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culture

leisure

storytelling

technology

tourist spaces

Tourism, technology and narratives: Reflections for the design of tourist spaces

We characterize tourism essentially as a phenomenon of communication between architecture, a territory, a space and its visitors. The design of tourist spaces has evolved over time, according to the technologies used to build them. The emergence of new technologies enables new interactions with our environment and a constant connection with sources of information, in addition to geo-location and augmented reality. These are technologies that are re-configuring the tourist space and, therefore, opening up possibilities. This gives us new capacities for experience and meaning for knowledge, interpretation, discovery and the relationship with the environment. These tools allow the design of hitherto unknown spaces (the combination of location and communication) of cultural experiences (and leisure) which are articulated around new narratives, placing value on emerging assets and opening up a field that must be explored and constricted.

Theatrum mundi

Religious pilgrimages were the first tourist movements before the invention of the word *tourism* (around the turn of the century, from the 18th to the 19th century) [1]. From the year 1300 until today, the Catholic jubilees have brought important flows of people from all over the world to Rome, the centre of Christianity.

The Rome of the Popes received hundreds of thousands of people. For this reason, the Popes and their architects developed a strategy to welcome the pilgrims/tourists. The obelisks, squares and churches are part of itineraries designed for the enjoyment of the visit and function as an element to transform the visitor. A powerful narrative such as God's forgiveness guides the pilgrims' desire, and the Popes understand the importance of designing scenarios for that desire.

Certainly, the artefact that best completes this strategy is the *Piazza di San Pietro* in Roma, commissioned by Pope Chigi (Alexander VII) and designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini between 1655 and 1667.

This space beyond and collect all the technology applied of his moment to the design of the public and tourist space.



Image 1
Vedute di Roma.
Engraving of Piranesi
(1760).

Bernini is not only an architect. He is a sculptor, painter, and less well-known, a man of the theatre, he is able to add drama to the scenes of his creations, sculptures or squares. He is able to design public spaces, to integrate all the tools at his disposal, and incorporate the narratives in a magnificent and clear way.

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*La chiesa di San Pietro quasi matrice di tutte le altre doveva avere un portico che per l'appunto dimostrasse di ricevere a braccia aperte maternamente i Cattolici per confermarli nella credenza, gli Heretici per riunirli nella Chiesa e gli Infedeli per illuminarli nella vera fede.*¹

You do not need to have read the above words to feel physically embraced by the power of the Church inside the colonnade. It is the concept of the *theatrum mundi*, the baroque literary topic which acts as a vector of the design of scenographic and emotional spaces that convert the visitor into a protagonist immersed in an architecture and in his own narrative.

In addition, these baroque spaces are among the first to have guides for visitors, that is, a means of inter-

1. "The church of St. Peter, as the matrix of all the others, should have a portico that shows that it received the Catholics with open arms, to confirm them into the faith; the heretics, to bring them into the Church; and the unbelievers to enlighten them to the true faith" (free translation of the authors).

preting the meanings of the space. In a guide in Spanish from the year 1767, reviewed by Professor Alicia Cámara, we find this description (3):

En este año de 1660 se empezó en el pontificado de Alexandro VII una bellissima fábrica en forma de teatro en la plaza de S. Pedro, en la qual están 282 columnas de mármol de quatro órdenes, y encima de las columnas de la parte de dentro están puestas 114 estatuas, cosa cierto de grandissimo grato y magnificencia, que se ha acabado de la gloriosa memoria de Clemente X... el Dibuxo de dicho Theatro es de Cavallero Bernini, de quien también en el pontificado de Alexandro VII se acabó la famosa Máquina de la Cáthedra de S. Pedro.

Adding:

Conceptos como el de ‘Teatro’ para este escenario urbano, ‘Máquina’ [...] y ‘magnificencia’ nos remiten a los valores por los que se guiaba la percepción y la valoración de la belleza de una obra arquitectónica en esta época de pleno barroco.

Bernini, thus, projects a theatrical machine for which he even designs and builds the canopies that the Pope uses to appear before the pilgrims. It represents a milestone in the design of urban, emotional and experiential space. A complete system of adaptation of the public space to the use for tourism.

Interactive spaces

The strong emotional interactivity of the Bernini space is produced by the sum of the various elements mentioned above: (i) an omnipotent architectural form that sublimates the baroque space, the gigantic dimension—a year after it was built it was able to accommodate all the inhabitants of Rome—the proportions, the steps and the slopes, the perspective and the points of view, the vocabulary and formal syntax; (ii) a powerful and sacred narrative of salvation shared culturally and ratified by (iii) liturgies, such as the *urbi et orbi* blessing, that is to say, regulated dynamics of the use of space, and tools that are external to space such as the (iv) interpretation and information guides.

Three hundred and fifty years later, the design of the tourist space presents new possibilities and challenges. New technological tools are modifying human behaviour and the use of public space, whether tourist or otherwise. The set of instruments, technical resources and habitual disciplinary procedures is astonishing.

Thus, as Colin Ellard explains in his book *Psychogeography* [4]:

[...] these technologies are redefining everything from public space to the meaning of a wall and are [...] revo-



Image 2 Smart Highway. ©Studio Roosegaarde.

lutionizing the ability of our environments to influence us. Anyone truly interested in understanding how a place can influence us should pay attention to the multiple ways in which new technologies, incorporated into traditional ones and even ancestral methods of building places, can affect our behaviour.

The *tecnopoet* Daan Roosegaarde [5] is someone who is interested and fascinated by the places where technology, people and public spaces converge. Artist and innovator, he is known internationally for designs that generate futuristic social relations between people and technology, such as the *Smart Highway* and the *Van Gogh Path*. Interactive environments that transport the public to a space of sensory stimulation that explores the limits of art and architecture and deepens ideas of sensitive and interactive public spaces that extend from both the existing architecture and the human form. It explores a fusion of human behaviour, technology and nature.

The built environment of his projects reacts to a great variety of sounds and movements that transform the landscape according to the behaviour of the visitors. Different sensors from each facility recognize human activity. The software learns and adapts to human behaviours that occur while exploring this receptive environment.

The *Smart Highway*, for example, are intelligent, interactive and sustainable roads that use light, energy and information according to different traffic situations.

The lines of light are charged with solar energy and some are lit by the passing vehicles, which reacts on the priority lanes. They also incorporate dynamic painting that informs the climatic conditions and the harvesting of the wind power of the passing vehicles.

We find this same interactive concept applied in a more touristy concept. In a stretch of 600 metres, the Dutch designer creates one of his special and different

In a stretch of 600 metres, the Dutch designer creates one of his special and different sensory experiences, the Van Gogh Path. It is a cycle lane with a pavement that illuminates at night with 50,000 stones/LEDs embedded in the ground that glow in the dark in enigmatic swirls inspired by one of Van Gogh's most famous pieces, *The Starry Night*. The stones are illuminated by solar energy, along with light-gathering paint, which create an impressive display at night. The itinerary combines innovation with cultural heritage in the city of Nuenen, the place where Van Gogh lived between 1883 and 1885, and forms part of a tourist and heritage route of sites related to the painter.



Image 3 Van Gogh Path. ©Studio Roosegaarde.



Image 4 The Starry Night. Vincent Van Gogh.

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It is the mystical experience of diving into a painting by Van Gogh, and the ecological liturgy gained from capturing solar energy and the use of the bicycle, which is singled out individually through the interaction with

technology placed at the fingertips of the visitor.

The relation of the visitor to the space becomes much more cryptic and abstract because of the absence of architectural elements that are imposed by its volume and its magnificence, as in the *Piazza de Bernini*: a narrow stretch of land developed over a few hundred metres, which creates a relationship with the surrounding landscape and incorporates an artistic and ecological story. From the baroque theatre to contemporary poetry with the metaphorical transposition of an artistic icon and a design for modern and sustainable sensibilities.

Crown Fountain [6], in Chicago, is another example of interactive space. Designed by the artist Jaume Plensa and the team of architects Krueck & Sexton, the space consists of a shallow pool of black granite with a

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reflective sheet of water between two glass brick towers. The towers are 15 metres tall and have LEDs that project videos with the faces of the people of Chicago. Strategically placed at the height of the mouth, a cascade of water falls into the granite pool intermittently through the two towers, squirting across the granite surface and giving the impression that the water has come from the mouth of the faces. Temperature sensors establish the climatic conditions in which the water comes out.

During the summer months, users go there dressed to bathe. The dynamics of the water and the changing faces are regulated and programmed with a random effect. The projected images are of four types: a passive screen (showing a scene from nature), a passive face (showing one of the faces, but in a passive posture and looking around), an active face (showing, through gestures, that the water could be about to come out, such as screwing up the mouth, closing the eyes, etc.) and, finally, a mocking face (that laughs at the public when the water does not come out as expected).

It is a recreational space of strong animation and games (*involvement*). The fact that the output of the water is unpredictable forces the users (especially the young ones) to create strategies of movement and interaction with the space. It forms part of the pathways of Millennium Park, in an urban, recreational and artistic development of Chicago.



Imagen 5 Crown Fountain, Chicago. Jaume Plensa. ©Serge Melki, CC.

Narratives and virtuality

If there is an element common to such diverse projects and technologies, it is the narratives that accompany them. Spaces and narratives are strongly linked to build a tourist and cultural space. In fact, it is essential to enjoy a complete experience. If we could imagine a visitor or a tourist devoid of the narratives that accompany the spaces mentioned above, we would be sure that their fascination would be diminished. The Catholic tradition and the reading of the guides of Rome allow the pilgrim to arrive from one church to another in order to get the Jubilee and finish in St. Peter's Basilica. Understanding the history of how Van Gogh painted *The Starry Night* in the sanatorium of Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, where he was secluded towards the end of his life, and where he shows the outside view from the window of his room at night, allows us to understand and enjoy the bike ride. Otherwise, it would just be a few lights on the ground, or a series of aligned columns.

The importance and accumulation of narratives about places, as narrative layers, make them more desirable and therefore visitable. Films, series, novels, images and sounds are full of themes of New York, which turns this city into a planetarium as a tourist destination.

Even the reverse is true: some stories create tourist spaces by themselves. The fascination for the love story of Romeo and Juliet has made the city of Verona adapt to the narrative to identify fictitious places with real places, changing the name of a palace with a similar name to the protagonist (Dal Capello to Capuleti) and building a balcony without which no one would be able to image the famous theatrical scene. It is visited by hundreds of thousands of people a year, and liturgies are presented

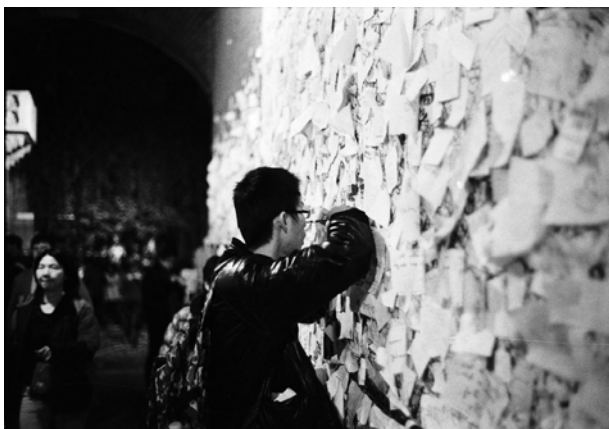


Image 6 Writing on the wall of Juliet's house in Verona. ©Dino Quinzani. CC BY-SA 3.0.



Image 7 Juliet's balcony. © Lo Scaliger. CC BY-SA 3.0.

such as the writing of letters to Juliet and posting them on a wall.

The paradox is that the story allows the place to be credible, which can be enjoyed more than the truth or reality itself, which can often be disappointing. As Umberto Eco [7] says:

All of this means that the possible world of narrative is the only universe in which we can be absolutely sure of something, and it gives us a very profound idea of truth.

This “deep idea of truth” generated by the narrative can be transported to real places and turned into tourist sites, whether fictitious, *fake* or real. The filmed versions of narrative universes such as *The Lord of the Rings* or *Game of Thrones*, for example, have brought value to the country of New Zealand, in the former case, and Dubrovnik, Ward Castle (Ireland), Gerona and Canet de Mar, in the latter case. In addition, in both cas-

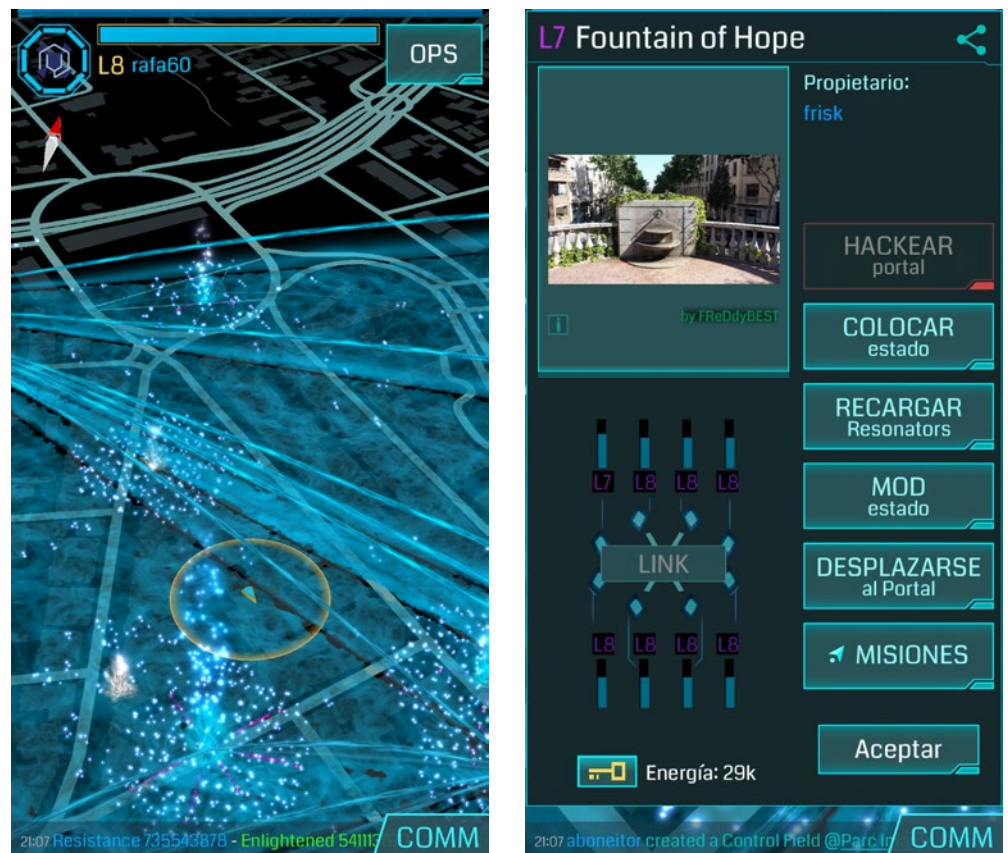
es, the original scenes have been transformed by means of digital technology to deploy elements of the story, as with Juliet's balcony in Verona, but done virtually, meaning half way between reality and fiction. In many cases, the power of the narrative has been imposed on real history and has served as a script for the dynamics of visiting and promoting destinations. A virtuality that, in servicing the narrative, transcends the television screen and expands and reconfigures the tourist space.

More so with the emergence of mobile digital devices that allow new sophisticated interactions with our physical and social environment, such as geo-location, augmented reality² and a constant connection with networks and sources of information. New technologies for knowledge, interpretation, discovery, communication and the relationship with the environment.

These tools allow the design of hitherto unknown spaces (the combination of location and communication) of cultural experiences (and leisure) which are articulated around new narratives, placing value on emerging assets to offer us new possibilities of experience and meaning. That is, projects that, through technology, virtualize the tourist space and explore new avenues of interaction and experience. Interactions that multiply thanks to augmented reality. This return journey, or symbiosis between place and narrative, means that some recent projects, thanks to the technology, have chosen to design virtual tourist spaces and visits that do not necessarily depend on architectures.

The examples presented below are virtual tourist spaces generated by stories, mobile technology and game dynamics that make use of the existing space. Unlike expressly constructed spaces, they do not use shape or geometry. They are only designed from the narrative abstraction and can relate distant points and interact permanently with the users. Just as the dynamics of use and liturgy of built spaces must adapt to the form and architecture of space, in these cases it is the other way around, the space conforms to the use of the tourist. A further step in the abstraction of a tourist experience. They are articulating projects that also include management elements.

2. Augmented reality is a technique that adds virtual information to the real world. A new layer of virtual information is created that, mixed with real objects, forms the same space and creates a mixed reality in real time. The difference with virtual reality is that, in this, all objects are simulated by means of computer with the aim of replacing the real world. In contrast, in augmented reality, all objects, both real and virtual, coexist in the same space. With this technology, the real world that envelops the user is turned into an interactive digital experience, in which the main objective is to expand the information of the real world.



Images 8 and 9
©Niantic Inc.

Ingress

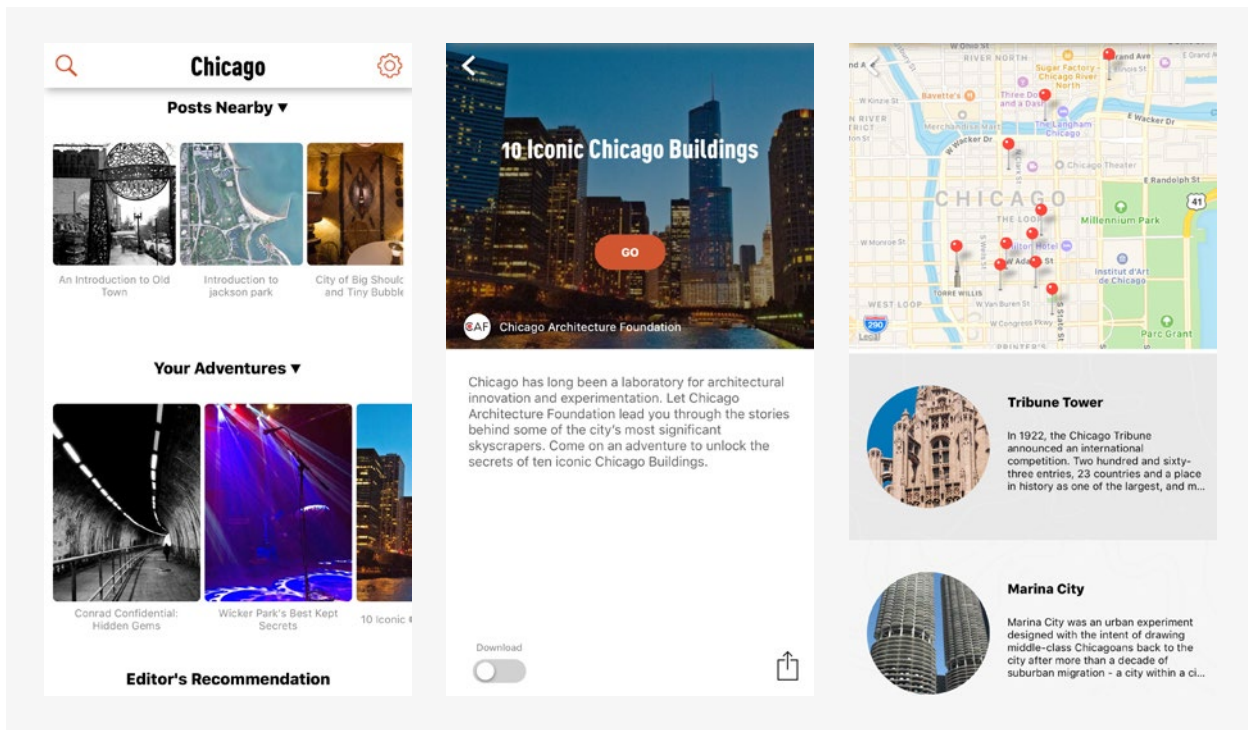
On the one hand, we have an Ingress platform [8] (2014), an online augmented, massive, multiplayer online role, based on geo-location and created by Niantic Inc., a *start-up* of Google. With video game aesthetics and cartographic base of Google Maps, it transforms the real world into the scenario of a planetary game of mystery, intrigue and competition. The monuments and the relevant points of the public space are transformed into *energy portals* that the player must capture. To do this, you have to walk to each geo-point and *bombard it* in the purest style of the video game console. The player, as he captures these portals, can triangulate them, occupy the territory for his side and defend it for his playing partners. Millions of players around the world fight among themselves to occupy it.

The narrative is that a mysterious and alien energy has been discovered that must be controlled. Two sides clash: the Illuminati, who want to harness the power that this energy can confer, and the members of the Resistance, who fight to defend themselves from the Illuminati.

If the mobile device and the application are used as the player moves around the real world, they can get objects that help in the search, install technological elements to occupy territories and establish alliances with other players to fight for the cause of the Illuminati or the Resistance. Ingress is the antecedent of Pokemon Go, the worldwide phenomenon that has placed this type of game at the forefront of the genre, also designed and produced by Niantic.

Vamonde

Vamonde [9] is a *start-up* created by Professor Anijo Mathew of IIT (Institute of Design in Chicago) after more than a decade of research, with the collaboration of students from the school and various Chicago entities regarding the provision of content. The platform, launched in November 2015, allows you to discover, share and create hyperlocal stories and information, not only the stories and secrets that lay behind the places, but the interesting things you can see and do. After



Images 10, 11 and 12 ©Vamonde.

only three months in operation, 3,000 adventures had already been downloaded.

The platform allows users to build their own narratives to unite experiences and memories in hyperlocal adventures that can then be shared with other people around the world.

Vamonde can be a guide to explore new places or a platform to create and share the pursuit of a treasure or an adventure for the user’s favourite places. The platform emerges from the professor’s interest in how urban spaces are changing because of technology and how technology is changing because of urban spaces. One of the things that the teacher detected is the increase of “hyperlocal narratives”³. According to Mathew [9], we are, as a generation, highly connected and related to technology at all levels, so we have new ways of collecting and sharing narratives.

These two factors combine to create a major change in the way people behave in urban spaces. We connect with physical spaces both through technology and our bodies. We want to see not only what there is, but also to collect stories, get authentic experiences and enrich and

deepen our connections with history, place and each other. Brands and the objects have become less important than the experiential narratives. In short we have swapped collecting objects for collecting experiences.

According to the professor, tools such as *Facebook*, *Snapchat*, *Instagram* and travel blogs, among others, only allow the capture of a certain dimension of our experience, a fragment of a thought, a photo of a place, a small video clip, etc. most of which are inadequate for sharing a complete and attractive narrative. With Vamonde, it has been sought to address this problem by using the power of the growing *shared economy*, which has radically changed the notions of narration and experience.

Currently, Vamonde is an open platform where users can create, store and share hyperlocal stories and memories by using video, images, text, audio and narration.

3. Information that is thematized, referred and coming from defined communities.



Image 13 ©Institut de Cultura de Barcelona (ICUB).

Literapolis BCN

In December 2015, UNESCO declared Barcelona a City of Literature. Among the many activities that are taking place, the Barcelona Institute of Culture (ICUB) started, at the beginning of 2017, the Literapolis BCN project. The objective of this project, designed by Iternatura Comunicació, is twofold: one is to equip the city of Barcelona with a tool with which to relate city and literature; and the other, more specifically, is to target a young audience (usually ones that do not read much) to incite them to read and enjoy reading. It is a question of designing spaces of experience and participation in the form of a literary gymkhana, which allows us to discover the stories that are hidden in the streets of Barcelona.

The project thus consists in generating relationship dynamics between novels of and about Barcelona and the places where the authors place the action in order that they can be visited physically and virtually by means of mobile technology. The project has been launched with six novels, with three itineraries each, and a total of 180 geo-points. In each novel there are three itineraries with gamified dynamics, multimedia content and six different mechanics of interaction with urban settings.

To these points discussed in each novel on the map of Barcelona, we have added various layers of information and interaction (photos, voice-overs, video, etc.). The general dynamic is to visit the points to experience the territories that the novel describes and add

A context in which we could say that communication obeys new laws and participation and networks have acquired an extraordinary role, means that this has to be taken into account in order to take up the challenge and use new ways of communicating and interacting. Our approach is based on transmedia storytelling, the technique of communicating and explaining an experience across multiple platforms and formats using current digital technologies. That is, (i) use new and diverse communication tools (web, app...), (ii) use story and play as tools of involvement and (iii) induce or favour participation.



Image 14 ©Institut de Cultura de Barcelona (ICUB).

documentation that complements the experience. In other words, it aims to stimulate new knowledge and changes in practices around books and reading.

In our opinion, the forms and channels of communication are now more relevant than ever, not only to convey the messages, but also to influence, in a real and decisive way, the change of uses. A context in which we could say that communication obeys new laws and participation and networks have acquired an extraordinary role, means that this has to be taken into account in order to take up the challenge and use new ways of communicating and interacting. Our approach is based on *transmedia storytelling*, the technique of communicating and explaining an experience across multiple platforms and formats using current digital technologies. That is, (i) use new and diverse communication tools (web, app...), (ii) use story and play as tools of involvement and (iii) induce or favour participation.



LITERAPOLIS BCN GIMCANA LITERÀRIA

Image 15 ©Institut de Cultura de Barcelona (ICUB).

From the point of view of production, transmedia narrative means the creation of content that involves an audience through the use of various techniques to permeate their daily lives. To achieve this commitment, a transmedia production will develop stories through multiple forms of communication to offer unique pieces of content on each channel. It is important to note that these pieces of content are not only linked together (openly or subtly), but are also synchronized with each other.

With this project some of this content has been made available to the public, which has been linked to personal experiences of knowledge of the city through pedagogical and game dynamics with the support of digital and analogue technologies.

It has the complicity of libraries and book stores, as well as of museums and spaces of leisure and culture of the city, adhering to the platform and rewarding the players with discounts, prizes, activities, etc. In this way it is related virtuality and in reality.

Final reflection

We understand tourism to be a communicative function between the space or territory and its visitors. Especially in urban and cultural tourism, the narratives and possible interactions between the space and the visitor mark the satisfaction of the experience. In fact, we could say that the tourist space is any public space that has narratives to share with its visitors.

The design of these spaces has been marked by the evolution of the technologies that the creators have had within their reach, and they base part of their success on the capacity of transmission of narrative messages and their adaptation to the physical space to generate *engagement*. The emergence of new technologies, especially mobile, is re-configuring the tourist space and offers us new design capabilities.

Augmented reality mixed with IRL (*in real life*), *storytelling*, gamification and social networks are tools with which to fascinate tourists as the obelisks did in the Roman streets. Furthermore, tourism consumers are increasingly demanding, they seek more personalized tourism products and smart services that provide them with high quality, individualized information, anytime, anywhere and in real time. Especially for digital natives, who demand the tourist space to be that which we already have on our devices or machines. Devices that take us from the symbolic to the virtual, from the liturgy to the experience.

Not all tourists are the same, nor do they all seek the same intensity of information and knowledge. Technology allows us to adapt to each style of visitor. Incorporate stories, games, rigour, anecdotes, etc. according to demand.

We understand, therefore, that technology provides a difference as a tool for designing experience and interactivity. Certainly the success of the design of the new tourist spaces will not come from replacing one way of doing things with another, but from the coexistence and mix of all of them.

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