Digital Storytelling and archaeological sites: shedding light on a multidimensional relationship

The cases of digital storytelling experiences developed within the research projects **myEleusis, Voeska** and **Periplous.**

Authors
Katerina Servi, Akrivi Katifori, Maria Boile, Dimitra Petousi, Myrto Koukouli, Yannis Ioannidis, Despoina Tsiafaki, Natasa Michailidou, Melpomeni Karta, Ioanna Antoniou-Kritikou, Varvara Papadopoulou, Lamprini Papastratou, Aristidis Vassios, Kalliopi Papaggeli, Chrysanthi Tzavali, Christina Kazazaki, Pari Kalamara, Pemy Galiatsatou

Affiliations
1 Athena Research Center
2 Ephorate of Antiquities of West Attica
3 Ephorate of Antiquities of Arta
4 Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities

Introduction

Storytelling serves as a timeless method of communication in archaeological contexts. Cultural Heritage stakeholders are interested in raising awareness to the public for the findings of their research in an **effective and engaging way using both traditional and media-based resources** .This is also the case of three research projects, myEleusis, Voeska and Periplous, where archaeologists collaborate with authors, designers and technology providers to develop **digital storytelling experiences with the scope to interpret, communicate and reflect about the past and the discoveries of the archaeological sites of Eleusis, Arta and Epidaurus** accordingly.

Write your script
and make it come to life !
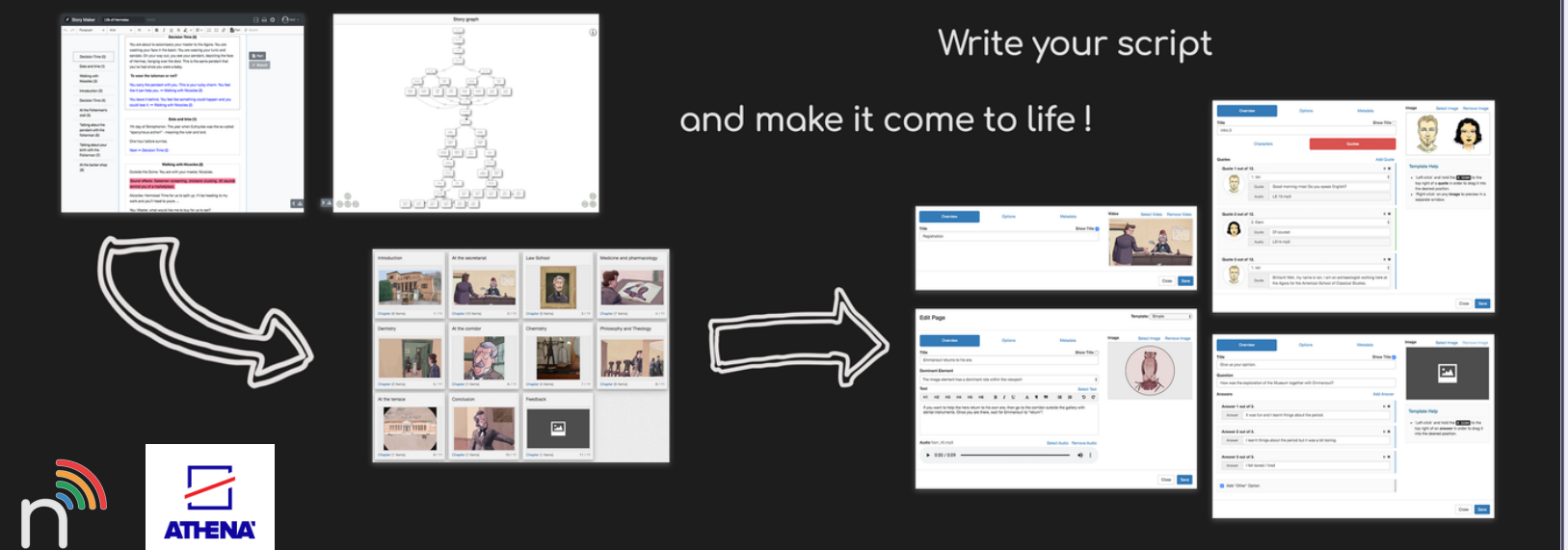
An interactive digital storytelling experience in ancient Eleusis

In myEleusis, an interactive digital experience unfolds through five different perspectives. The story takes place in ancient Eleusis in 160 CE. It begins on the night of the arrival of the Sacred Procession from Athens, when the "phaidyntes" (burnisher) of the sanctuary is found with a severe head injury. Very soon it becomes clear that the perpetrator has taken the keys of the Telesterion and has stolen the "deiknymena" i.e., the sacred objects of the ceremony. Pausanias, the famous traveler of the second century CE, undertakes to solve the mystery with the help of a young Eleusinian, Alexis. Initially, the user takes a short quiz, which assigns him or her one of the five main characters of the story. Through the eyes of the character, the user experiences the story in seven episodes, each of which corresponds to a specific monument inside the modern archaeological site of Eleusis. During the experience, the user is asked to make selections that affect the development of the story.
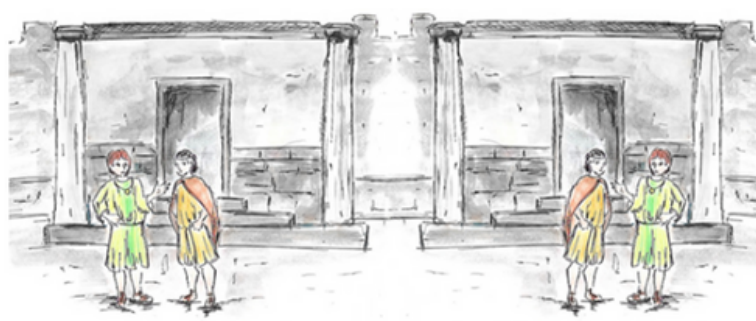
A multi-layered experience through space and time in the archaeological sites of Arta

In Voeska, a multi-layered experience has been adopted that runs through space and time. Considering the uniqueness of Arta and the fact that it has three charming historical faces, a flexible core idea was chosen, which finds application in different periods and offers the ability to link objects to spaces. The focus of the idea is a scribe, who undertakes to write a series of letters, which are ordered by his clients. The Epistles cover all time periods and involve a wide range of people: men, women, aristocrats, peasants, craftsmen, artists, kings. The persons who send and receive the letters could be fictitious or real or both. The main advantage of this idea is that it can include a variety of themes, so as to create a "mosaic" in which each piece is independent, but all together create a broader and timeless image of Arta, while touring the city. Moreover, it effortlessly links fiction to specific objects and sites, and in fact, each Epistle can link more than one object to more than one site. Utilizing the main components of fiction, the selected approach activates historical empathy.

Αξιότιμε Επίγονε,

Χαίρε! Καταρχάς ευχόμαστε να είσαι καλά και να ευημερείς, εκεί, στη μακρινή Σικυώνα. Εμείς, εδώ, σε μνημονεύουμε συχνά και νιώθουμε περήφανοι για την πολύτιμη συνεισφορά σου στη μουσική τέχνη. Το επιγόνιον, το θαυμαστό μουσικό όργανο που εφηύρες, ευφραίνει τις ψυχές των ανθρώπων και τιμά το όνομά σου και το όνομα της γενέτειράς σου, της Αμβρακίας στα πέρατα του ελληνικού κόσμου.

A linear digital storytelling experience connecting the past with the present of the underwater antiquities of Epidaurus

In Periplous, a journey aboard a boat with transparent bottom is accompanied by an automated guided tour, where the digital experience complements the physical one in real time as the visitors float above the underwater antiquities of Epidaurus. The boat follows predetermined routes and stops mid-sea while providing descriptions and narrations. A linear approach for the digital storytelling experience is adopted, connecting the past with the present. Within this context, visitors will be able to discover 'hidden' information in a series of points of interest, called "Snapshots", including pre-recorded narrations or conversations connected to the archeological findings and representing everyday life in the ancient times. The participants in the dialogues are either 'ancient people' who lived in Epidaurus, as represented through fictional dialogues, or the real archaeologists, who have undertaken the excavation and the conservation of the specific archeological site.

Conclusion

The approaches followed within the three projects, although **they differ** from one to another, because of variations in archaeologists' needs, the scope of the experience, and the site's characteristics, all of them **draw inspiration from the monuments, the historical events, and the people** to deliver pertinent information as effortlessly as possible. The aim is to **engage the user emotionally** with the people who lived in ancient Eleusis, Arta and Epidaurus, to understand their **needs, desires, habits, and different perspectives,** and to transform his or her **connection to the history and the archaeological site** from the level of simple knowledge into a **deeper, multilevel, and rich experience**.

Related Literature
[1] Maria Roussou and Akrivi Katifori. 2018. Flow, Staging, Wayfinding, Personalization: Evaluating User Experience with Mobile Museum Narratives. Multimodal Technol. Interact. 2, 2 (June 2018), 32. DOI:https://doi.org/10.3390/MTI2020032
[2] Akrivi Katifori, Maria Roussou, Irene Kaklopoulou, Katerina Servi. 2019. Mobile interactive storytelling in the Athens Ancient Agora: exploring the right balance between the Site and the App, XVII. Culture and Computer Science, May 23–24, 2019, Konzerthaus Berlin.
[3] Akrivi Katifori, Sara Perry, Maria Vayanou, Angeliki Antoniou, Ioannis-Panagiotis Ioannidis, Sierra McKinney, Angeliki Chrysanthi, and Yannis Ioannidis. 2020. "Let Them Talk!": Exploring Guided Group Interaction in Digital Storytelling Experiences. J. Comput. Cult. Herit. 13, 3 (August 2020), 1–30. DOI:https://doi.org/10.1145/3382773

For more information:
https://myeleusis.com
https://voeska.com
www.ilsp.gr/projects/periplous