

IIS 2005 - Session: Accessibility, Mobility and Connectivity: Changing Frontiers of Daily Routines

The role of communication networks in the practice of space: the heritage tourism

Sara Monaci – University of Turin, Italy – Faculty of Humanities – New Media Lab - sara.monaci@unito.it

Communication networks are reshaping concepts of time and space: a new social theory, grounded on the model of network, replaces the notion of *space of places* with the one of *space of fluxes* (Castells 1996). According to Castells our contemporary megalopolis are growing by the influence of communication fluxes while a new *architecture of fluxes* is gradually reshaping forms and functions of public spaces and institutional places: city airports, stations and recent museums, like Koolhaas' Lille Grand Palais and O'Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao, represent some examples of this new direction. (Mitchell 1995, 1999; Castells 1996, 2004). Architectures of fluxes are gaining an increasing symbolic value due to their role as tourist attractions and related to the new forms of social practice and communication they can fulfill. In this paper I will investigate the idea of museum as *space of fluxes* and I will focus on three issues related to tourism practice:

- *Virtualization of space.* Internet contributes to replace physical movement to museum with virtual experience through web sites and digital reproductions on DVD, CD-Rom or even Playstations. Virtual museums and portals for tourism give people tools for planning trips and visits according to individual needs and desires. Booking hotels, flights, museum tickets on the web allow individuals to arrange *their own trip*. Ubiquitous access to information and customized services on line represent opportunities to enhance the flexibility and the multiplicity; they give postmodern tourism new means of expanding and diversifying tourist experiences (Feifer, 1985).

- *Delocalization.* Wireless networks and mobile devices have made the access to museums contents ubiquitous and literally *on the move*. Tourists can access virtual museums through the display of a PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) while they're at the airport or when they're in the museum: tourists can get a virtual visit while they're sipping a coke in a restaurant or they may decide to give it up seeing on the web that the exhibition they're interested in is over. Due to wireless networks, virtual space is no more linked to a physical location: it becomes a flux of communication and information integrated to the physical space, accessible wherever and whenever. Wireless networks allow a constant negotiation and reconfiguring of tourist objectives and paths. Tourists routes could be always reshaped according to information access: they could be the result of a mix of possibilities and connections among individuals and communication networks (Geser, 2004).

- *Colonization of the institutional setting of museum by private communication.* Wireless devices (cell phone, smart phone, PDA) allow tourists to be *always on*: mentally connected with a network of friends and colleagues, but physically thousands of miles away. Practices of space supported by wireless devices reveal, on one hand, an increasing sense of detachment with the museum setting (Monaci, 2003) but, on the other hand, mobiles are perceived as invaluable devices for social interactions. Tourists strolling in museums with a cell phone or a smart phone can either perform private communications, either use the device to search for information related to the museum and exchange opinions with distant others or with people around. Many museums in Europe (Proctor, Tellis 2003) have already realized mobile applications aimed to support objects interpretation and communication exchanges among visitors.

THE 37TH WORLD CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY
STOCKHOLM SWEDEN 5-9 JULY 2005

The sometimes intrusive presence of wireless devices is turning the institutional setting of a museum in a space of fluxes: a place where traditional tourist activities (guided tours, interpreting and sharing information) could be combined and enhanced by practices of spaces mediated by communication networks.

REFERENCES

- Castells M., *The rise of network society*, Vol I, Cambridge, M.; Oxford : Blackwell, 1996.
Castells M., *La città delle reti*, Edizioni Reset, Milano 2004.
Mitchell W., *City of bits : space, place, and the Infobahn*, Cambridge M.; London : The MIT Press, c1995.
Mitchell W., *E-topia : "urban life, Jim-but not as we know it"*. Cambridge M.; London : The MIT Press, c1999.
Feifer M., *Going Places*, London : Macmillian 1985.
Geser H., *Towards a sociological theory of mobile phone*, http://socio.ch/mobile/t_geser1.pdf
Monaci S., *Comunicazione integrata al Museo Nazionale del Cinema*, in Nuova Museologia, Giornale ufficiale del comitato italiano dell'International Council of Museums, N. 9, Novembre 2003.
Proctor N., C. Tellis, *The State of Art in Museum Handhelds in 2003*, *Proceedings of Museum and the Web Conference*, Charlotte, NC, USA 2003.