Teaching Participatory Storytelling for Cultural Promotion:

A Case Study from Sicily (Italy)

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Abstract: *After an introduction on the impact that new technologies and social media have had on the cultural sector, and an overview about storytelling and digital storytelling, the #iziTRAVELSicilia participatory project will be presented. It has been conducted since May 2016 on the izi.TRAVEL platform for free production of multimedia audio guides, as a didactic tool for cultural dissemination through a participatory process. The project proved how much digital participatory storytelling could be a particularly useful tool in teaching cultural heritage.*

Key terms: *digital didactics, participatory museums, cultural storytelling, cultural communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Jenkins, in the *Convergence Culture* and the *Participatory Age* era of which he spoke more than a decade ago [1], a great changing impulse occurred, thanks to bottom-up contributions and processes activated by increasingly numerous groups of individuals from civil society. This processes allowed a profound innovation in cultural communication, which has become bidirectional, dialogic and participatory, aimed at various categories of stakeholders, who are greatly interested not only in finding mere cultural information, but real stories and narratives.

Almost a decade has passed since the publication of Nina Simon [2], focused on the participatory museum and the role that new technologies and social media play today in cultural communication and in the relationship between culture and its multiple audiences.

The new forms, with which communities can participate in the fruition and creation of cultural heritage itself [3], allow for the pursuit of new audience development and engagement policies [4] [5] [6], in making museums and cultural institutions more attractive from an educational point of view [7] and more collaborative locally with other institutions, such as Schools [8].

Participation and co-creation processes have been facilitated thanks, above all, to the development of social media, which have really transfigured the traditional roles of the subjects involved (creators, distributors, consumers, critics and collaborators), who now instead actively participate in the co-creative production as well as in the dissemination of cultural content [3].

In this contemporaneity, the cultural institutions can act as cultural hubs, able to foster the connections, that can also be spontaneously created between members of a community.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. The Digital Storytelling for Culture: Functions and Participation

Storytelling, as the art of telling stories, has allowed humanity to build so powerful narrative gears, that they support an entire collective imagination [9].

In the storytelling transformation itself, some essential elements have changed: the figure of the *storyteller* (from the epic aedo to the mass communicator), the *content* (from the epic narrative to the modern ones), the *format* (from primitive graphics to digital visual productions) and *transmission technologies* (from wall paintings to digital publishing platforms).

In the field of cultural communication, storytelling serves to attract users with stories that make cultural heritage attractive, allowing an emotional approach able in increasing interest. It is no coincidence, therefore, that among the most innovative communication and interaction options between a cultural institution and its users there is the digital storytelling, intended as a tool for democratizing cultural content through specific languages [10] [11] [12] [13] [14].

According to the AthenaPlus EU projetc scholars, digital storytelling can be considered the modern expression of an ancient art, based on the use of digital tools:

Digital society has opened new opportunities to tell stories, offering new tools and environments for expression, increased by the development of social networking and mobile applications. Digital storytelling is relatively a new term and refers to the use of digital tools to tell stories. It can be seen as the modern way of telling stories, combining multimedia features [15].

The practice of digital storytelling in the cultural field has three main fields of application, easily interconnecting with each other: *education* (because it helps in the creation of meaning, belonging and in digital skills acquisition), *cultural mediation* (because it has made cultural institutions more oriented to a democratic and participatory communication and to searching for new relationships with the public) and *tourism* (because in tourism evolution, the narrative and experiential aspect took over) [15].

For museums and contemporary cultural institutions, digital storytelling is the perfect communication and participation technique in corresponding to their educational vocation in an increasingly interactive, engaging and co-creative way. However, it continues to be an emerging and evolving practice [13] [14] [16], because it is closely linked to the evolution of new technologies itself.

Wanting to analyze the main *functions of cultural storytelling*, the ones identified by Chiara Moroni in the political narrative field [17] and those indicated by Christian Salmon regarding the management one [18] can be amalgamated with each other, by readapting them and inserting a last new function that appears fundamental to our considerations, thus fully describing the typical functions of a cultural storytelling [19]:

1) *community function*: it fosters the construction of a community sense

2) *referential function*: it allows the transmission of knowledge

3) *empathic function*: it arouses emotion and involvement

4) *mnestic function*: it allows the individual and collective memories' transmission between generations

5) *identity function*: it allows the identity construction

6) *value function*: it allows the values' transmission

7) *"springboard" function*: it allows people to understand what may happen in the future by reading what happened in the past

8) *connective function*: it fosters the connection between institutions and heritage, individuals and collectivity.

All these functions have one element in common: they can be activated only when an emotional connection is created and this can only happen by abandoning the past methods of knowledge transmission, which are didactic and self-referentiality based, and finding a suitable language and arguments, to arouse willingness to listen and to enjoy cultural content.

Over the last years, participatory digital storytelling projects and methodologies have multiplied, developing real strategies for direct involvement of users in the works of art's production itself. The

process has thus become co-creative and pro-active, able to deeply affect the relationship with the public, favoring involvement, participation, two-way communication and, finally, that sense of belonging to a community, which fosters own participatory and cognitive-emotional processes.

The participatory approach and crowdsourcing technologies, within the digital storytelling domain, are the main trends [20] [21], as they are able to activate virtuous processes in encouraging both the creation and the sharing of the so-called *User Generated Contents* [22] [23] [3].

The social base's expansion in cultural participation is a strategic asset in cultural institutions' policies, in order to trigger effective, equitable, lasting development processes, able in generating positive repercussions both on individual abilities and opportunities and on the creative capital of people, on the citizenship quality, health and well-being as a whole [5].

2.2. Storytelling as a Didactic Practice in Approaching Culture

In the field of educational and cultural mediation, storytelling is not just a technique for knowledge transmission but an educational methodology based on the use of the narrative technique, exploited in its potential as a cognitive resource and social glue [24].

Storytelling as a didactic practice in the cultural field has a centuries-old history: it was adopted as a teaching activity for the first time in 1917 by Anna Curtis Chandler at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, adapting some slides through stories.

The evolution of the museum's educational function in recent decades and the pedagogical rediscovery of the effectiveness of narratives in the knowledge transmission have both favored the transformation of storytelling into an educational methodology, able in facilitating the community identity building, by developing forms of *life-long learning* [24] [25] [8] and *learning by doing* [26] [27].

One of the main challenges in the education field with new technologies is searching for new ways and places in which a new community dimension in the educational process could be created. According to this challenge, digital storytelling is one of the most congenial learning tool for the new generations, who are looking for communication codes that suit them [25] [8].

In contemporary teaching, technologies are to be considered only as a tool for achieving a purpose, for enhancing the knowledge experience, but without replacing it: therefore, *teaching by using technologies* and not teaching about technologies [27].

The use of digital technologies and the more shared and interactive forms of learning, thank to the use of mobile devices (that are normally forbidden in the classroom or by parents), allow a positive appreciation of the learning process, facilitating innovative, flexible and unconventional forms of transmission and knowledge re-processing and co-constructing [28] [29] [8].

2.3. The #Izitravelsicilia Case Study: A Co-Creative Process in Cultural Enhancement

This research is focusing on the #iziTRAVELSicilia project as an example of cultural heritage education with digital storytelling, as a tool for cultural transmission and enhancement through shared practices of pro-active and co-creative participation. The protagonists, on the Sicilian regional scale, are the local stakeholders, especially the communities of students, coming from regionals schools of all levels, according to the Faro Convention's definition as *heritage communities* [30] [31] [32].

#iziTRAVELSicilia was activated, by one of this paper' writers, as an annual university research project in May 2016 on the global platform izi.TRAVEL (https://www.izi.travel/it), which have been launched in 2015 to facilitate the democratization of culture through the free creation of multimedia audio guides. The main objective of the project itself was to fill the gap in online and mobile Sicilian communication [33] through participatory storytelling and cultural crowdsourcing processes, as well indicated by the Faro Convention, which encourages creative processes by involving both local communities and territories [34] [35].

The digital storytelling is the real communicative key of this project, aimed at creating an emotional and accessible connection between people and stories about their cultural heritage, by refusing traditional models of knowledge transmission.

Thanks both to a central coordination, to the storytelling approach and to the "happy alchemy" produced by a context so sterile that it could on the contrary become fertile, more than 300

multimedia audio guides have been produced so far, without distinction of ownership (regional, diocesan, civic, private, etc.), of the size or importance of the institutions or the heritage involved themselves.

Thousands of people participated in this process, an example of the heritage communities mentioned by the Convention (municipalities, museums, museum networks, associations, cultural and tourist operators, schools with educational projects, universities through laboratory projects or degrees, PhDs or postgraduate courses' theses). Thus, #iziTRAVELSicilia soon proved to be a good practice in digital promotion and enhancement through digital storytelling and forms of cultural citizenship.

Over 4000 people were able to activate a bottom up virtuous process and to transform themselves into bearers of knowledge and cultural value. They became proud disseminators or digital testimonials of their heritage, traditions and, finally, tangible and intangible stories, helping to fill another important gap, namely the absence of online catalogs of Sicilian collections [33].

We therefore took care to give visibility to the splendid collections of Sicilian small and large museums, to the widespread archaeological, architectural and ethno-anthropological heritage, to all the monuments, castles, churches and palaces, and, finally to Sicilian specificity and traditions.

2.4. The #Izitravelsicilia Case: The Participatory Teaching Methodology

The methodological approach adopted starts from the belief that not only technologies are able to offer users freedom and quality of information but, above all, they are useful tools to give value to cultural and emotional experiences. Through the storytelling approach, they allow users to build their own "human experience" in understanding cultural heritage and the historical-social process that governed it. In all the produced audio guides, an effort was made to develop stories in a narrative way, by readapting the scientific content provided to a more attractive language. In any case, the story has never been privileged to the validity, reliability and authorship of the content itself.

Thanks to an innovative teaching practice, a large number of audio guides have been produced as the final result of museum and heritage education projects, shared and carried out with regional schools, universities and postgraduate laboratory projects and even with some thesis cases, in collaboration with the Universities of Catania, Palermo and Macerata.

The protagonists of these projects were the students, the tutor teachers, the external cultural mediator and the cultural institutions, partners of the projects.

A fundamental figure is the external cultural mediator, who is one of the writers and since the very beginning of the project has been playing the role of the coordinator of the entire project on a regional scale and the role of the so-called *cultural creative designer* [8], expert in this case not only in the deployed technology, but also in participatory storytelling processes, aiming at achieving both the educational goals and the final multimedia products.

After having been validated, the audio guides have been published on izi.TRAVEL, through the institutional profiles of the project partners (Superintendencies, Museums, Museum Hubs, Dioceses, Municipalities, Foundations, etc.), who are the real custodians of historical, artistic, archaeological and naturalistic knowledge of the heritage, or through the profiles of the institutions within which the project has matured (Schools, Local tourist entities, Cultural and Tourist local or regional associations). The content validation by the partners has always been essential to ensure their authorship.

Beyond the general objectives already indicated, the projects carried out with the students pursue the main objective, the one to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, as indicated by the key actions of the UE 2030 Agenda [25].

The essential purpose of these educational projects, based on co-creative and participatory face-to-face and online class-workshops [29], was to develop a teaching methodology in involving students and improving their digital and creative skills in co-creating multimedia audio guides. The experiential and direct approach [36] and the collaborative learning processes [28] led to the publication of multimedia products of which the students could fully feel co-authors and co-protagonists.

Wanting to identify the design phases applied in these co-creative projects, focusing at this adaptable and sustainable methodolgy [29], since these are educational projects carried out with students of different levels (primary and secondary schools; laboratories and workshops in university courses; laboratories and workshops in post-university courses) and on a regional scale, the writers can thus indicate in general these distinguished phases:

1) Opening of a storytelling project within an educational institution (Schools and University Courses) together with a local cultural institution as project partner

2) Identification of the cultural heritage (a museum collection, a tradition, a selection of point of interest in a city) to be enhanced by the project

3) Acquisition of scientific documentation given by the institutional partner (brochures, catalogs, informative texts, didactic panels)

4) Co-creative planning of museum audio guides and audio tours

5) Tasks' assignment to the students, according to the selected objects / places to be described

6) Direct and guided experience on the places

7) Digital documentation acquisition (photos, videos etc.) through student's personal mobile devices (smartphones, tablets)

8) Creative re-elaboration of the scientific material provided and / or found by the students, on a digital writing software (Word, Open Word)

9) Revision of the descriptions by teachers and the external mediator

10) Validation by the institutions partner of the project

11) Uploading of textual, photo and video contents on the izi.TRAVEL CMS platform and indication of credits

12) Linking to other internal and external online resources on the CMS platform

13) Voiceover of textual contents through mobile or pc applications (at school or at home)

14) Uploading of the voiceover on the CMS platform

15) Final validation of the created audio guide

16) Publication on the izi.TRAVEL platform and its application of the produced audio guide

17) Dissemination through social media platforms and mobile applications (Messanger, Whatsapp etc.)

Each of all those phases was targeted on the age of the students, on the specific cultural projects, on the institutional collaborations, trying to activate informal learning environments, based on the collaboration and active interaction of all the project participants.

Once the topic to be narrated has been identified (collections, itineraries in the territory, churches, customs and traditions, etc.), the institutional partners (Museums, Superintendencies, Municipalities, Dioceses, local tourist and cultural associations etc.) give the scientific and / or informative material from which to obtain certified informations.

The digital and creative skills acquired by the students varied according to the age of those involved in the project:

- *Primary Schools educational projects (age 6-9)*: the children were organized into work groups (4 or 5 children), to develop an aptitude for teamwork; during one or more guided tours of the places, they were invited to produce their own photo documentation through the devices loaned by their parents; they were trained how to take pictures, to zoom in and out and so on; after some learning lessons in the classroom, they were guided in the production of the contents; they became familiar with writing platforms, with the production and selection of images, and the connection between images and descriptions; they were able to create their own voiceovers of the texts

(through the teachers', the mediator's or the parents' at home devices); they participated in the uploading phase of their content on the CMS platform, made by the teachers or the cultural mediator, until the final publication of their multimedia products; Qr codes were finally created and printed, to show them to their parents and friends;

- *Middle School educational projects (age 10-13)*: the students were organized into working groups (2 or 3 students), to develop an aptitude for teamwork; during one or more guided tours of the places, they were invited to produce their own photo documentation, through their own devices; after some learning lessons in the classroom, they were guided in the creative and narrative reworking of the scientific contents; they were invited to enlarge the informations by doing online researches, wanting to deepen their knowledge with respect to what was discussed during the visits on the sites and in the classroom; they have improved their skills with writing platforms, with the production and selection of images and videos, with the creation of voice overs of texts (through their own devices); they participated in the uploading phase on the CMS platform, made by the teachers or the cultural mediator, until the final publication of their multimedia products;

- *High Schools educational projects (age 14-18)*: the students worked individually, to develop their individual responsibility towards a collective and shared project; during one or more guided tours of the places, they were invited to produce their own photo and video documentation, through their own devices; after some learning lessons in the classroom, they were invited to analyze the scientific contents and they were left alone in their creative and narrative re-elaboration process; they were invited to enlarge the informations by doing online researches, wanting to deepen their knowledge with respect to what was discussed during the visits on the sites and in the classroom, and the were guided to correctly distinguish good and bad informations online; they have improved their skills with writing platforms, with the production, selection and reworking of images and videos (in same cases they mounted videos in a documentary style), with the voiceover of the texts; once the textual contents have been corrected and validated, they have directly uploaded them online during the classroom workshops or at home, by registering themselves with their own credentials (personal email and password) on the izi.TRAVEL CMS platform; they were trained to create the correct credits for images downloaded from the web and to search and upload their own videos or videos specifically identified on YouTube; they were trained to transform the normal written text in an hypertextual one, by linking to other interesting online resources; they have personally published their multimedia products; they were invited to share them on their social media profiles and on Whatsapp;

- *Universitary and post-universitary educational projects (ages 19-25 and 25-35)*: the students worked in small groups (2 or 3 students), by co-designing together how the audio guides will be organized, having to produce their content for the audio guides in a more individual and less choral way than the previous ones, dividing between themselves the creative and producing tasks to develop both the aptitude for teamwork and skills in the field of cultural and tourist planning alone; they were invited to discover the places by themselves and to produce their photo and video documentation through their own devices; after learning works in the classroom, they were invited to analyze the scientific contents and they were left alone in their creative and narrative re-elaboration process; they were invited to enlarge the informations by doing online researches, wanting to deepen their knowledge with respect to what was discussed during the visits on the sites and in the classroom, and the were guided to correctly distinguish good and bad informations online; they have improved their skills with writing platforms, with the production, selection and reworking of images and videos (in same cases they mounted videos in a documentary style), with the voiceover of the texts; once the textual contents have been corrected and validated, they have directly uploaded them online during the classroom workshops or at home, by registering themselves with their own credentials (personal email and password) on the izi.TRAVEL CMS platform; they were trained to create the correct credits for images downloaded from the web and to search and upload their own videos or videos specifically identified on YouTube; they were trained to transform the normal written text in an hypertextual one, by linking to other interesting online resources; they have personally published their multimedia products; they were invited to share them on their social media profiles and on Whatsapp.

As just discussed, after the re-elaboration process of scientific and / or didactic content provided by the cultural institutions, the publication of new content with a narrative and friendly language has always been authorized only after a final verification and revision by the institutions themselves. The story, therefore, has always been kept in the right balance between scientific knowledge on the one hand and the democratization of knowledge and *ad hoc* languages on the other; this simplification never has been translated in the trivialization of terminology and scientific content.

While the audio guides produced within school projects are in any case choral products of an entire class or interclass, in which learning times, methods and difficulties were respected (students with special educational needs were also involved) and in which however, the credits relating to the contribution of each student are always indicated (with the indication under the single schedules of the texts and voiceover authorship), the audio guides published within universitary and post-universitary workshops and laboratories are, instead, multimedia products of the students' talent; so far, their authorship is always recognized in the summary of the audio guides.

In the cases of older students, their works were followed at a distance through Telegram or Whatsapp groups, carried out in their support, for clarifications, on how to carry out the project, how to carry out voiceovers, for sharing contents within the group. In many cases, the students preferred to make the voiceovers at home (sending them to Whatsapp for verification and validation), rather than during the laboratory (being forced to find an acoustically non-invasive environment for recording).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is now time to illustrate at least one project for each educational projects' category.

The first project to be mentioned, for its high educational level and its inclusiveness, is that of the audio guides produced by the students of the "Lombardo Radice - Pappalardo" Institute of Castelvetrano (Trapani's area), as part of an educational project carried out in collaboration with the Archaeological Park of Selinunte and Cave di Cusa. Students from 3rd, 4th, 5th classes of Primary school produced the audio guide *The Temples and the Metopes - Children's Guide*[1], while all the classes of the Middle school created the two audio tours *The little Selinuntini tell (the ancient Selinunte)*[2] and *The little stonemasons tell the Cave of Cusa*[3]. At the end of each sheet or point of interest, the guides are equipped with quizzes for testing the final user's learning. 66 classes were involved, for a total of about 900 children coordinated and followed by over 50 teachers, all trained by the central coordinator with a specific workshop on storytelling techniques and the use of the izi.TRAVEL platform and the CMS. The three audio guides consist of a total of 66 sheets, with 66 different voices, a different child for each class. The voice of a little girl should be mentioned, for the highly inclusive meaning itself: despite suffering from a selective mutism, she wanted to participate anyway, recording at home (instead of in the school's recording studio, as the others did). Introducing themselves as children of ancient Selinunte, the children of Castelvetrano told their peers about the cultural heritage of their city and the nearby quarries of Cusa, with simple language and with the technique of narrative storytelling.

Numerous audio guides have been produced as part of School-Work projects within the High School programs, conducted in collaboration with local authorities as institutional tutors (Museum Hubs and Regional museums, Municipalities, Associations etc.). After training workshops, in which the project on izi.TRAVEL and its CMS were presented, the students of numerous Sicilian schools contributed to the digital enhancement and promotion of their cultural heritage. Many school managers and teachers involved decided to continue the experience within the subsequent years of their educational programs, both by implementing the published audio guides of new content or translations in other languages, and by publishing new ones.

A real case of a long term strategy about participatory projects on izi.TRAVEL is the audio guide of the *Ursino Castle Civic Museum*[4] in Catania, where the museum staff, since 2016, is coordinating

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[1] https://www.izi.travel/it/7dc4-i-templi-e-le-metope-guida-per-bambini/it.
[2] https://www.izi.travel/it/02eb-i-piccoli-selinuntini-raccontano/it.
[3] https://www.izi.travel/it/e39e-i-piccoli-scalpellini-raccontano-le-cave-di-cusa/it.
[4] https://www.izi.travel/it/8282-museo-civico-castello-ursino/it.

hundreds of students as "digital Ciceroni" for more than three years, to implement the audio guides of the museum and its collections in Italian and English. This is a perfect example of how the activities of a museum have quickly adapted according to a strategic plan of communication and enhancement of the collections. The izi.TRAVEL museum audio guide is offered at the entrance of the Castle as the official digital audioguide. It has 100 schedules on line, translated into English. The project has continued until now and many other schedules will be created. Today, it is a "five star app" and it has been downloaded and enhanced thousand times [37].

As part of a project realized in collaboration with the local regional tourist offices named "Pro Loco", led by their central coordination office UNPLI-Sicilia (the National Union of the Italian Pro Loco in Sicily), in the last two-year dozens of audio tours have been created, in which local storytellers wanted to tell stories related to popular traditions (religious feasts, traditional festivals) or stories related to specific monuments, such as castles (legends of princesses, ghosts, etc.). Also in this case, the work was based on training workshops and the production, by each volunteer (in two years about 450 volunteers), of their own geo-localized contents in the audio tours. In 2019, 9 audio tours on Sicilian folk traditions were produced from the UNPLI Sicilia profile[5] on izi.TRAVEL, with about 220 geo-localized intangible cultural heritage points of interest. In 2020, 44 audio guides and audio tours were published, with about 630 geo-localized intangible stories, from the profiles of some of the provincial UNPLI departments (Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Catania, Enna, Messina, Palermo and Trapani) and from the profiles of some Pro Loco. In this case, according to the COVID-19 global situation, the whole project was transferred online.

Within the work conducted by the students of the post-graduate Master in Economics and Management of Cultural Heritage of the Palermo University, the audio guide of the *Regional Museum of Palazzo Mirto* was produced, the result, however, of a final thesis project[6].

The key to #iziTRAVELSicilia's success lies in that "alchemy" we have talked about: alchemy given by the absolute compatibility of this model with the values, concepts, experiences and expectations (even unfulfilled) of a large and widespread community of individuals, who, until that moment, felt that they had not been involved in the local cultural promotion processes, perceiving the total absence of strategies about the digital communication and enhancement by political decision makers.

#iziTRAVELSicilia soon revealed itself as an example of good practices in museum education, in co-creating cultural value, able in transforming people coming from different social communities (especially students) into *smart heritage communities*, thus revealing the great impact of cultural sustainability of this platform [34]. Within the first objective of enhancing the common heritage, the lack of online catalogs of Sicilian collections has begun to be filled, too: the majority of museums, today on izi.TRAVEL, do not even have a website today, such as already highlighted in the past [33]. For the first time and thanks to bottom-up storytelling processes, Sicily has endowed itself with unique strategies to promote the territory.

It was also possible to demonstrate the great impact that this project has had and still has on civil society, through a format, a coordination and shared languages at all levels, which encouraged creative processes able in involving local communities and territories, by creating new strategies for cultural and territorial promotion [38] [39].

4. CONCLUSION

This project has been soon transformed itself into a *participatory process* that is now difficult to reverse: the effectiveness and sustainability of this innovation model are contributing to a real systemic change, gradually done but increasingly rooted, aware and widespread.

This bottom-up revolution is certainly pioneering, but in the teaching sector and in the strategies of participatory cultural communication it can be presented without doubts as a lever model for change.

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[5] https://www.izi.travel/it/d35a-unpli-sicilia/it.
[6] https://izi.travel/it/49c0-museo-regionale-di-palazzo-mirto/it.

The educational institutions collaborated in the project in a two-way didactic approach, in a position not of subjection to cultural institutions, but of collaboration and co-creation. Above all, a process of informal heritage education and acquisition of digital skills have been activated on this platform, by allowing students not only to elaborate and settle what they learned during the process, but to become themselves "digital Ciceroni" of their cultural heritage and disseminators of that kind of knowledge, through the audio guides they produced.

Returning to the typical functions of cultural storytelling, we can say that, in the #iziTRAVELSicilia project, they have all been fully fulfilled. The narratives created helped to consolidate the sense of belonging of young people to a community (*community function*), of which they have better and in an emotional way understood (*empathic function*) the identity (*identity function*) and values (*value function*), as well as the importance of the transmission of knowledge between generations (*referential function*) as a key element for the conservation of a collective identity (*mnestic function*), useful for understanding the past to affect the future (*"springboard" function*).

Finally, all three main fields of application identified by the AthenaPlus group were interconnected, making the potential of digital media fully effective. The project has contributed from the *educational* side, by collaborating both in the creation of meaning and of the sense of belonging, in the transmission of values, of cultural awareness, of people's stories and traditions, and in the acquisition of digital skills; it has contributed to creating a *cultural mediation*, because the Sicilian cultural institutions have revealed themselves interested in new mechanisms of interaction with the public and more oriented to new digital socutions in communicating their heritage, through participatory processes, widespread technologies and a more democratic and cognitively accessible language; it has contributed to bringing *culture and tourism* closer together, in a finally bidirectional relationship, having recognized how cultural communication can no longer be hierarchical and self-referential today, but need to be focused on narrations, emotions and experiences as essential elements both of an adequate communication and a right cultural democratization, and to an adequate tourism promotion. By involving in a participatory way all the categories protagonists of this project, including thousands of Sicilian students, the Sicilian cultural heritage promotion has also been realized and, through this process, the awareness itself of its own protection.

In the virtuous path of this process, only one factor is missing, to prevent it from atrophying in the long run: the real institutionalization, for which, unfortunately, the longer and decidedly less pioneering and visionary times of the Sicilian bureaucracy are going to be expected.

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