

Culturalazio.it: an open platform for user-generated contents

“Culture, a common heritage”

Culturalazio.it: an open platform for user generated contents

Arturo Di Corinto – CATTID, Sapienza University of Rome

(a.dicorinto@uniroma1.it 1)

Contribution to the *Eurospace Book*

Preface

Culturalazio.it, is the portal of the Department of Culture, Entertainment and Sports of the Lazio Region and was created with the aim of spreading the concept that culture is accessible to all. Inside the portal, citizens are not only seen as users of its contents but as its first producers.

The main idea of the Culturalazio.it portal is indeed that culture is a collective resource, in both economic and social terms. It is a “common heritage” and a regional portal on culture can be useful to promote knowledge on a territory’s cultural heritage, history, customs and traditions.

Introduction

Putting citizens in a condition of managing their own information is not a new idea and the debate on how ICT can foster their social and democratic involvement, allowing them to participate in decisions taken by local administrations, dates back to the 1970s with American cities’ BBS.

In the last three years, along the lines of this tradition and using typical web 2.0 applications, the culturalazio.it portal has been offering citizens a tool that gives them a leading role in regional cultural policies.

Since the beginning, one of the main aims of the portal on the Lazio Culture (www.culturalazio.it) was to stimulate cultural consumption and tourism activities to develop an increased demand and meet any unsatisfied needs, marketing at the same time the less well-known areas in order to promote their cultural attractions and increase their interaction with the rest of the territory. A key objective of the portal is also to promote **transparency, innovation** and **involvement** in the production and consumption of culture. How can this be done? Our idea is to provide digital resources to overcome difficulties such as lack of information, knowledge gap as well as geographical, physical, cultural, language and generational barriers proposing new communication formats that are able to reach out to the youth.

We therefore adopted the following strategy:

- Making cultural information available by organizing data that was already contained in the archive and museum systems;
- Recovering and organizing non-digital information on shows, events and exhibitions;
- Realizing information systems that can support and integrate cultural demand and consumption, such as the case of the “Great Cultural Attractions of Lazio”;
- Improving management processes within the relevant administrative bodies;
- Creating areas for free creative expression (with a multimedia gallery in Creative Commons);
- Putting citizens in contact with their institutional representatives (through an open blog where users can read and write their own contents).

Our challenge was to develop and foster the growth of the territory’s economy through cultural and tourism promotion “taking art works out of the museums so that culture can be enjoyed inside citizens’ homes”. In this way, the cultural heritage is accessible to all and institutional initiatives are not only focused on financial support and conservation but

mainly communication. This activity increases knowledge on all aspects related to the cultural heritage and creates an opportunity to discover the territory, its history and the people who live there. It stimulates earnings and employment, increasing the attention towards the less renowned places. The promoters of this project are convinced that the cultural heritage not only transmits knowledge but is a leading sector of the economy, either directly or indirectly through tourism.

The portal was also created due to the awareness that it would have been impossible to convey the vast, varied and complicated cultural heritage of Lazio and the many events taking place through a web site, even with a large editorial board. The only way in which the web site could become a doorway to this rich cultural heritage was by making its users become narrators. The narrators are envoys from each area describing the territory they come from. This is an extended idea of editorial board, through which the selection and production of the portal's contents are realized. The cultural production can therefore be accessed and enriched by all, while following general principles of relevance, topicality and reliability of the information given. The portal has become a community place where each citizen can be an active producer of communication and interaction goods.

History

The Culturalazio portal was first published online in May, 2006. It was realized with a reduced budget and in a short time due to the cooperation between the Department of Culture, Sports and Entertainment of the Region and its technological partner AIT (ICT company of the Lazio Region). The editorial board included staff from the Regional Directorate for Cultural and Sports Activities and interns from "La Sapienza" University of Rome.

The first step was to convey the Department's operational structure in a transparent way, describing the various offices and departments and indicating the persons in charge of single areas. A section was also created for users to consult regional **laws** and **decrees** and to download **tenders**, **public notices** and documents related to **procurements** and **administrative acts**. In this way, the Region could comply with regulations in force on public administration communications, and specifically with law no. 150 of 2000 regulating information and communication activities in the institutions.

New objectives were soon added, such as protecting the memory, cultural diversity and new forms of art in the Region. These processes were facilitated by the use of new technologies which made it possible to **digitally include** citizens, making it possible for them to access digital resources to deepen their knowledge on some aspects of culture. In the sections dedicated to museum, archive, library systems but even European projects, cinema and live entertainment, citizens could access material and links, both institutional and private, on issues of interest.

As we proceeded to compose and organize the contents of the web site it was immediately clear that we had to respect some basic rules in order that it could be used by all citizens, and therefore it had to be **accessible** and **user-friendly**.

Newsmaking

Since the beginning of the project, our main newsmaking principles included the need to highlight local events, which may even have a small relevance but which directly involve small towns and their neighbourhood. We gave particular attention to the vital cultural activities offered by the small towns of Lazio, which are normally not featured by the *mainstream* media since they are local and are often organized by small bodies that have budgetary constraints and cannot afford communication and marketing activities to

promote their events.

Thanks to the tools that were made available and the quality of the contents, in May 2009 the portal could already boast **220 thousand users** per year. This result made us increase our attention on services dedicated to the community, which required the direct involvement of users. Apart from the periodical **newsletter** we gave importance to common spaces open to all users for citizens to express themselves, especially through the **blog**.

By extending the editorial board, citizens were offered the possibility of writing news. In addition, on the Blog they could hold actual discussions on cultural themes. For example, citizens could see a play and write a review that could be read and commented by other users. This enriched the debate and facilitated the exchange of ideas among all those who actively participated in the cultural life of the territory. Even passive readers felt involved. Today, the 3.0 release of the portal has renewed its graphical layout taking into account the increased active participation of users. It focuses on a multimedia approach, which is a real innovation with respect to standard policies of public administrations. It invites users to participate through the video channel "**CulturalazioTV**", where users can upload contents; the webtv "**Laziolive**", realized by the editorial board and the multicultural webradio "**Melting Pod**", which offers news in original language for immigrant communities as well as cultural information for the "new Italians". This multimedia system is supported by the **georeferencing** of news and navigation inside the web site by means of **virtual three-dimensional reconstructions** of the Great Cultural Attractions of Lazio: Vulci, Fossanova, Tivoli, the Via del Sale and the polygonal Walls.

Participation

Transforming the user into a producer of contents would not have been possible if the primary objective of Culturalazio.it had not been to initiate a **virtuous democratic process** whereby all citizens actively participate in the territory's cultural life.

Indeed, the society that is coming out through internet and its social use is one that cannot do without the direct involvement of individuals in the construction of projects, products and services for their consumption. But what happens if the same institutions propose the debate and create an active community?

The main characteristic of an institution is that it exists thanks to the cooperation between those who offer a service and those who use it and it establishes a direct relationship of mutual exchange with the territory and the population, whose needs are a top priority for the service. Technologies offer new opportunities of enriching and facilitating this exchange, bringing improvements to the whole society. However, we would risk falling into technological determinism if we stated that technology can improve the community on its own. To increase its use for this purpose, public administrations need to make a clear choice and promote the direct involvement of citizens, for example by creating a virtual community that is able to propose actual improvements for the territory.

For this reason, the portal only considers high-standard events, such as exhibitions, plays, classical music concerts and even festivals and religious processions, small sports events that have a meaning for local communities and contribute to enhancing their identity. It is important to represent the culture of the Lazio region in a transversal way, featuring traditions and lifestyles as well as the local folklore that depict the real aspects of towns and make citizens feel represented by the community. The connection with the Culturalazio.it **community** is fundamental for the local society, which feels involved in the social network, leaving aside cyberspace stereotypes that are more detached from the

actual local life.

Culturalazio.it tries to fully represent the territory through the direct involvement of citizens, operators and cultural associations and it also addresses all those who are interested in Lazio and do not live in the region, such as tourists, immigrants, experts and amateurs. In this way, the network is constantly open and gives priority to new inputs in the web flow. Even if it is based on a local context, the experience of the Culturalazio portal aims at encouraging the participation of a larger number of users, opening up to a more universal and global community.

It would seem contradictory to create a community based on a local territory that is the symbol of a global non-territorial communication network at the same time, but this is only apparent. The most intimate need for information of human beings is related to the area in which they live in order that they can move and interact with the local community.

However, being able to exchange views with people living abroad created the need to provide information on the portal in different languages. This was done by involving cultural mediators, foreign media and associations existing in the Region dealing with exchanges with other cultures. In this way, the collective culture proposed by Culturalazio became a cultural exchange and strengthened the local identity.

Another value that was highlighted by the portal was to represent culture as a common heritage and not as property. It was enhanced through the use of **Creative Commons**; licenses for all the material published on the web site. Through these licenses, authors of the portal's contents give other users the opportunity of using them, extracting and amending the material and choosing the limits to this freedom. This is based on the principle of overcoming the "extremisms of intellectual property", which lead to the limiting of innovation and creativity, as expressed by the jurist Lawrence

Lessig by extending the duration of a copyright to an undefined period. The adoption of flexible licenses by a public administration therefore reflects the will to consider the contents produced by the portal as everyone's contents. This is the "brand character" of portal: "**Culture, a common heritage**".



Assessorato

- Direzione regionale
- Area spettacolo e strutture
- Area cinema ed Europa
- Area valorizzazione
- Area sport
- Area servizi culturali
- Servizi al pubblico
- Stage e tirocini
- Progetti europei
- Bandi e avvisi pubblici
- Normativa e atti
- Sala stampa
- Politiche culturali

Schede

- Antichità
- Medioevo ed età moderna
- Età contemporanea
- Servizi culturali
- Cinema teatro danza
- Musica
- Cosa si muove nel Lazio
- Intercultura
- Strade e itinerari
- Cultura e natura
- Scienza e sport

Fotografa il senso di un luogo
CONCORSO

15 progetti per promuovere la via Francigena
ecco i risultati dell'avviso pubblico

Concorso di idee per l'identità visiva del patrimonio culturale del Lazio

Officine culturali e Teatro sociale
Scarica la determina di assegnazione dei contributi

attrattori culturali



eventi

primo piano
IL SENSO DEI LUOGHI 2008
La cultura promuove il territorio

speciale
Programmazione integrata territoriale
Le novità del 2008

Festa della Frontiera IV Edizione

L'Altro Corto
Festival del cortometraggio

L'isola del cinema
Per l'estate 2008 il grande cinema d'autore approda sull'isola

Festa della Frontiera IV Edizione

community

- Blog**
Partecipa alle discussioni
- Le buone gestioni**
Best practices culturali
- Redazione Diffusa**
Scrivi tu la notizia
- Libri in vetrina**
Proposte di lettura
- Andiamo a Teatro**
Le nostre recensioni

Video channel

Titolo video titolo

Castello

Hitlist Carica un tuo video

Andiamo a Teatro

agenda

Gennaio 2007

Do	Lu	Ma	Me	Gi	Ve	Sa
01	02	03	04	05	06	06
07	08	09	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27

[Appuntamenti del mese](#)
[Tutti gli appuntamenti futuri](#)

Laziolive



news

- 07/07/2008 "Dov'è il tuo canto"
Il 7 luglio alle 19:00, presso la serra e i giardini... [Leggi](#)
- 07/07/2008 "Dov'è il tuo canto"
Il 7 luglio alle 19:00, presso la serra e i giardini... [Leggi](#)
- 07/07/2008 "Dov'è il tuo canto"
Il 7 luglio alle 19:00, presso la serra e i giardini... [Leggi](#)
- 07/07/2008 "Dov'è il tuo canto"
Il 7 luglio alle 19:00, presso la serra e i giardini... [Leggi](#)
- 07/07/2008 "Dov'è il tuo canto"
Il 7 luglio alle 19:00, presso la serra e i giardini... [Leggi](#)

multimedia

- Galleria fotografica**
I giardini di Ninfa
- Video**
Il senso dei luoghi 2008
- Audio**
Audioguide alle abbazie del Lazio
- Galleria fotografica**
I giardini di Ninfa