EXPERIENCING URBAN IDENTITY THROUGH NOVELS-INSPIRED DIGITAL NAVIGATION

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Abstract

Cities' complex character renders difficult the recognition and possession of the spirit of the place during a visit. A literary novel through sequences of experiential reception and representation of urban space aids the visitor to understand and interpret the complexity of urban sites. Our research proposal will enlighten the ways that novels could provide a strong urban identity experience. The combination of novels with innovative digital technologies, the fictional texts referring to the city and the use of digital navigation, contribute greatly in the art of experiencing the city. Our research outcome is twofold. First, the vivid life of novels will define a new approach of place experiential tourism. Second, the development of novel-guiding paths within a digital navigation system will alter the typical character of such map-based technologies providing a deeper and creative way of exploring a place.

Introduction

Urban places comprise a charming field in order to satisfy the contemporary traveller's quest for experience and knowledge. The complex character of cities renders difficult the recognition and possession of the spirit of place during a visit. In general, in many cases tourists' engagement is situated in the forced and incomplete gazing, not in experiencing.

Urban landscapes are highly complex and they provide a diasporic character through both time and space¹. According to this, often is very difficult the emergence of cultural paths in order to unveil urban landscapes and their individually local qualities. The city environment, as a pulsating place, is characterized by social, economic, political, cultural fields. In order to approach such fields a visitor must have an essential and continuous experience of spaces. Language is an important tool for people to shape their understanding of space. Novels can provide important ways towards the creation of a sense of being in a place.

We will enlighten the potential that novels could provide a strong urban identity experience. In particular, our work explores in which way novels could enhance the engagement of visitors with an urban landscape. We will argue that the interweaving
of current digital navigation approaches could further enhance such experiential tourism approach. Devices such as mobiles and/or tablets contribute on a high degree on experiential tourism. Idhe's argue on the extension of human individual embodied perceptual skills through digital technological devices, "It is through instruments that transformed perceptions occur and new ‘worlds’ emerge, but any new world is itself a modification of life-world processes."² Through typical wayfinding and planning tools are based on digital media they have in common a technical basis. However, the content of such tools is constrained as based only on cartographic concepts. A definitive lack of the current navigation digital media is about the existence of a story-based plot/event. Such kind of premises could be provided by from novels and draw inspiration from them.

We argue that the enrichment of digital maps with narrative qualities from novels could strength the role of digital maps as an aid to enhance the visitor's spatial experience. Digital tools have a major role in the experiencing and embodiment of the real world. The blending of novels and digital navigation system is a promising way towards the engagement of a cityscape.

**Research Framework**

The aim of our research is to enhance the visiting experience of an urban landscape. The proposed operational framework aims towards a digital navigation system capable to connect a series of real urban places with novels by enabling the emergence of dynamic itineraries and paths that digitally integrates writings with the referenced places of Heraklion, Crete (Figure 1). The selected novels are the following: *Medals³*, C. Mitsotaki, *The Age of the Labyrinths⁴*, The story of *Olga⁵*, *Blackwhite⁶*, all by R. Galanaki. *Anthropoi kai yperanthropoi⁷*, G. Kazantzaki. *The Woman of Sybaris⁸*, L. Zografou. *Third Christian Girls’ School⁹*, E. Alexiou and finally the *Captain Mihalis¹⁰*, N. Kazantzakis.

![Figure 1: Heraklion 1666 (left), and Heraklion 2016 (right)](image)

The operational framework is developed in three interconnected phases. The first
phase is devoted to the literary analysis based on urban elements (common in all selected novels) will enlighten the ways that the selected texts could provide a strong urban identity experience of Heraklion. The path that a fiction proposes is the way through opened in the impassable continuum of the urban tissue by the author and at the same time is the experiential voyage of the 'passing stranger' of the city. The second phase introduces the resulted types and kinds of interconnected paths and itineraries, as they are amalgamated and overlapped within a digital navigation system. The combination of literature texts with digital technologies, the fictional texts referring to the city and the use of digital navigation, contribute greatly in the art of experiencing the city. Novels, with their plot, are relating spaces' sequences; as a result, the reader/visitor encounters such narrative stories when he/she is following a path in the city. Furthermore, such space sequences are forming distinct urban paths and itineraries. Through the diverse literary itineraries and paths, visitors interact via the proposed digital navigating system and utilize it following their preferences.

The third, future, phase will integrate an augmented reality media within the interactive navigation guide. Augmented Reality will further empower an overlaid between the implicit narrative worlds with the real urban landscape.

**The flux of the City and Literary Novels**

The multifocal and multivalent character of contemporary cities makes difficult to be considered and conceived by the inhabitant, visitor. The city, symbol and agent of culture, historical background, field of social relations, experiences, architectural order, aesthetic phenomenon, all at the same time, is hided in the specialized, one-dimensional, partitive approaches of its special features. It resists to the categorized, simplified and standardized identity representations.

"Like all big cities, it consisted of irregularity, change, sliding forward, not keeping in step, collision of things and affairs, and fathomless points of silence in between, of paved ways and wilderness, of one great rhythmic throb and the perpetual discord and dislocation of all opposing rhythms, and as a whole resembled a seething, bubbling fluid in a vessel consisting of the solid material of buildings, laws, regulations, and historical traditions."

Existential tourism contains bodily feelings, emotional ties, identity construction and narration related to place. According to Tuan a combination of emotions and thought is important for a place's reality's experience. Furthermore, in another of his seminal work, he argued that words and in particular fiction and literature have the power to call places into existence. The novels can define diverse and personalized feelings, interpretations, conceptions, i.e. ways of life with reference to a particular urban landscape, and finally render such visiting environment as an exceptional destination.
Literary texts are privileged carriers of that \textit{bubbling fluid} that enables experiential and emotional aspects of urban space. A novel through sequences of experiential reception and representation of urban spaces aids the visitor to understand and interpret the complexity of urban sites.

Novels create multivariate representations of historical space, social spaces, and cultural spaces of an urban landscape. They offer a dynamic and multifaceted capture of the urban environment that is mainly appropriate for visitors for experiencing the complex and diasporic urbanity of a city. A literary text enables not only the representation of space, but also its generation.

\textbf{City and Digital Navigation}

“\textit{To ask for a map is to say, ‘Tell me a story’}”\textsuperscript{14}

The city is a social and cultural place that is in constant interaction with every cartographic attempt and expressions, i.e. map. In most of the cases, visitors confront an unfamiliar city landscape with the aid of map elements, tourist destinations, transit spaces, high streets. Tourists' urban experience is based on a negotiation of the divergence between map and real places.

The complexity and high potentiality of such interactions are extremely apparent in novels. There exist not many cases of literary text’s geography mapping. Broseau made evident the novel's particular way of defining its own geography\textsuperscript{15}. Bourdieu defines a projection over the Paris's map of the social space of Flaubert's novel, 'Sentimental Education'. In the 1846 Paris's map, Bourdieu indicates the trajectories of the principal characters (continuous arrows), and he attaches their names to their residences' places\textsuperscript{16}, (Figure 2).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figure2a}
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figure2b}
\caption{Bourdieu (left) and Moretti (right) mapping the spaces of narrating}
\end{figure}

Moretti with his seminal work opens up new horizons in mapping the spaces of
narrating. He developed a series of maps that enables the discovery of many hidden dimensions of literary texts, where with his maps he tries to visualize the characters' meeting places, and their interactions, (Figure 2). For Hones, at the core of literary geography is the narrative as texts and novels for which she argues those are not a mere representation, but considers them as spatial practices, 'narrative as spacing, as a performance of space'.

In general, visitors' relationships to urban places are primarily interactional: the sense of being (embodiment - engagement) in a place is formed through the interaction of a three-tier set: the urban setting, the person experiencing it and digital technology. There is no other human experience extra mediated by technology than the tourist experience. Two principal forces power the case. First, tourists are influenced by the force to discover and approach a new place being an urban or natural destination. Second, tourists will confront a different and strange place they are try to tackle the fear of otherness and strangeness. Therefore, visiting a new place involves being embodied by technology at different levels.

The invasion of digital mediated navigation systems provides new approaches on the use of maps. However, two principal limitations are characterized such approaches. First, contemporary visitors based on that new technology express a behaviour that is less worried with their location on a map than with what to perform next. Second, all navigation map-based visiting experiences confront urban elements as independent and individual points well established in digital map. Google Earth and Bing are typical examples of such cases.

Furthermore, contemporary digital interactive tourist guides direct visitors towards characteristic landmarks, pathways and regions, and they fail to mediate a coherent unifying story connecting socio-political and cultural levels of such places. Consequently, visitors establish less connections and understanding of the manifold layers of the reality in a visiting place. Vital layers of the urban life, such as social, community, culture etc. remain in many cases untouched, fragmented and diasporic.

**Novel-based experience of Heraklion**

Heraklion is a city of multifaceted heritage values of different historic periods, religions, ethnicities, professions and urban quarters renders inevitable their overlap but at the same time does not prevent conflict between them. From the eight novels, are established eight different approaches of Heraklion's character. The selection of authors was on the basis that all choose their birthplace, to transform into the 'literary city' as a historical time to the late 19th century-early 20th. That is the period preceding the slaughter of the city in 1898 and following the autonomy of Crete, the union with Greece and the exchange of populations. It was a time of radical changes for the life of the city and its inhabitants. Such eight narrations represent eight distinct 'cities', which intersect, refracting and aggregated into one.
The urban spatial qualities of the selected texts redefine a novel urban space inspired by the movement (real or potential) of the visitor since ‘His movement is the purpose for the space, and it should function to activate his kinaesthetic experience in a series of interesting rhythms and variations in speed and force’. An embodied experience of a visitor is simulated by the movement. The basic proposed navigation system has its foundations on particular cognitive maps that derived from the urban landscape analysis. The main task is to finding, spotting and linking of specific and common urban elements that express a different status within the narrative content and context of each author/novel.

In all authors' texts the resultant physiognomy of Heraklion is formed focusing on the following spatial components: In the imposing presence of the Venetian wall, which acts as a border and dashboard observatory, memory's symbol and representation, security and confinement and as an operational and ambiguous significance of the four gates that control the crossings. The main roads cross roads connecting the gates in the maze of alleyways. The central and peripheral neighbourhoods that contrasts the historic centre with its monumental landmarks and the porous region of the labyrinthine structure, is introducing class indicators, cultural and social differentiation. In the public space the popular squares, sites of historical memory, social and national-religious cohesion and meeting of inhabitants’ singular and plural stories.

The result is a set of urban cognitive maps that are based in the following eight narrations, (Figure 3). First narration, the introverted city, K. Mitsotaki. Second narration, the city of labyrinths, R. Galanaki. Third narration, the ‘personal’ city-shell, R. Galanaki. Fourth narration, the city of the escape valves, G. Kazantzaki. Fifth narration, the city of gender prelabelling, L. Zografou. Sixth narration, the city of thresholds, E. Alexiou. Seventh narration, the city-chessboard of the two ethnic groups, Greek and Ottoman community, N. Kazantzakis. Eighth narration, the city as archive of memory, R. Galanaki.

Figure 3: The eight urban cognitive maps, (first row 1st-4th, second 5th-8th)
The specific urban indicators have a two-fold role. First, as they appeared in the eight novels, they result towards the definition of a set of singular points of view for the visitor. Such points of view are translated to paths as a coincidence, in accordance with the development of novels’ events. Therefore, visitors have the potential to be guided along particular paths according the eight narratives in the city milieu, or they can blend their independent paths with these acquired from the novels. Second, urban indicators act as indicators that redefine new ‘spaces’ of different kind and type as resulted from the text analysis and the real setting, that of the urban area of Heraklion. Mixing the eight narrations with digital content is especially synthesized in order to empower visitor’s experience and urban environment engagement\textsuperscript{21}. As a result, diverse visitors engage in different urban experiences and allocate diverse meanings to their experiences.

**Discussion – Conclusions**

Our proposed operational framework it is a first step towards the development of a novels-based digitally mediated navigation system. Narrative-based digital mobile media can participate in an ongoing production of urban place as a simultaneously physical, social, and psychological setting. The simultaneous paths’ activation with the aid of the eight different novels reflects de Certeau’s model of place as a ‘polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities’\textsuperscript{22}. The outcome of our research framework is twofold. First, the vivid life of novels can define a new approach of place experiential tourism. Second, the development of original guiding paths within a digital navigation system will alter the typical character of such map-based navigation technologies providing to their users a deeper and creative way of exploring an urban place. The proposed digitally enhanced itineraries can enable visitors’ engagement on at least two levels, the level produced by the visitors’ own practice, and the level produced by the specific literary texts’ social, cultural practices traversing the urban space.

Therefore, Heraklion’s urban place is dynamically emerged as a distinctive experience. The visitors acquire interactively the heroes, events, urban elements and engage with their motion within the city. Within the selected literary narratives, distinct urban spaces are intentionally associated with particular class activities, with diverse gender, and with historically specific socio-political activities.

A novels-based digital media can enhance aesthetic experiences of the urban landscape and therefore redefine the connection between tourist experience and urban place and develop new means of exploring it. The amalgamation of novels with the digital navigation technologies offers contemporary visitor/travellers the ability to acquire their own place experience through the mediation of narration and to initiate their own real and digital blended navigations into the urban space derived
from their preferences and interests. In other words, to acquire their own magic of the place driven by the projections, translation and interpretation that fictional fabrication accomplishes upon the urban horizon.

References