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Linguaggi specialistici e Traduzione Tecnica

Volume 2

# Multimodal Promotional Strategies in Place and Cultural Heritage Branding

## Case studies and best practices

edited by
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# INTRODUCTION TO THE VOLUME[1]

NICOLETTA VASTA, PIETRO MANZELLA

## 1. "Small cities with big dreams"

"How can small cities make an impact in a globalizing world dominated by 'world cities' and urban development strategies aimed at increasing agglomeration?" This question, posed in the blurb of Greg Richards and Lian Duif's (2019) seminal volume *Small Cities with Big Dreams. Creative Placemaking and Branding Strategies*, was a source of inspiration for the international conference "Multimodal Promotional Strategies in Place and Cultural Heritage Branding: Case studies and best practices", held at the University of Udine (Gorizia Campus) on December 11-12, 2023. The conference – organized by the *Research Lab on Strategic Communication and New Media* at the Dept. of Languages, Literatures, Communication, Education and Social Studies (DILL) with the financial support of the Fondazione Carigo and Consorzio Universitario di Gorizia and under the patronage of the Municipality of Gorizia – was part of the GO!2025 initiatives promoting Nova Gorica and Gorizia as "the borderless European Capital of Culture" (henceforth, ECoC, see https://www.go2025.eu/en).

The creative concept underlying Nova Gorica and Gorizia's candidacy as ECoC 2025 underscores its being "a transnational European city, a place where people and ideas are treasured and respected regardless of their cultural, national, linguistic or any other background" (GECT GO 2020, p. 3). In its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, the Council of Europe defines the latter as "an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures […that] aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse worldviews and practices […] while fostering integration and social cohesion" (CM[2008]30, p. 9). While intercultural dialogue is fundamental for the development of relationships between people, countries and cultures in general, it becomes all the more crucial in a border area like Gorizia. Hence, the Nova Gorica-Gorizia ECoC 2025 project is an

[1] Although the present Introduction is a collaborative effort and reflects the views of both authors, Nicoletta Vasta wrote Sections 1 and 2.1 while Pietro Manzella wrote Sections 2.2 and 3.

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opportunity for intercultural inclusion, as well as a tool for strengthening the sense of belonging to a shared European identity. Intercultural dialogue sustains cohesion and inclusion and is also an instrument of mediation and reconciliation, as it prevents social fragmentation by promoting equity, human dignity, and the pursuit of the common good. The actions to be undertaken to foster civic engagement have to be aimed at enhancing social cohesion and inclusion. Moreover, the ECoC status represents a unique opportunity for *place branding* through the synergic interplay of various activities aimed at forging and enhancing Nova Gorica and Gorizia's shared identity and image, which will be promoted among, and communicated to, multiple internal and external stakeholders.

Among those activities, fostering tourism is certainly of paramount importance. Tourism is a global industry which has been massively penetrated by digital technologies and the internet and which affects even the most remote areas of the world, thus offering opportunities to study interpersonal and cross-community relations alongside international and intercultural relations and contacts (Jaworski, Pritchard 2005).[2] As the designation of an ECoC has shifted from big European cities to smaller ones, it seems to us that the two key strategies small cities have to enact if they wish to brand themselves as attractive *glocal*[3] destinations for cultural tourism should be:

- developing institutional collaboration (and extending it to the regions surrounding the small city in question) in the co-creation, as a territorial network, of events and projects, to be consistently pursued through a single institutional website (in our case, https://www.go2025.eu/en); and
- 'positioning' the small city's distinctive brand identity against competitors by triggering the psychological leveraging process through *storytelling* (see, e.g., Qualizza 2017; Vasta 2020) – in J. Bruner's (1990, p. 47) definition, whereby "storytelling […] develops as an unfinished process in which causes are identified, links are forged, predictions are risked, and the exceptional is linked with the ordinary". This is achieved

[2] Although most studies investigating the relationship between technology and tourism tend to emphasize the affordances of digital connections, viz. in co-creating the city (see e.g. Marques and Borba 2017) and in underscoring the role of tourists as *prosumers* (as defined in Toffler 1980, p. 292 *et passim*), some critical discourse analysis (CDA)-inspired, 'take-a-break-from-technology'-oriented studies (e.g. Li, Pearce and Low 2018) have questioned the idea that technology is beneficial *per se* to the tourist industry.

[3] The literature on multimodal and web-mediated discourse analysis of *glocalization* strategies in promotional texts, including those aimed at cultural heritage branding, is burgeoning: to mention just a few titles, see, e.g., Campagna 2007; Fairclough 2006; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010, 2014; Maci 2007, 2012, 2017; Manca 2016; Paganoni 2015; Pawels 2012; Thurlow and Jaworski 2011; Turra 2020.

by drawing on individual related stories building up a recurrent narrative, or "Intertextual Thematic Formation" (Lemke 1988),[4] in itself linked to master (or transhistorical) narratives, i.e. narratives embedded in a specific narrative system drawing on recognizable myths and archetypes deeply embedded in a particular culture (Vasta 2023, p. 52; see also Bhabha's 1994, p. 145 notion of the "production of nation as narration"); these master narratives, however, are not fixed, but can be adapted creatively to changing times and, as such, resonate with different communities (see Andò, Leonzi 2014, viz. Ch. 1).

In passing, E.M. Bruner (2005, viz. pp. 19-27) distinguishes three types of narrative concerning the tourist's experience and calling into play vital constructs for discourse analysts and ethnographers of communication, such as agency, contested narratives and the tourist gaze:

- *pretour narratives*, i.e. the imagined journey when tourists are exploring their options for travelling and are gathering information; in the current authors' opinion, these narratives draw on the master narratives inscribed in the global tourist community of practice's *habitus* (in Bourdieu's sense, 1990, pp. 52-65), marketed online by the local authorities, tour operators or tour guides, and, more recently, new tourism and hospitality "curators", like travel consultants and destination marketing organizers and bloggers, and thus reflecting the growing trend towards re-intermediation in the form of collecting, selecting, displaying and contextualizing (Richards 2024, p. 28);
- the lived, extraordinary *experience on tour*, on the grounds of which tourists reshape and personalize the pretour narratives; and
- *posttour narratives*, recounting the journey and related experiences, which "are never finished, for, with each retelling, the circumstances, the audience, and the situation of the narrator change, providing the opportunity for novel understandings and novel narratives to arise" (E.M. Bruner 2005, p. 27).

Even more importantly, the crucial step required to amplify the voice of a relatively unknown city is by creatively engaging one's stakeholders – first and foremost one's citizens as a community of advocates and/or brand ambassadors – in *storytelling* and *storylistening* (Scholes, Clutterbuck 1998; Qualizza 2017, pp. 69-70) concerning individual lived experiences and their interpretations; selecting, showcasing and raising awareness about the most interesting tangible and intangible features of, and master narratives about,

[4] In Lemke's (1988, p. 30, 32) definition, ITFs are common systems of semantic relations to speak of the same things in the same manner, i.e. "a community's recurrent *saids* and *dones* [...] as well as its semiotic resources for saying and doing"; see also Coccetta, this volume.

the destination will meet this requirement, ultimately bringing in more tourists and business. In the case of Nova Gorica-Gorizia 2025, one such master narrative is subsumed by the adjective "borderless" in the slogan "GO borderless", recalling the need for civilized societies to build bridges, not walls, between neighbouring communities. This master narrative tells a tale of, and (re-)establishes an emotional bond between, the two cities, its citizens and the values subsumed by their shared historical heritage, despite different political, economic and institutional systems, while reconciling tradition and innovation, past and future.

As Jaworski and Thurlow (2010, p. 256) effectively point out, "tourism is a past master at recontextualization, lifting the everyday into the realm of the fantastical, transforming the banal into the exotic, and converting use-value into exchange-value". A brand, including a town or city, cannot be restricted to offering goods and services, but must result from the strategic harmonization of a number of factors – including those pertaining to its economic, political and media systems – and must be enriched by emotional values represented symbolically, both verbally and visually, so as to project a multi-faceted, yet distinctive and consistent image:

> The ultimate goods purchased by tourists during their travels are images, lifestyles, memories, and their narrative enactments. Material goods such as souvenirs and other artefacts, not unlike snippets of language formulae brought back from foreign trips, are themselves (re-)packaged and promoted as useful props in the enactment of these performances, and they serve as an extension of the tourist gaze. (Jaworski, Thurlow 2010, p. 257)

In this process of recontextualization and re-enactment of the tourist performance (Jaworski, Thurlow 2014), it is vital to recall, however cursorily, the fundamental distinction between *space*, a physical entity combining mobility and trajectories, and *place*, a philosophical entity 'constructed' through living, telling and inhabiting (Tuan 1979; Qualizza 2017, p. 69):

> As location, place is one unit among other units to which it is linked by a circulation net; the analysis of location is subsumed under the geographer's concept and analysis of space. Place, however, has more substance than the word location suggests: it is a unique entity, a 'special ensemble' (Lukermann, 1964, p. 70); it has a history and meaning. Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning. (Tuan 1979, p. 387)

Thus, *place branding* is to be construed in contingent and dynamic terms – i.e., in a constant, productive dialogue with the historical and sociocultural context a place is associated with and not simply in terms of its perceived

image –, as well as in strategic terms – i.e., in its potential to construct competitive identity (Anholt 2007) and to act as a countermeasure to massive globalization processes (see also Vasta 2020, pp. 7-8) by mediating between the global and the local (E.M. Bruner 2005, p. 12). Borrowing Richards' words (2024, p. 27, *emphasis added*),

> Cities use curation to highlight particular "urban scenes" and develop "experiencescapes", adding new meanings to places. [...] Following the principles of stylistic innovation, [...] curators do not produce experiences, but frame and disseminate them through *creative sensing, stylistic orchestration and synchronization of producers and consumers*.

It is precisely the "multimodal orchestration" (Kress 2010; Bezemer, Kress 2016; see Footnote 5) of unique stories and extraordinary experiences that constitutes the main focus of this volume, as the following Sections illustrate.

## 2. The return of 'places'

### 2.1 *Multimodal/multisensorial practices and transmedia storytelling*

According to Thurlow and Jaworski (2011, p. 286),

> Language scholars and academics working in the interdisciplinary field of critical tourism studies have often had to justify their scholarly interests to those unable to see beyond their own personal experience of tourism as a frivolous and recreational activity.

The same authors (Jaworski, Thurlow 2010, p. 255) advocate for "a sociolinguistics or discourse analysis that is better able to account for the hybrid, the trans-local, the spectacular, the idiosyncratic, the creative, and the multimodal": against this backdrop, the contributions collected in this volume, inspired by the above-mentioned international conference on multimodal promotional strategies in place and cultural heritage branding, bring together cultural tourism studies, multimodal analyses of individual case studies and corpus-driven studies, critical analyses and educational applications of integrated semiotic modes, also embracing extended reality, virtual reality and augmented reality technologies. The object of investigation is a range of promotional digital genres (such as thematic videos, institutional websites, virtual maps and tours, and the like) constructing, construing and constituting the dialectic relationship between culture, place and text (Fairclough 1995, 2006).

This is all the more relevant in a material world where "every human action is a process of selection among many semiotic systems which are

always in a kind of dialectal dialogicality with each other" (Scollon, Scollon 2003, p. xii) and where new communication technologies have an ever-increasing impact on social interactions and discourses themselves (Scollon, Le Vine 2004): not only is all discourse multimodal (e.g. Kress, van Leeuwen [1996] 2021; Kress 2010), but multimodal meaning-making (and, more specifically, "multimodal orchestration"[5]) is particularly important for the critical discourse analysis of multisensorial experiences (van Leeuwen 2004, pp. 15-17). The latter include those related to tourism-oriented experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999, 2010, 2011), where experience is divided into 5 dimensions: sensory experience, emotional experience, action experience, thinking experience and associative experience. In Schmitt's view (2010, p. 71), "ordinary experiences occur as part of everyday life; they are routine and result, to a degree, from passive stimulation. Extraordinary experiences are more active, intense, and stylized" and "experience providers", such as visual identity, communication, product presence, web sites, and service, are used to create different types of customer experiences.[6]

In these respects, it is also useful to recall Bitner's (1992) notion of *servicescape* – or "how the built environment (i.e., the manmade, physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment) […] affects both consumers and employees in service organizations" (Bitner 1992, p. 58) and is used as a tangible organizational resource. In describing the dimensions of the servicescape, Bitner notes that

> A complex mix of environmental features constitute the servicescape and influence internal responses and behaviors. Specifically, the dimensions of the physical surroundings include all of the objective physical factors that can be controlled [...] to enhance (or constrain) employee and customer actions. Those factors include an endless list of possibilities, such as lighting, color, signage, textures, quality of materials, style of furnishings, layout, wall decor, temperature, and so on (Bitner 1992, p. 65)

– all elements which multimodal and multisensorial communicative practices and analyses take into due account and which, in the context of providing intangible services like that of a journey or cultural trip, concur with

[5] By "multimodal orchestration", Kress (2010, p. 162) defines "the process of *assembling/organizing/designing* a plurality of signs into a particular configuration to form a coherent arrangement", with an emphasis on the 'semiotic harmony' of the resultant *ensemble*, and their 'aptness' to "meet the rhetor's [or text organizer's] interests. [...] *Orchestrations* and the resultant *ensembles* can be organized in *space* and they can be organized in *time*, in *sequence*, in *process*, in *motion*". See also Bezemer and Kress (2016, p. 28 *et passim, emphasis original*).

[6] For a review of the literature on experiential marketing, see Tian (2022). For its applications to tourism-related marketing, see, e.g., Rather (2020).

storytelling to form *experiencescapes* (Mei *et al.* 2020), which favour consumer engagement.

The potential for storytelling through the convergence of different media and multisensorial practices requires some reflection on the elusive notion of *transmedia storytelling* (see Jenkins 2003, 2006)[7] in relation to those of *transmedia traversals* and *transmedia identities* (Lemke 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2013, 2014, 2023): first of all, in Gambarato's view, transmedia storytelling refers to

> integrated media experiences that occur amongst a variety of platforms. A transmedia narrative tells altogether *one big pervasive story*, attracting audience engagement. It is not about offering the same content in different media platforms, but it is the *worldbuilding experience*, unfolding content and generating the possibilities for the story to *evolve with new and pertinent content*. (Gambarato 2013, p. 82, *emphasis added*)

In this perspective, the reader will find more than one chapter in this volume viewing *place branding* in terms of mythical and/or "remediated" (Bolter, Grusin 1999; Iedema 2003) narratives and multimodal/multisensorial meaning-making practices that re-cast, re-invent and re-actualize stories relating reality to the world of imagination and vice-versa, enacting in discourse Lemke's crucial notion of *traversal:*

> The defining characteristic of a traversal is that it makes meaning across boundaries: between media, genres, sites, institutions, contexts. It may and usually does extend across multiple timescales as well: minutes, hours, days, years. (Lemke 2013, p. 16)

– which entails that

> The media are shaping us, and we are determining what shapes the media must take to do so. Agency here is distributed over vast networks of producers, marketers, consumer/interpreters, and media themselves. As in any such complex dynamical system, new qualitative phenomena are emergent, whether they are new social identities, new cultural imaginative-worlds, or new marketing strategies such as transmedia franchises. (Lemke 2013, p. 24)

Against such a complex kaleidoscope, the interdisciplinary perspective adopted in this volume is a springboard for further research that takes up

[7] See also: Andò and Leonzi 2014; Ciancia (2015, p. 131) on "the rising importance of multi-channel structures that completely change the role of the audience, allowing the development of widespread creativity through the collaborative creation and the collective consumption of narrative worlds"; Gambarato (2013) for interesting insights into the differences between *transmedia storytelling*, *cross-media* and *multimedia*.

Jaworski and Thurlow's above-mentioned call for a paradigmatic shift in discourse analysis.

## 2.2 *Sustainability-related issues*

The integration of multimodal promotional strategies in cultural heritage branding aligns closely with the principles of sustainability – a contested concept (Manzella 2023, p. 101) that must be framed positively through a balanced approach to economic growth, environmental preservation, and social equity. In this context, numerous informative and educational resources – often multimodal in nature – target non-expert citizens, particularly younger generations, and have been employed to sensitize them to global challenges such as environmental sustainability (Zollo 2024, p. 185). By utilizing diverse communication platforms, including digital media, interactive technologies, and traditional outreach methods, these strategies enhance the visibility and accessibility of cultural and historical destinations. Hypertexts and interactive websites, for example, rely on a broad spectrum of multimodal resources to offer potential tourists an immersive experience of a country and its culture (Turra 2020, p. 256).

Moreover, a strong emphasis on the authentic representation of local traditions in branding fosters feelings of belonging and community involvement. The dissemination and celebration of local traditions are linked to social sustainability, as they can enhance local pride and attachment to place (Irimiás *et al.* 2024, p. 2). Arguably, sustainable tourism ensures the development of local communities and natural environments, while promoting human welfare and public participation in decision-making (Adamus-Matuszyńska *et al.* 2021, p. 2). This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership among local populations, strengthening social cohesion and empowering communities to act as stewards of their cultural heritage. Sustainable branding practices also encourage visitors to respect local customs and reduce activities that may degrade the physical or cultural environment of heritage sites.

Crucially, multimodal promotional strategies can embed sustainable development goals into the broader master narrative of cultural heritage conservation, which must also address the need to re-scale urban narratives in response to the rise of unprecedented global economies and the increasing competition between cities to attract residents, investments, and tourists (Paganoni 2015, p. 102). Highlighting the importance of conservation, responsible tourism, and intergenerational equity resonates with contemporary audiences, who are increasingly conscious of their environmental impact. By aligning cultural promotion with these global values, these strategies help to foster a tourism model that prioritizes long-

term conservation over short-term exploitation. Thus, the intersection of multimodal promotional strategies and cultural heritage branding offers a powerful framework for achieving sustainability by harmonizing cultural heritage conservation, community empowerment, and ecological responsibility.

## 3. Multimodal Narratives: Exploring Place, Space, and Identity in the Digital Age

In an era characterised by rapid globalization and escalating competition among urban centres, the need to preserve cultural diversity while fostering innovation has never been more pressing. Cities, both large and small, are confronted with complex challenges: maintaining a unique, recognizable identity, attracting investment, and promoting community engagement within a landscape increasingly shaped by global trends. This collection of studies examines the transformative potential of creativity, multimodal technologies, and inclusive practices in addressing these challenges, offering a rich tapestry of insights into the evolving interplay of place, space, and identity.

Central to this exploration is the redefinition of 'place' and 'space' in the digital age, which encompasses both physical and virtual environments as dynamic portals connecting the past and present. These spaces, whether represented by a city square, an artefact, or an immersive digital experience, act as systems of information and memory, enabling individuals and communities to navigate their histories while shaping their futures. Alongside this is an unwavering commitment to intercultural dialogue and inclusive practices, which celebrate the value of diversity – individual and collective memories, local traditions, and cultural narratives – ensuring their preservation against the homogenizing pressures of globalization.

Greg Richards sets the tone for this volume with his comprehensive examination of the role of creativity in the urban development of smaller cities. He introduces the "Middleground" framework – a conceptual space where local resources, creative industries, and institutional networks intersect – highlighting how events and cultural initiatives act as vital catalysts for community engagement and economic renewal. Richards positions these initiatives as portals to urban identity, enabling smaller cities to "borrow size" and amplify their presence within global networks. Through insightful case studies from the Netherlands and Luxembourg, he illustrates how cross-border collaborations create synergies that preserve diversity while positioning smaller cities as dynamic contributors to broader urban development. His analysis underscores the importance of collaborative

leadership in fostering shared visions that harness the power of creativity and local heritage.

Francesca Coccetta extends this discussion through her analysis of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) initiative, focusing on its impact on urban identity and cultural narratives. Her multimodal discourse analysis of 60 promotional videos reveals how these media serve as virtual spaces – doorways to a city's past and aspirations. These transmedia representations function not only as marketing tools but also as vehicles for cultural expression, preserving local identity while situating it within a broader European context. Coccetta's findings emphasize the value of storytelling in resisting the homogenizing effects of globalization, offering powerful lessons for urban revitalization and cultural tourism.

Deirdre Kantz and Anthony Baldry explore the intersection of tourism, technology, and marketing through a detailed investigation of wine glossaries and augmented reality (AR) wine labels. These tools, once merely informative, have evolved into immersive storytelling devices that connect consumers to the rich traditions and histories behind wine culture. An AR wine label becomes a portal, enabling individuals to engage with the craftsmanship and cultural narratives embedded within the product. Kantz and Baldry highlight the role of these innovations in fostering deeper consumer engagement and promoting intercultural dialogue, illustrating the broader educational spin-offs of digital marketing practices.

In a complementary exploration, Anthony Baldry and Davide Taibi focus on the transformative effects of augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI) in tourism and education. Their work centres on the development of structured pathways in serious games, which enable users to virtually explore cultural and historical sites. These pathways, accessed through digital interfaces such as icons on buildings or AR markers, create immersive experiences that bridge the past and present, enriching the understanding of heritage. Their approach emphasizes collaboration, encouraging educators, students, and tourists to engage with cultural narratives in ways that sustain shared memory and community ownership.

Cristina Arizzi's analysis offers illuminating insights into the case study of the Museum of the Sea (MUMA) in Milazzo, Sicily, where storytelling and digital technologies converge to address pressing ecological challenges. Triggered by the tragic story of Siso, a sperm whale whose death due to marine pollution became a symbol of environmental degradation, MUMA transforms the traditional museum model into an ecomuseum. Through virtual and augmented reality experiences, MUMA engages visitors, particularly children, in interactive journeys that promote ecological consciousness and marine conservation. Arizzi positions the museum as a portal connecting visitors to both local traditions and global environmental

concerns, demonstrating how grassroots initiatives can foster sustainability and redefine cultural tourism.

Antonina Dattolo and Elena Rocco expand the discussion of inclusivity through their innovative *Talking Maps* project, which reimagines cultural heritage as a participatory and accessible experience. These multimodal maps serve as virtual spaces that bring cultural narratives to life for diverse audiences, including individuals with cognitive or linguistic impairments. By engaging communities in the storytelling process, the project ensures that local traditions are preserved and celebrated, promoting intercultural dialogue and shared ownership of heritage. Dattolo and Rocco's work exemplifies the transformative power of inclusive design in preserving diversity while making cultural heritage accessible to all.

Elisa Perego and Piergiorgio Trevisan highlight the role of audio description (AD) as both a tool for accessibility and a resource for education. By transforming paintings, films, and other visual media into richly descriptive narratives, AD opens a portal for visually impaired individuals to experience cultural artefacts in meaningful ways. The authors demonstrate how AD can also serve as an innovative pedagogical tool in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, equipping students with linguistic and critical thinking skills while raising awareness on the accessibility issue. This dual focus on inclusivity and education underscores the broader societal impact of AD in creating more equitable cultural spaces.

Finally, Pietro Manzella investigates the role of extended reality (XR) technologies in promoting sustainable tourism, focusing on the *GO GREEN* project in Italy's Gorizia province. Through immersive digital experiences, such as narrative itineraries facilitated by XR headsets and goggles, the project connects audiences to the Collio region's cultural, historical, and natural heritage. Manzella's analysis highlights the significance of multimodal communication in fostering sustainability narratives and engaging younger audiences. By positioning youth as innovators and active participants, the project demonstrates how virtual spaces can drive environmental education and intercultural dialogue, creating new pathways for sustainable tourism.

Together, the contributions in this volume illuminate how creativity, technology, and inclusivity can redefine the ways people engage with urban spaces, cultural heritage, and educational practices. These works underscore the importance of bridging the past and present, preserving diversity, and fostering collaboration to navigate the challenges of globalization. By presenting cutting-edge research and real-world applications, this collection is intended as a resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners striving to create a more inclusive, sustainable, and culturally vibrant future.

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# SMALL CITIES: DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGE THROUGH CREATIVITY

GREG RICHARDS

**Abstract** – With growing urban competition, smaller cities in particular face challenges in 'putting themselves on the map'. Richards and Duif (2019) suggest that smaller places can succeed if they collaborate rather than compete, enabling them to 'borrow size' to stimulate development. By collaborating, small cities also have opportunities to 'create size' through joint actions. This chapter focusses on the role of events in generating creative development powered by the 'Middleground' of the creative city, and highlights the effects of networking across regional and international borders. A review of traditional creative industries, creative class and creative city approaches leads to an integrative creative development model based on the work of Sacco et al. (2014) and the placemaking perspective of Richards (2020). This model analyses the different layers of the creative city proposed by Cohendet et al. (2010), integrating different forms of creative capital and accounting for the dynamic links between actors and institutions. These ideas are applied to cases from the Netherlands and Luxemburg, with a particular focus on cross-border collaboration stimulated through the European Capital of Culture programme.

**Keywords**: creative development; small cities; collaboration; place branding; European capital of culture.

## 1. Introduction

Creative place thinking has been around for some time – usually linked to the creative industries as drivers of urban economic growth, but also incorporating ideas about creative mobilities and creative clusters (Collis *et al.* 2013). Globalisation has created pressure for places to creatively develop their available resources in an effort to remain productive and attractive to internal and external stakeholders. This has also stimulated cities and regions to think about innovation and creativity as means to create distinction and put themselves on the map. In many cases, cities have resorted to place marketing and place branding as tools to distinguish themselves, which as Ivan Torok (2009) has explained is problematic. Very often city brands lack substance and embedding in the local context, and come to look very much the same. The irony is that policy makers in search of good ideas for new development paths

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often end up copying one another through 'policy tourism' (Gonzalez 2011), adding to the serial reproduction of culture.

Small cities have a particular disadvantage in terms of place branding, since they tend to have very similar physical and cultural resources. Europe is full of well-preserved historic towns, with attractive inner-city areas. Tourists often consume these places in similar ways, visiting a church or a castle, taking some photos of an unspoilt cityscape and drinking a coffee at a quaint café before returning to their cars.

There are many small cities..(and).. they are not particularly *interesting* because:

- they lack urbanity
- traditionalism (or backwardness);
- pervasive economic decline
- loss of historic central functions vis a vis bigger cities;
- brain drain, or loss of younger populations;
- ineffective and reflexive modes of governance;
- political obscurantism and regression.

(Grossmann, Mallach 2021, pp. 169-170)

This is problematic, because small cities are becoming increasingly embroiled in place competition. For example, in the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) programme, the average population size of cities hosting the programme has fallen dramatically in recent years (Figure 1).

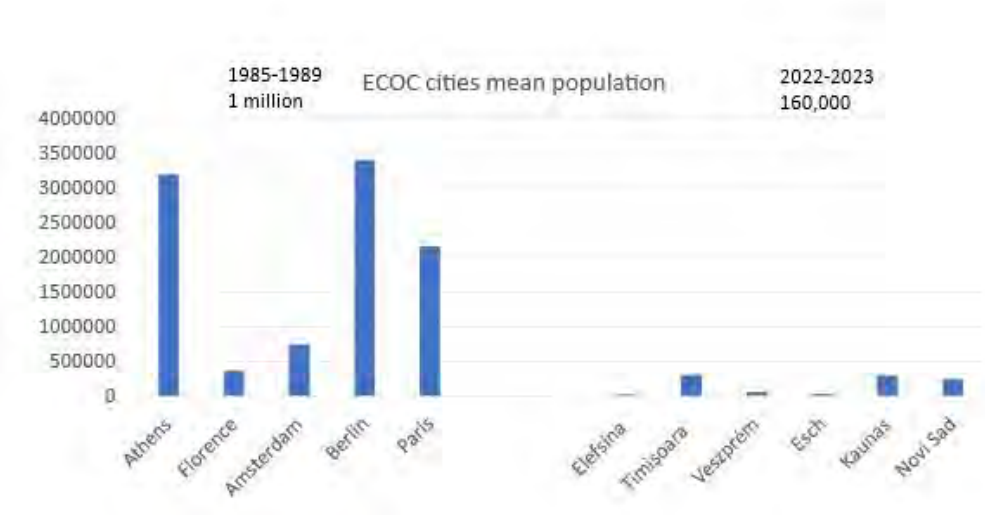


Figure 1
Population sizes of ECOC host cities 1985-1989 and 2022-2023
(source: compilation of national population statistics).

The shrinking size of ECOC cities means:

1) The main priority is for cities to put themselves on the map.

2) Links to the surrounding region become even more important.

3) The development of new cultural facilities provides an engine for cultural development (Richards 2021).

In order to be different and distinctive, small cities need creative approaches. How can they re-invent and re-define themselves in ways that make them more attractive? This chapter considers some of the paths to creative development taken by cities, and how these work in the context of small cities. We then move on to the question of collaboration, looking specifically at the use of events as a tool for bringing cities together, focusing on regional and cross-border collaboration in the European Union. This develops a model of the creative city that considers the elements of creative development and the dynamic roles of actors and institutions in this process.

## 2. Creativity in urban development

### *2.1. The rise of urban creativity*

Creativity has become a widely deployed tool for urban development around the globe, and has been deployed in cities of varying sizes. Creativity in urban development has tended to be conceptualised as a branding tool, as an economic class or as an economic sector. The concepts of the creative city, the creative class and the creative industries are therefore the main approaches to creativity in cities (Boom 2017). Although these ideas are closely linked, because they depend on the application of creativity to economic processes, they are conceptually distinct. The creative city concept developed originally by Bianchini and Landry (1995), starts from the premise that everybody is creative, and therefore whole cities can be creative as well. By promoting creativity through the arts and grass-roots creativity, cities can improve the quality of life of citizens, grow the creative industries and improve their positioning.

> A Creative City came to be known as a model for cities that were able to mobilize a set of people and set the right conditions to bring about a more innovative and holistic approach to urban planning (van Boom 2017, p. 359).

Florida's (2002) creative class concept is based on a narrower idea of certain groups of people being creative. The creative class comprises people in occupations such as IT, design and architecture, who arguably account for

around a third of the total workforce in developed economies. This approach has been criticised as being elitist, suggesting that people outside these groups are somehow not creative. However, studies have indicated that the economic argument made by Florida, that jobs increasingly follow people, may have a kern of truth (Rutten, Gelissen 2008).

The creative industries concept is the most widespread of the three models, perhaps because it is more easily recognisable for policymakers. As van Boom (2017, p. 359) notes: "the creative industries were hailed as those sectors that would be the driving forces behind a new, post-industrial, symbolic economy." The adoption of a creative industries policy by the Department of National Heritage in the UK in the late 1990s is widely seen as the starting point for such policies. Although the stimulation of creativity in the UK dates to specific programmes of the Greater London Council in the 1980s, which also spawned the creative cities concept, the creative industries model was different because it was specifically designed to avoid association with 'culture'. The choice of the term 'creative industries 'over 'cultural industries' was a deliberate political attempt to disassociate these industries from the subsidized arts discourse, and relate them to the spheres of digitalization, innovation and 'the knowledge economy' (van Boom 2017). The creative industries concepts fitted well with the political climate in the UK, where the promotion of private enterprise fitted the idea that the creative industries were entrepreneurial in contrast to the subsidized arts and cultural sectors.

The creative industries approach often involved policies designed to stimulate and support localized cultural production and consumption (Pratt 2008), such as cultural-creative clusters (Mommaas 2004) and/or industrial districts (Santagata *et al.* 2007). The creative industries approach therefore tended to develop links between creativity and specific areas of the city – signalling the start of a spatial turn in thinking about creative development. The emphasis on place continued with the idea of 'urban success', which according to Florida (2002), is brought about by the existence of creative human capital (*talent*) in place.

These three different approaches to creativity in development are differentiated in terms of the focus of creativity and the desired outcomes. The creative city approach sees everybody as creative, but produces a lack of focus for policymakers. The creative industries tend to emphasise supply side policies, but they are relatively easy to understand for policymakers. The creative class represents a 'new' approach in which jobs follow creative people, not the other way round. But it centres on a specific group of people and specific hot spots in the city.

Each of these models tends to frame the city as a static backdrop for creativity. People are attracted to the 'buzz' of the city, they interact in the city centre to generate information spillovers, stimulating new ideas and

innovation. The analyses of these issues are also derived from a single disciplinary standpoint – most often in terms of economics. There has been increasing attention for soft factors of location, and a move towards economic geography. Florida's (2002) main contribution was to turn to traditional discourse about firm location on its head – jobs no longer attract people, but (creative) people attract jobs. Although this argument has been severely criticised for conceptualising those in creative occupations as a class, and for a rather loose classification of creative jobs, the general idea that the presence of the creative class is linked to high levels of economic growth seems to stand up to empirical testing (Rutten, Gelissen, 2008). Unfortunately, Florida's basically circular argument that creative people attract other creative people does not provide any mechanism for creative development processes.

Identifying these weaknesses with these previous models of creative development, Sacco and Blessi (2007) argued for a more integrated approach to the study of creative regions, based on a combination of models. By combining different approaches they attempted to overcome characteristic failings of culture-led development: instrumentalism, over-engineering and parochialism (Sacco *et al.* 2014). Sacco and Blessi (2007) argue that providing opportunity is about more than attracting jobs or coffee bars. The emphasis needs to be on capacity building as well as simply providing work. They developed a model combining economic clustering (basic growth factors, as outlined by Porter 1980) with increased attractiveness (as in the creative class approach of Florida 2002) and capacity building (following Sen 1999).

Sacco and Blessi's model is useful for identifying the endogenous and exogenous resources that can be used to creatively develop places and stimulate the creative industries. These resources fall into five main areas: Quality, Development, Attraction, Sociality and Networking (Richards, Duif 2019) further refine these into three main areas:

1) people, talent and socialities;

2) networks that link people and resources together; and

3) processes of resource accumulation and use: governance, investment, capacity building, and attraction.

Sacco and Blessi's (2007) work provides a good picture of the *What*, but we need more to understand the process of successful placemaking – the *How*. As Scott (2010) remarked: "there can be no mechanical initiation of creative energy at any given place simply by bringing together different elements …. in the expectation that the requisite synergies will then spontaneously spring forth" (Scott 2010, p. 127). The important thing is to understand how specific places can trigger the transformation of available resources into creative development outcomes.

Richards (2020) proposes a model that builds on the analysis of Sacco and Blessi. The model makes it clear that there is a strong relationship between creativity and place. The resources of a place form the raw materials that can be given meaning for the different actors in the creative system. The creative industries play an important role in this meaning generating process, and in turn can derive meaning from being located in a particular place.

Scott (2010) comments on the way in which meaning develops around particular places: "the individuals who compose each community typically internalize elements of their daily environment and reflect these back in more or less socially conditioned creative efforts" (Scott 2010, p. 119) This provides the embedded aspect of creativity in place. But "to be socially meaningful," Scott argues, "the products of creative work must eventually be recognizable as such by others" (Scott 2010, p. 119). So places of creative production also need to be linked to global networks that can provide the necessary external recognition. The local and global networks of the creative industries link both individual creatives through face-to-face encounters (local buzz) as well as links to the wider social milieu (Montouri 2011) that supports creative and innovative processes. Therefore, according to Scott (2010, p. 121)

> It follows immediately that geography is implicated in these matters, for all social relationships are necessarily characterized by extension in space. Indeed, on further examination, the geographic dimension turns out to be extraordinarily potent as a medium of variation in creative energies.

Therefore there is a need "to pay very special attention to the cultural resonances of place" ….. and the "localized reputation and authenticity effects" of place (Scott 2010, p. 122). Creativity, embedded in place, therefore has important geographical and historical dimensions usually overlooked in analyses of the creative industries or the creative city. Over time, particular places become associated with specific forms of creativity and communities of practice, such as cinema in Los Angeles or design and fashion in Milan. These places are linked by networks of creative people, ideas and resources, that travel between the different hubs and nodes of the network. In fact, the definition of the creative industries developed by Potts, Cunningham, Hartley and Ormerod (2008) sees them as a 'social network market' in which value is created through social contacts and the exchange of information. Particular 'hubs' in the network become places that people have to travel through in order to gather knowledge and the associated prestige of 'being there' (Richards, Colombo 2017). A "Turn to the spatiality of creativity" can be noted (Meusburger 2009) because "Place matters, because a stimulating environment and a talented individual must come together and interact before a creative process can occur" (Meusburger 2009 p. 98).

The creative industries therefore rely heavily on a system of buzz and pipelines that generate knowledge overspill, global recognition and local embedding. Scott (2010) refers to the localized synergies generated within clusters of creatives in cities, supporting a spatially organized system of interacting phenomena, which Scott calls the 'urban creative field'. One of the problems of the spatial view of the city taken by Scott is that he tends to focus on particular clusters, both in the sense of creative industrial agglomerations and the sedimented feel of authenticity that accrues to these places as concentrations of urban life.

These places are also largely linked to the centres of large cities, which arguably concentrate opportunities for face-to-face contacts with other creatives, and therefore knowledge spillovers. Scott also argues that this occurs most often "among individuals in the upper echelons of the managerial and creative hierarchy" (Scott 2010 p. 122). This reveals a relatively stratified model of the creative industries and the creative city, which provides an echo of Florida's creative class.

## *2.2 A dynamic model of creative city development*

To develop a more open model of the creative city and to understand more about the role of the creative industries, we can look to Cohendet, Grandadam and Simon's (2010) model of the creative city, which recognises three layers of Upperground, Middleground and Underground. The Upperground harbours the elite cultural institutions, including museums, linked to the global 'space of flows'. The Underground represents the dense fabric of small cultural enterprises that generate cultural products and experiences which support the local buzz in the 'space of places'. The Middleground links the Uppergound with the Underground, most importantly through events and programmes that bring the small players in the Underground to the attention of the gatekeepers of the Upperground. While the traditional cultural institutions tend to dominate the Upperground, the creative industries are particularly important in the Middleground. If we look at cities like Barcelona, for example, creative industries mapping underlines the key linking role of cultural and creative events and creative spaces in the city (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022).

Looking at the relationship between the city and the creative industries in this way, we move beyond Allen Scott's (2010, p. 121) early characterisation of the "city as canvas". Far more than providing a context or location for creative activity, cities also act systematically to support creativity by bringing together a complex range of actors and institutions. By considering the different layers of this creative ecosystem, we can give more depth and dynamism to the creative city concept, and the mechanisms of creative development become more embedded and visible (Figure 2).

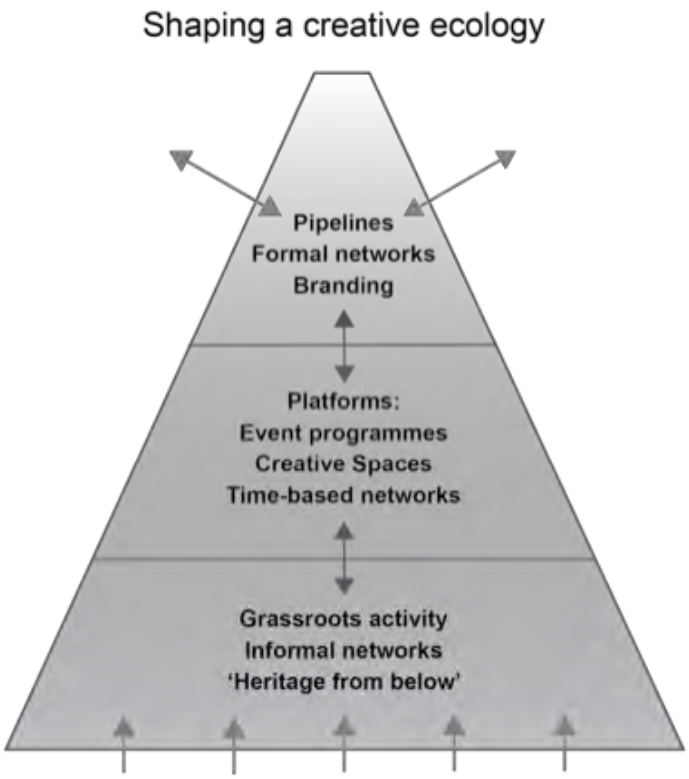


Figure 2
A creative ecology model of the creative city.

Having developed a three-dimensional context for creative development, we also have to address the question of how creative development processes are initiated. This is one of the main issues dealt with in the book *Small Cities with Big Dreams* (Richards, Duif 2019), which analyses how smaller places can compete effectively in the global economy. This in turn builds on earlier work on the creative city and the creative industries, as well as contributions from scholars such as Sacco and Blessi (2007), Bærenholdt (2017), Harrison and Tatar (2008) and Montuori (2011).

Using a triangular model of placemaking, Richards (2020) develops an analysis of creative placemaking as a dynamic relationship between three elements: resources, meaning and creativity. He conceptualises place resources in terms of a series of tangible and intangible elements, following Sacco and Blessi (2007), which also include endogenous and exogenous resources. Resources are not just what you have or own, but what you can claim in some way. The element of creativity might seem at first to refer to the creative class or the creative industries, but here it refers to the application of creativity in content creation and governance. This is also where important capacity building implications can be found, pointing to the need to nurture endogenous

creativity as well as attract creatives from outside. The trigger for growth is provided by giving meaning to resources through creative process, which relies on the three elements of meaning identified by Harrison and Tatar (2008).

They argue that meaning making involves connecting particular loci, events and people. Events are particularly important, because they provide temporal triggers for development processes and the sense of urgency needed to synchronise policy agendas. In many cities and regions, therefore, event programmes have provided an important catalyst for development, as the European Capital of Culture programme has demonstrated in many cities (Richards, Palmer 2010). The opening of major cultural and creative institutions can also constitute important events in the life of the city, as the opening of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in 1997 illustrates (Richards 2010). Urban development processes can provide the creative spaces that are vital for supporting cultural and creative events (Richards, Wilson 2006).

The creative industries also tend to play an important role in these processes, because they can harness the value of tangible and intangible resources to create meaning, bringing people together at particular times in specific places to stimulate exchange and interaction. This combination of events and spaces underpins the middle ground of the creative city, which links the creativity of the Underground to the institutions of the Upperground.

In this way, qualities of place have also become a major input to the creative industries. Just as cities support the creative industries through their people, places and institutions, so the creative industries in turn support the city, generating symbolic capital and confirming authenticity. The idea of the creative city as brand is enshrined in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities). Member cities develop their music scenes, their audio-visual industries and tangible and intangible heritage, constructing themselves as festival cities, attracting film induced tourism, and media attention. For example, the city of Montreal has a wide-ranging cultural policy that includes supporting a number of key creative industries, including circus arts, film and television production and design. These industries are seen as forming part of a creative ecology that strengthens the image of the city and in particular underlines its unique role as the largest French-speaking city in North America (Richards, Marques 2018). There is also increasing evidence of creative events being used as an engine for placemaking (de Brito, Richards 2017). The UNESCO creative cities programme is also being used to support a broad range of place-based creative programmes related to design, literature, music and gastronomy. This adds to a general trend to brand cities as 'music cities' or 'festival cities' (Ballico, Watson 2020; Gold, Gold 2021), and a general process of 'curation' of places (Richards 2024).

An important debate in the midst of this rising tide of creative development is whether development benefits can extend beyond the creative

class or the Middleground of the creative city. In Toronto, for example, the growth of the creative class has been positioned as a stimulus for inner city development. One of the measures used for the success of these creative clusters is the rise in property prices, which are much higher than in other areas of the city. However, this can also be read as a sign of gentrification, which is linked to negative externalities such as the displacement of the previous residential population, increasing prices and falling diversity. As Hracs (2007, p. 35) remarks:

> While the creation of a 'bohemian wonderland' and tourist village benefits real estate developers, popular artists, owners of the trendy boutiques and the area's tax base, there have been negative ramifications for the neighbourhood's disadvantaged groups.

One of the challenges in analysing the effects of creative development is the lack of longitudinal data. At best, correlations are made between the numbers of people in the creative class or the creative industries and economic growth. But this provides a limited picture of the effects of creative development, usually over a relatively short period of time. To address this problem, this chapter examines a longitudinal case study of creative industries-based placemaking development.

## 3. Creative placemaking in Den Bosch

The city of 's-Hertogenbosch (or Den Bosch for short) in the Netherlands has over the past 15 years developed a series of programmes designed to improve the quality of life and stimulate the growth of the cultural and creative industries. The centrepiece of this development was the Bosch 500 programme, based on the life and works of the famous painter Hieronymus Bosch. The programme celebrated the 500$^{th}$ anniversary of Bosch's death in 2016, bringing Bosch's work to life through contemporary creativity in the fields of art, film, music, games, design and events (Marques, Richards 2014).

Richards (2020) argues that the Bosch 500 programme represents a good example of a placemaking initiative based on creativity. The key challenge of the programme was that the city did not possess any of Bosch's paintings. These are spread over museums in different countries around the world. The city therefore needed to develop a strategy to obtain a significant number of Bosch's 25 surviving paintings to be able to stage a major exhibition of his work in 2016. The solution was very creative – the city funded a Bosch Research and Restoration Project, which would use the latest techniques to examine Bosch's works and increase the body of knowledge related to his art.

The city offered to research and restore the paintings held by other museums for free. Of course, there was a catch: the museums had to agree to the works being featured in the Bosch retrospective in 2016. This tactic was very successful: eventually 17 of the 25 surviving paintings were secured from museums in 10 countries around the world. The scale of the Bosch exhibition in 2016, combined with the nostalgia of the painting returning to the place they were made 500 years ago, generated an amazing amount of attention. Coverage in national and international media was estimated to be worth €50 million. Over 421,000 visits were made to the exhibition – in a museum that previously attracted less than 200,000 a year.

The Visions of a Genius exhibition was among the top 10 old masters shows in 2016 (Richards, Duif 2019). It put the small city of Den Bosch (pop. 150,000) on the global map. The EU Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor showed that Den Bosch had outperformed all other Dutch cities (including the capital Amsterdam) in terms of 'cultural vibrancy' in 2016. The Bosch programme included a wide range of events and activities that went far beyond the work of Bosch himself, and included other cities and regions and other artforms and sectors of the creative industries. This served several purposes: image improvement, building collaboration, developing social cohesion and stimulating tourism development.

*Visitor experience on Tripadvisor (2016)*

> Visited the Noordbrants Museum to see the Hieronymus Bosch Exhibition celebrating his 500th anniversary. This is a delightful little museum, probably worth visiting at anytime. But the main attraction for this visit was the outstanding Bosch exhibition. For his 500th anniversary, the museum has managed to get together most of the known Bosch paintings and a lot of his drawings. Unfortunately, there were two major works from the Prado missing, but these were assessed as being too fragile to transport. The paintings were well explained by the audiotour and the exhibition guide - assuming that anyone can fully explain all of Bosch's symbology! I am unlikely to see such a comprehensive exhibition of Bosch's work in my lifetime.

One of the important drivers of the Bosch 500 programme was the creative industries. There were many events related to creative talent, video games, gastronomy, music, TV and cinema, design and architecture. This diversity was reflected in the logo of the programme, developed by Dutch design studio Kluif. Based on the only surviving image of Bosch's face, the logo was produced in several versions that reflected the different creative industries present in the programme.

### *3.1 Creative events*

The Middleground of the creative city uses events and creative spaces to link the Upperground and the Underground together. The Bosch 500 programme used a series of creative events to provide a platform for creative actors and institutions to generate knowledge spillovers and engage different publics. The Bosch Young Talent Show (BYTS) was a ten-day, international art event for young, promising art students. Recently graduated artists from the Bosch cities Network (’s-Hertogenbosch, Berlin, Bruges, Brussels, Frankfurt, Ghent, Lisbon, London, Madrid, New Haven, New York, Paris, Rotterdam, Venice, Vienna & Washington) displayed their work in ’s-Hertogenbosch. The 40 artists were asked to make a cutting-edge selection of their latest work to produce a view of the contemporary art scene.

A social networked view of creativity was developed through the ‘Bosch Parade’ event, which invited local residents and cultural and sporting groups to devise Bosch artworks to traverse the river encircling the city centre. These phantasmagorical floating contraptions enchanted residents and tourists alike, and the event later became a regular part of the city’s calendar. The Bosch Parade brought voluntary, sporting and cultural organizations together in ‘s-Hertogenbosch, increasing social cohesion as well as generating attention for these groups. This in turn led to a boost in participation in voluntary work in the city.

The Bosch Dinner was a cooking competition that pitted the different neighbourhoods of the city against one another. This contest, based loosely on the Palio horseraces between city districts in Siena, was held on the market square in the city centre. It proved to be a low-threshold event for local residents, who turned up to cheer on their neighbourhood and to enjoy the food together after the contest.

Another creative update of the Bosch legacy was developed through the Bosch Art Game (2014). The winning entry was a visual novel inspired by the works of Bosch by the Italian game designers We Are Müesli. In the city itself, the Garden of Earthly Delights game on the Bosch app allowed children and adults to hunt Bosch’s creations in the city centre. Many of the figures from Bosch’s most famous painting appeared in three-dimensional form in the city, partly making up for the fact that Bosch’s most famous painting was missing from the Visions of a Genius exhibition. The same painting was updated by 15 international artists using a variety of media including artificial intelligence, sound art, digital animation, painting, sculpture and installation, resulting in a diverse range of eye-catching artworks.

In terms of merchandising the programme organisers also developed strong links with the creative sector. They formed a partnership with the design

company FatBoy to produce a range of contemporary objects related to Bosch and his work. They commissioned ceramics, which were used in a promotion developed with local restaurants. Peter Greenaway was invited to make a film, in which "Bosch prophesies the events of 1492, the start of the modern world."

> In 1491 Joris van Halewijn, pander [*sic*] to the Burgundian nobility, hiding his visual identity, commissions the Dutch painter Bosch to paint a triptych of the Temptations of St Anthony. Bosch's assistant Clem, and Bosch's wife Aleyt warn him of the danger of the commission, but Bosch, fearless, curious, and well paid, starts to paint... Here there is a mixture of historical figures - Bosch, his wife Aleyt, Joris van Halewijn, Ferdinand I of Aragon, Isabella of Castile, Mad Joan and Christopher Columbus, with a series of fictional figures taken from the paintings. The characters roll and intermix together, to create a triptych of their own. (ImDB).

Although the Grenaway film never materialised, the director did appear in the documentary "The Curious World of Hieronymus Bosch", a documentary based around the Visions of a Genius exhibition.

### *3.2 Creative places*

The Hieronymus Bosch programme also helped to strengthen the development of new creative spaces in the city. These included the the VerkadeFabriek (a former sweet factory) and the Tramkade (site of a former tram depot and cattle feed factory). The municipality, now the owner of the complex, has given the site over to creative enterprises for 10 years to stimulate placemaking processes. The site provides restaurants, bars entertainment, co-working spaces, a social design enterprise and unusual accommodation options, including sleeping in a crane cabin. The feasibility of developing an immersive experience in the Tramkade is currently being examined by a group of creative entrepreneurs. They will work in collaboration with the Noordbrabants Museum to develop accessible experiences based on the work of painters such as Van Gogh and Bosch. This will make use of the knowledge and content developed through the Bosch Research and Conservation Project, as well as the Van Gogh animated film *Loving Vincent*. In this animation, every frame of the film was hand painted in oil by 124 artists, who created more than 65,000 paintings to recount the life and mysterious death of the painter. Seventy of the pictures painted for the film featured in an exhibition at the Noordbrabants Museum in 2017. The St. Joost School of Art & Design has also found a home in the former sorting office of Dutch Post, and Avans has plans to develop this further into a creative nursery.

Bosch himself has provided the inspiration for the development of his residence on the marketplace in Den Bosch. In this house visitors can "climb

the same stairs used by Hieronymus Bosch" 500 years ago. The house, which opened to the public in 2022, provides an overview of the life of Bosch and his time through interactive displays, archaeological finds from the restoration and contemporary art inspired by Bosch.

### *3.3 Building a legacy*

Most research on the creative industries focuses on particular sectors, spaces or moments in time. It is therefore difficult to establish the longer-term effects of creative development programmes on cities. In the case of Den Bosch a longitudinal body of evidence was collected during the development process, although data collection by the event organisers, as in many other cases, stopped once the programme ended. However, by piecing together different data sources a picture of the post-programme legacy can be constructed.

Richards (2020) identifies key elements of the Bosch500 legacy, including different types of public value generated by the programme, in terms of intrinsic, extrinsic and institutional value (Table 1).

| | |
|---|---|
| *Intrinsic value* | Bosch positioned as a figurehead for the city |
| | Increased quality of life and cultural vibrancy |
| *Extrinsic value* | Substantial growth in tourism, also post-2016 |
| | Long-term growth in business activity |
| *Institutional value* | Greater confidence for the museums and business networks |
| | Increased (inter)national contacts |
| | Increased store of Bosch content |
| | Shifting value agenda in events from instrumental towards intrinsic and institutional value. |
| | Longer term legacy for the creative industries. |
| | New networks, often based on creative contacts |

Table 1
Table 1: Creative legacies of the Bosch500 Programme.

For example, the statistics department of the city of Den Bosch provided a raft of indicators to show that the city benefitted in many ways from the Bosch500 programme. These included a substantial growth in tourism and event visits, increased business activity and a reduction in empty premises, and plans for 400-450 new hotel rooms, or a 60% increase on previous capacity (Richards 2020). This significant legacy for the Bosch 500 programme goes far beyond the immediate economic and tourism impacts of 2016. A major example of this is the developing programme of the Noordbrabants Museum, which was home

to the Visions of a Genius exhibition. The increased institutional capacity generated by this event raised the status of the museum in the eyes of policymakers, sponsors and the public. This enabled the museum to develop its work with Bosch into links with Van Gogh and other artists. The success of the Bosch500 programme helped the museum to attract more sponsorship, which also facilitated the purchase of paintings by Van Gogh and stimulated the donation of a significant collection of modern art. This has in turn raised the profile of the museum and the city.

There was some local resistance to the development of the Bosch500 programme, which came mainly from actors in the cultural sector, who feared that investment in Bosch would negatively impact the funding of established institutions. The Bosch500 organisation therefore had to develop activities that responded to these concerns, including discussion sessions to which cultural and civic actors were invited. This helped to counter the perception that the programme was being imposed from without, and led to increased local support and participation (Richards, Duif 2019).

The legacy of the Bosch500 programme therefore includes the growth of creative industries and associated economic gain, as well as strengthening of the social fabric of the city and increasing the quality of life, making Den Bosch a more attractive location to live in or to locate or invest in. This has helped to support the repositioning of the city as the 'Cultural Capital of the South' of the Netherlands. The creative industries also received a boost as a result of growing economic and cultural activity, although there was a feeling that the city failed to capitalise fully on the momentum created by the Bosch programme. A further setback to creative growth came in 2020 with the arrival of Covid-19. The closure of cultural institutions, the cancellation of events and travel restrictions all conspired to put creative growth on hold, just as in other cities.

In the post-Covid period, the city has shown a high degree of resilience, which may at least partly relate to the impulse provided by Bosch 500. For example, the proportion of empty business premises in the city was below the national average in 2016 and has continued to fall in spite of the pandemic. The number of hotel and restaurant businesses grew from 480 in 2015 to 680 in 2022, a rise of 42%. The city saw a strong growth in visitor numbers after the Bosch 500 programme, from 2.8 million to 6.8 million in 2019. There was a sharp fall during the pandemic, but there were more than 5.1 million visitors in 2022, 82% above 2016 levels. The number of hotel overnights rose to 267,000 in 2022, exceeding pre-pandemic levels, and a third more than the pre-Bosch 500 level in 2015 (Gemeente's-Hertogenbosch 2024).

One of the important keys to the success of Den Bosch was developing a collaborative rather than a competitive strategy. The city worked together with other cities in the Brabant region to develop a larger and more far-reaching

programme. The city developed a series of local, regional and international networks to support collaborative working in areas such as knowledge development, cultural heritage and civic collaboration. These networks arguably proved essential to the success of the Bosch 500 programme, because they enabled the city to lever resources, knowledge and expertise that otherwise would not have been available. Den Bosch did this at a variety of scales, including local, regional and international networks. In the following section, we consider the specific issue of developing collaboration between neighbouring cities and countries.

## 4. Cross-border collaboration in the European Capital of Culture

The ECOC programme is supposed to provide a basis for cultural collaboration, even though the bidding process for the title tends to pit cities against one another in a zero-sum game (Richards, Marques 2016). The major area of collaboration tends to involve the ECOC host city and the surrounding region, which often helps to provide the resources necessary to 'create size' for smaller cities. As more small cities have become involved in the ECOC programme, they have also begun to collaborate more with other cities in their region and with those across regional and national borders.

The small country of Luxemburg has now hosted the ECOC three times, thanks to the rotation of the title between European Union member states. Luxemburg City was ECOC in 1995 and 2007, and in 2022, Esch-Alzette, the second largest city in Luxembourg, held the title. If the capital city can be considered small, with a population of 114,000, then Esch is tiny, with only 36,000 inhabitants. This has necessitated collaboration with cities and regions in neighbouring countries.

In the first ECOC in 1995 the problem of size was tackled by Luxemburg through a top-down approach, in which the national government funded events staged in the national institutions, particularly the major museums. The programme was also limited to Luxemburg City itself, with no collaborative projects with other cities in Luxemburg or abroad.

By 2007, however, the political climate and the context of the event had changed, and a much more bottom-up approach was adopted. The ECOC invited proposals for events from local and international cultural actors, and also looked over the border to cities in neighbouring France, Germany and Belgium. There was also a sizable budget (€4 million) devoted to cross-border programmes and 139 trans-border projects were organised during the 2007 ECOC (Luxemburg and Greater Region, 2008). This programme was very successful in engaging the citizens of Luxemburg and the rest of the 'greater region' across France, Germany

and Belgium. In particular, there was a high degree of participation from cross-border workers, 160,000 of whom regularly crossed the border to work in Luxemburg. Surveys showed that 68% of cross-border workers visited at least one ECOC event in 2007. Across the Greater Region as a whole, around 10% of residents attended more cultural events in 2007.

Although the 2007 was a success in terms of generating collaboration and developing new audiences, there were a number of challenges identified. These included the problems of familiarising regional audiences with the new cultural landscape, creating support for cross-border activities in terms of financing, professional guidance, administrative structures and information exchange and resolving intercultural and linguistic problems during meetings (Luxemburg and Greater Region 2008).

When Luxemburg hosted a third ECOC in 2022, it was decided to move the event out of the capital to the small provincial city of Esch-Alzette. Esch was the former centre of the steel industry in Luxemburg, which faced high unemployment and economic decline when the still mills closed in the 1970s. The 2022 ECOC was therefore seen as an important step in the regeneration of the city.

In 2022, Esch worked with 10 municipalities in the South of Luxemburg and 8 French municipalities to develop a regional, collaborative programme. The main aim was to provide a programme embedded in local culture, but with an international scope. The programme included more than 2,400 events, including a number of innovative events focussed on breaking down borders. The exhibition *Frontaliers. Lives in Stereo* examined the history of cross-border and migratory workers in the steel industry and the culture of migration. The exhibition *A Colônia Luxemburguesa* also traced the emigration of Luxemburgers to develop the steel industry in Brazil. The project *Travel Stories* also encouraged people across the different parts of the region to share their stories about the area and the role of the border in their lives :

> Tell us how you experience and get to know the Esch2022 region, what makes it special to you and why you love it! Be it a story from your daily life, a special place for you, an extraordinary encounter, or something that makes the region unique, we are looking forward to your stories. (https://esch2022.lu/en/travel-stories/)

In total, 41 projects were developed in whole or in part in the French part of Esch2022, with 9 projects linked to the French presidency of the EU. The RED project, focussed on developing European exchanges with the French municipalities participating in the ECOC, with high satisfaction rate of event participants (83%) (Esch 2022, 2023).

The transnational nature of the programme was underlined by the use of different languages. There were more than 1,200 events in French, 900 in English,

750 in Luxembourgish and 500 in German. The programme also featured events in Portuguese, Italian and Spanish, reflecting the presence of important minority groups in Luxemburg. The events attracted a total of over 500,000 visitors, mainly from Luxembourg (60%) and France (27%) (Esch 2022, 2023).

Most projects included some element of cross-border or international collaboration. Over 90% included multiple nationalities in the project, over 80% were multilingual, over 70% had international collaboration and there was also a high level of collaboration between the Esch2022 projects themselves (57%). Visitors were also very positive about the programme, with 91% saying they would recommend the event they attended to friends or colleagues, and 83% of visitors said they were satisfied with their experience. The programme was clearly fun as well as educational, with 93% saying they had a "good time". The collaborative message of the programme was also reflected in visitor experiences, with 66% saying they perceived a cross-border dimension in the event they attended. The programme also appeared to meet another important goal in increasing attractiveness, as 59% consider that the Esch2022 region was more attractive than in the past (Esch 2022, 2023).

The image development aspects of Esch 2022 were also significant, with over 8,600 articles published in the press, and 240 journalists attending from more than 60 countries. The media reach of the event was calculated at nearly 400 million people, generating a total Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) of over 21 million euros. This means the Total media value was almost equal to the 22.5 million euros budget for the event in 2022 (Esch 2022, 2023).

The role of the Middleground was particularly significant in the Esch2022 programme, with 61% of the programme being organised by non-profit organisations. Almost three quarters of participating organisations said that their projects included cross-border or international collaboration. This collaboration also included a large proportion of non-cultural partners, showing that the networks extended beyond the immediate scope of the programme itself. The most frequently mentioned legacy of the Esch2022 projects was "Partnerships / collaboration / network / cooperation / contacts", underlining the importance of collaboration going beyond the ECOC year itself. This indicates that it is increasingly important to collaborate, in order to gather skills, knowledge and contacts needed to stage a large cultural programme within the limited resources of the small city.

Richards and Duif (2019) identify a number of critical success factors in relation to the ECOC, some of which are particularly relevant for smaller cities and cross-border working. In particular, bringing stakeholders together through Political Will, Vision and Consistency and Building Relationships and Forging Collaboration are relevant for the ECOC cross-border context. For small cities, it is also important to Use the Underdog Position of the city in a creative way.

The fact that a small city with limited resources can stage impressive and attractive events is already a newsworthy event.

This needs a holistic approach – viewing creativity not as a class, or an industry, but as an ecology that links every part of the city together: a creative ecology of place.

## 5. Towards a creative ecology of place

Our analysis indicates that the atomisation of creative policies into creative industries or creative class or creative cluster approaches tends to minimise the synergies that can be developed between the creative industries and place. By adopting a broader, creative ecology approach, we can generate a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between creativity and place.

There is a need for a new 'creative ecology of place', which links the creative process and the creative industries more closely to the different aspects of place that support them. These links should not be limited to economic considerations of class or specific jobs, but should be accompanied by considerations of how creativity is embedded in place, through resources, meanings and creative strategies.

The creative cities model of Cohendet et al. (2010) goes some way towards addressing this problem, showing how different elements of the creative system fit together in cities. However, this model can also be strengthened by adding a spatial perspective, linking the city to the networks that feed it with external resources, and which help to position it in the creative field (Figure 3). One element that can usefully be added to the creative cities model is the concept of 'buzz and pipelines' (Bathelt *et al.* 2004). The creative industries are not just involved in production, but they also form the core of networks that link places and people (Potts *et al.* 2008), which are fed by the buzz created by the co-presence of 'cool' people in trendy places.

The coming together to create buzz is a key aspect of events, which then link the different levels of the creative city to stimulate consumption and production. This combination of the 'Creative localism' in the buzz and the 'Creative cosmopolitanism' that can be gained by developing networks to channel people, ideas and resources, allows even small places to be competitive. As Cerisola and Panzera (2022) have demonstrated using data from the Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor, the combination of Creative localism and Creative cosmopolitanism is most effective in stimulating creative growth. Creative cosmopolitanism can help to extend the pipelines linked to the Upperground of the creative city, while creative localism can help to forge connections that can sustain the local buzz essential for powering the Underground, and therefore the rest of the creative city ecology.

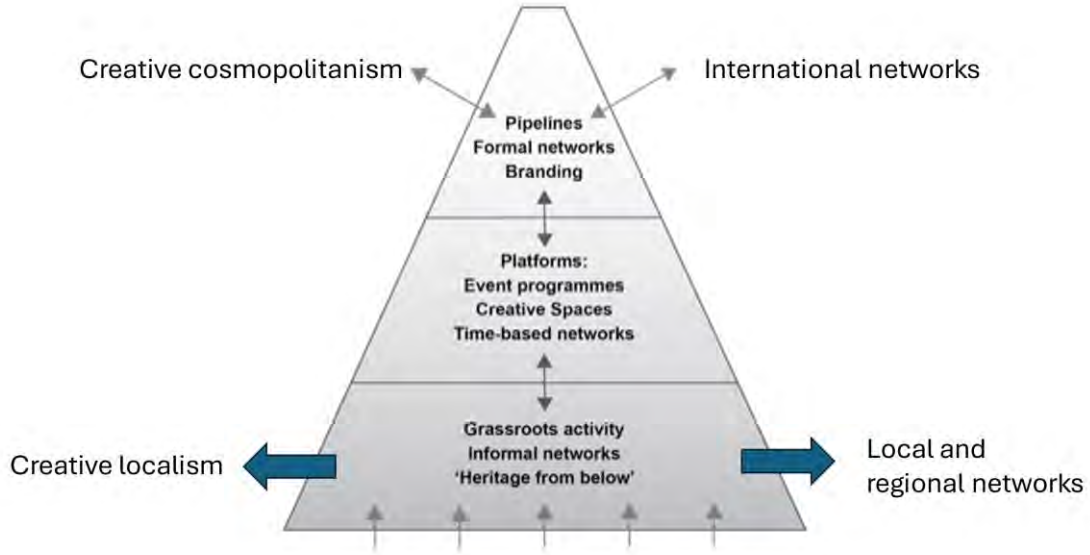


Figure 3
Expanding the creative city through networking.

When combined with the catalytic and agenda synchronising effects of events, this analysis helps us to understand why certain places are more successful than others in the development of creativity. Many cities have developed creative city, creative industries or creative class programmes, but not all of these are successful. Being a successful creative city involves collecting resources, imbuing them with meaning and linking them to creative networks through institutions that can frame the city in effective ways.

This is not something that happens accidentally. The experience of Den Bosch emphasises the need for place leadership, which provides a vision to galvanise the different actors in the city, encourage the formation of external links and internal bonds. Similar initiatives have long been evident in other cities, such as Montreal and Barcelona, for example. But the Den Bosch case also shows that small cities can be successful creative cities as well

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# ANALYSING THEMATIC CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE VIDEOS

FRANCESCA COCCETTA

**Abstract** – The title European Capital of Culture (ECoC) represents an opportunity for cities to enhance their brand image in the eyes of their own inhabitants and the whole of Europe alike; in addition, from a socio-economic standpoint, the title is a catalyst for the city's cultural development and urban revitalization as well as a boost for tourism. For this reason, it is important for cities aspiring to the ECoC title to make sure that their place identity is well-formulated in all their ECoC-related materials and in line with the expectations of ECoC calls. This article will thus explore place identity and the related concept of place branding in relation to 60 videos marketing and communicating 35 ECoCs in the 2007-2025 time period. In particular, by combining genre analysis and corpus-based Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis it looks at the thematics enacted in the videos and the forms and strategies of place branding they use. The analysis shows that, while some thematics are common to many videos (e.g. the city, local cultural heritage and performing arts), others are rarer or related to the ECoC leitmotiv (e.g. borders and crossing borders in the case of the videos promoting Nova Gorica and Gorizia). The results seem to suggest that the ECoC event represents an opportunity for the designated cities to showcase themselves as well as their cultural heritage.

**Keywords**: place branding; European Capital of Culture initiative; Intertextual Thematic Formations; corpus-based Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

## 1. Introduction

Drawing on Paasi (2002, 2003), in this article the term *place identity* refers to:

> features of nature, culture and people that are *used* in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, governance and political or religious regionalization to distinguish one region from others. (Paasi 2003, p. 478) (italics in the original)

This concept has attracted considerable interest in various disciplines including geography, urban planning, sociology, environmental studies, and tourism, to



DOI Code: 10.1285/i27241688n2p45

mention just a few. In their review of bibliographical records retrieved from the core data set of Web of Science, Peng, Strijker and Wu (2020) found that there was a rise in 2006 in academic articles with "place identity", "regional identity" or "regional identities" in their title and this rise was observed in various disciplines; after 2010, articles on place identity gradually came to be concentrated in humanities and social sciences, the disciplines with a more recent shift towards place marketing.

Indeed, related to the concept of place identity is that of *place branding* defined by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006, p. 186) as "the application of product branding to places". Place branding captures a place's unique meaning and differentiates a place from the others so that place consumers recognize it as existing, perceive it as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors and "consume[d] [it] in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place" (Kavaratzis, Ashworth 2006, p. 189).

One of the three main strategies for city branding identified by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006) is events branding, which is exemplified, *inter alia*, by the European Capital of Culture (ECoC), a EU-financed initiative aiming to highlight the cultural diversity and richness of different European cities every year. The initiative is a prestigious platform for cities to showcase their cultural and artistic offerings in the eyes of their inhabitants and the whole of Europe alike. From a socio-economic standpoint, an ECoC title is a catalyst for a city's cultural development and urban revitalization as well as a boost for tourism (e.g. Liu 2012; Richards, Duif 2019). For this reason, it is important for cities aspiring to the ECoC title to make sure that their place brand is properly constructed in all their ECoC-related materials, including their bid-book and promotional materials. A case in point is Liverpool which, when bidding for the ECoC title, was branded as *The World in One City* in reference to its multiethnic identity.[1] In line with this, the promotional material produced for the ECoC events entextualized a narrative of diversity and Otherness depicting images of people of African, Indian or Arabic origins and using slogans such as *wondrously diverse* and *melting pot* (Krüger 2013). Moreover, a city's brand should also be in line with the expectations of ECoC calls. In this respect, Lähdesmäki (2009) analyses the application books of Istanbul, Pécs, Tallinn and Turku and observes that their language makes constant use of expressions such as *local culture*, *local identity*, *regionality*, *European culture*, *European heritage*, and *common European*; these expressions clearly hint at the concepts of locality, regionality and Europeanness which are the cornerstones of the EU's cultural policy as well as of the ECoC initiative.

With a specific focus on the ECoC initiative, this article focuses on the concepts of place identity and place branding from a sociosemiotic perspective

[1] Liverpool is indeed a multicultural city where many communities coexist, including the Indian, African, Chinese and Arab communities who settled in the city at the height of British imperialism.

(e.g. Aiello, Thurlow 2006; Koller 2008; Paganoni 2015, 2019; Thurlow 2024). Specifically, it explores place branding in relation to a small corpus of 60 videos marketing and presenting 35 ECoCs in the 2007-2025 time period (henceforth: ECoC corpus) by looking at the thematics entextualized in the videos. The article aims to understand whether and how the videos capture ECoCs' cultural uniqueness and promote cultural diversity, but also combine them with European (and international) perspectives, thus increasing European citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area. Relevant to this article is Aiello and Thurlow's (2006) study examining the visual themes entextualized in official promotional texts of 30 cities which either competed for the ECoC title or were nominated ECoC in the 2005-2011 time period. Their analysis found that the most recurrent visual themes are: cityscapes, fireworks, children, and maps. They concluded that the repetition and uniformity of these themes:

> contribute to the creation and consolidation of a visual repertoire of 'Europeanness', which in turn is likely to be used as currency for the exchange of intercultural meanings and thus also for a mutual (not necessarily equal) understanding of what European culture is and what it means to represent it through the European Capital of Culture in any given year. (Aiello, Thurlow 2006, p. 159)

The present article approaches thematics using Lemke's semantically-based theory of intertextuality (1995a, 1995b) and suggests that this theory can help identify recurrent thematics as well as rare thematics that can potentially highlight the uniqueness of the designated ECoC. The article is organized as follows: Section 2 is an overview of the ECoC initiative; Section 3 describes the theoretical framework adopted to analyse the videos; Section 4 presents the materials analysed in this study and the methodology adopted; Section 5 presents and discusses the results of the study; finally; Section 6 draws some conclusions.

## 2. European Capitals of Culture

Initiated by the European Commission in 1985 with the aim of bringing EU citizens close together, European Capitals of Culture is "[a]n initiative putting culture at the heart of European cities."[2]

The ECoC selection competition starts six years before the *title year* and is organized at a national level with two EU Member States publishing a *call for bid* specifying the selection criteria and procedure. In a pre-selection stage,

[2] https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture (29.05.2024).

the cities interested in participating in the competition submit a *bid-book* setting out the city's objectives, programme, financial plans and management structure. The bid is reviewed by a Panel of experts in the field of culture against the following six categories of criteria (European Commission 2017):

- contribution to the long-term cultural strategy;
- cultural and artistic content;
- European dimension;
- outreach;
- management;
- capacity to deliver.

For example, in the case of the European dimension, which is "at the heart of an ECoC's programme" (European Commission 2017, p. 18), the Panel considers the extent to which the cultural programme promotes European cultural diversity, highlights the commonalities between various European cultures, and involves artists from different parts of Europe. The Panel selects a short list of cities authorized to proceed to the final selection stage and provides them with a report with some recommendations; in the final selection stage, these cities submit a more detailed application further assessed against the criteria used in the pre-selection stage. The Panel recommends one city per host country for the title which is then ratified by the Member State four years before the title year is celebrated.

The designated ECoC then plans and prepares the event. This includes involving stakeholders, engaging with citizens, establishing the necessary European connections, and building and/or modernizing infrastructure. During this four-year period, the ECoC is monitored by the Panel which then recommends the city for the Melina Mercouri Prize funded by the EU Creative Europe Programme and currently amounting to €1.5m.

Finally, after the ECoC year, the city is evaluated by the European Commission. The evaluation, carried out by an organization unrelated to the designated city and its ECoC management, is both qualitative and quantitative in nature and is made public so that other ECoCs can benefit from it.

## 3. Lemke's theory of intertextuality

To investigate recurrent and rare thematics in the ECoC corpus this article draws on Lemke's (1995a, 1995b) theory of intertextuality. According to Lemke, intertextuality is a social phenomenon which depends on a given community's culture; in his view, the meaning-making practices of a community produce texts

that are similar in their meanings. This focus on the community's meaning-making practices contrasts with previous definitions of intertextuality, such as Kristeva's (1980) and De Beaugrande and Dressler's (1981). For example, for Kristeva (1980, p. 37) "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another", meaning that a literary text is a product of a single author, but also borrows words and concepts from other texts of the past. Similarly, De Beaugrande and Dressler point out the exitance of similarities between texts, but add that the recognition of these similarities depends on a reader's knowledge of other texts.

By drawing on Halliday's grammar (Halliday, Matthiessen 2013), specifically its three metafunctions (i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual), Lemke states that texts:

> may be alike in the content of what they say about topics and subjects. They may be alike in their values, attitudes and stances toward their subjects and audiences. They may be alike in the sequence, structure and form of organization of what they say. These texts will always also be different as well, each will be in some ways unique. (Lemke 1995b, p. 6)

In other words, he postulates the existence of three types of intertextual relationship, namely, thematic ties, orientational ties, and generic ties. Thematic ties are those between texts sharing the same experiential meaning (i.e. topic); orientational ties are those between texts sharing a particular attitude or standpoint towards some topic; generic ties are those between texts belonging to the same genre.

When it comes to thematic ties, Lemke states that these can be identified by looking at the Intertextual Thematic Formations (ITFs) present in a text, defined as "[t]he shared and repeated patterns of semantic relationships, mainly ideational ones, usually characteristic of a register's Field. […] They consist of context-specific thematic items […] and semantic relations among these items" (Lemke 2005, p. 34); he (1995b, p. 35) adds that "[t]he same patterns recur from text to text in slightly different wordings, but recognizably the same, and each wording can be mapped onto a generic semantic pattern that is the same for all". Lemke investigated how thematic ties are made through linguistic resources by extending Hasan's (1984) notion of cohesive ties in texts, particularly of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and metonymy.

This article posits that Lemke's ITF is a viable tool for identifying the recurrent and rare thematics in the ECoC corpus. However, considering the multimodal nature of the texts under analysis, it extends Lemke's theory and investigates how thematic ties are made through linguistic resources as well as visual ones.

## 4. Materials and methods

The present study aims to propose a methodology to identify recurrent thematics in videos in a structured way. To do so, corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis (Bednarek 2015; Baldry, Kantz 2022) was adopted to analyse the ECoC corpus, a small corpus consisting of 60 videos marketing and presenting 35 ECoCs[3] in the 2007-2025 time period. The videos were retrieved from the YouTube and Vimeo video sharing platforms using the following search phrases: *European Capital of Culture*, *European Capital of Culture [year]*, *European Capital of Culture [name of the city]*, and *European Capital of Culture [year] [name of the city]*. The videos making up the corpus exemplify various types of videos, including adverts, image films, and legacy videos. The text types making up the corpus are shown in the line chart in Figure 1.

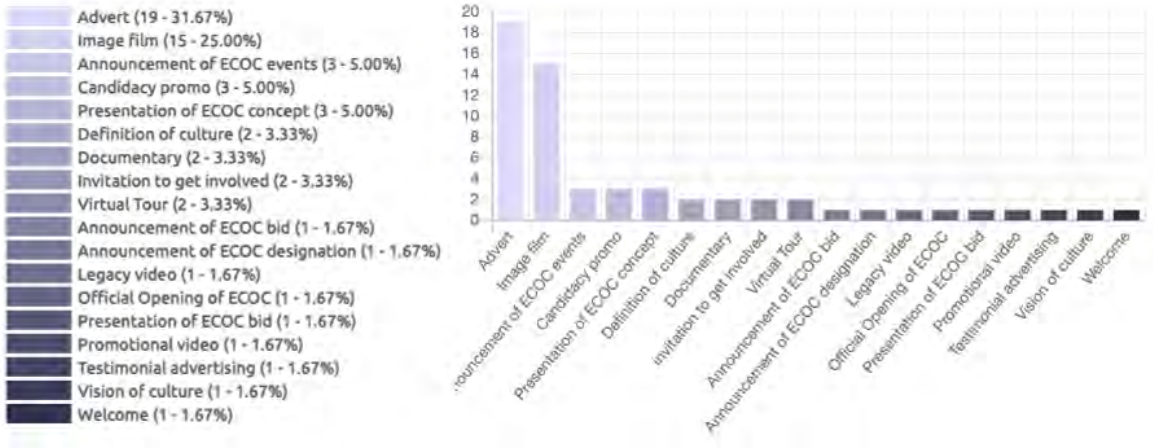


Figure 1
Corpus composition: text types.

As can be seen, adverts are the most frequent video type (31.67% of the total), followed by image films (25% of the total), that is, a film "used to present, sharpen and strengthen the image and identity of a company, brand or organization" (The mmmake agency 2023); in the case of the videos under analysis, the image films convey the core values, messages and culture of the respective ECoC. Among the least frequent video types are videos describing

[3] The ECoCs whose promotional videos are included in the corpus are (in alphabetical order): Aarhus (2017), Bodø (2024), Donostia-San Sebastian (2016), Elefsina (2023), Esch-sur-Alzette (2022), Galway (2020), Guimarães (2012), Istanbul (2010), Kauna (2022), Košice (2013), Leeuwarden-Fryslân (2018), Linz (2009), Liverpool (2008), Marseille-Provence (2013), Matera (2019), Mons (2015), Nova Gorica and Gorizia (2025) Novi Sad (2022), Paphos (2017), Pilsen (2015), Plovdiv (2019), Riga (2014), Rijeka (2020), Salzkammergut (2024), Sibiu (2007), Stavanger (2008), Tallinn (2011), Tartu (2024), Timișoara (2023), Turku (2011), Umeå (2014), Valletta (2018), Veszprém (2023), Vilnius (2009) and Wrocław (2016).

how the ECoC conceives culture, videos announcing the ECoC bid, and legacy videos. Legacy videos describe the legacy of the ECoC mega-event in terms of how this has enhanced the city which has hosted it; legacy videos can cover the aims envisaged by the ECoC initiative such as improvement of the city image, urban regeneration and investment attraction.

53 videos were produced before and five after the designation (Figure 2). While for some videos this information was available in the description box below the video on the YouTube or Vimeo webpage, in other cases the distinction was made on the basis of the details provided by the video itself. When it was not possible to retrieve this information, the label UNDECIDED was used.

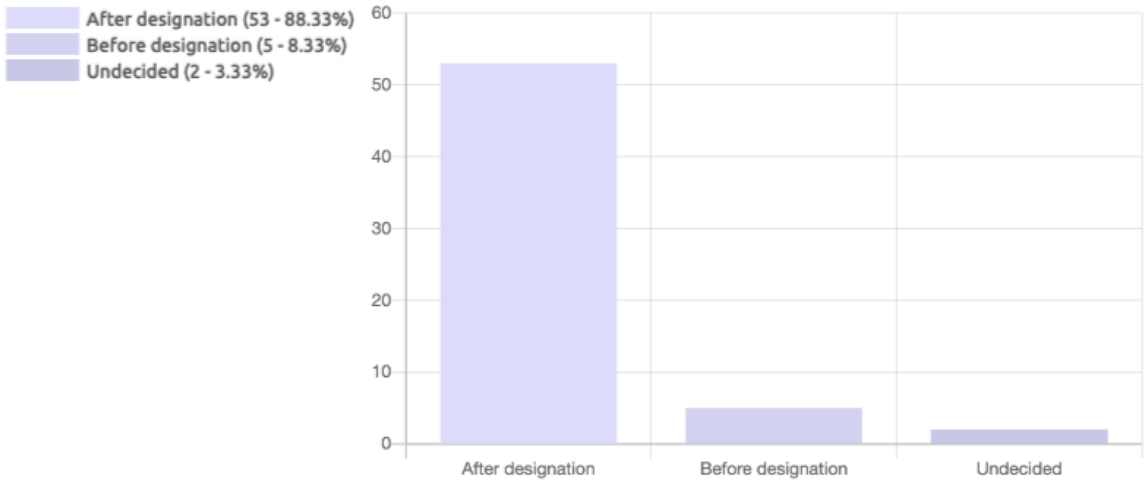


Figure 2
Corpus composition: time of production.

Information on the text type and on whether the video was produced before or after designation was deemed to be particularly relevant to understanding the relationship between the video genre and the specific thematics (see Discussion below).

The videos were uploaded to the OpenMWS platform[4] (Taibi 2023) to facilitate their annotation for ITFs and subsequent retrieval. In this respect, OpenMWS allows corpora of videos available on media sharing sites (e.g. YouTube and Vimeo) to be compiled and sequences in the corpus to be annotated using a tagging system created by individual researchers on the basis of their research objectives; sequences can then be searched using the OpenMWS search engine and, once retrieved, can be viewed so that a systematic multimodal analysis can be performed for specific sequences. For example, in the case of the present study, an ITF can be retrieved with a view to establishing the specific

[4] http://openmws-dslcc.pa.itd.cnr.it/pages/login.jsf (7.10.2024).

semiotic resources used in its construction and to assessing whether they are entextualized in the soundtrack, the videotrack or both simultaneously.

Once uploaded to the OpenMWS platform, the videos under analysis were divided into sequences; in this study, the term *sequence* is used to indicate a part of a video where a given thematic is entextualized. The sequences were then annotated in the platform's Annotation and Transcription Panel. An example of sequence annotation is given in Figure 3 with respect to a sequence of a video announcing the designation of Nova Goriza and Gorizia (WnitO6GlkxU)[5] as 2025 ECoCs.

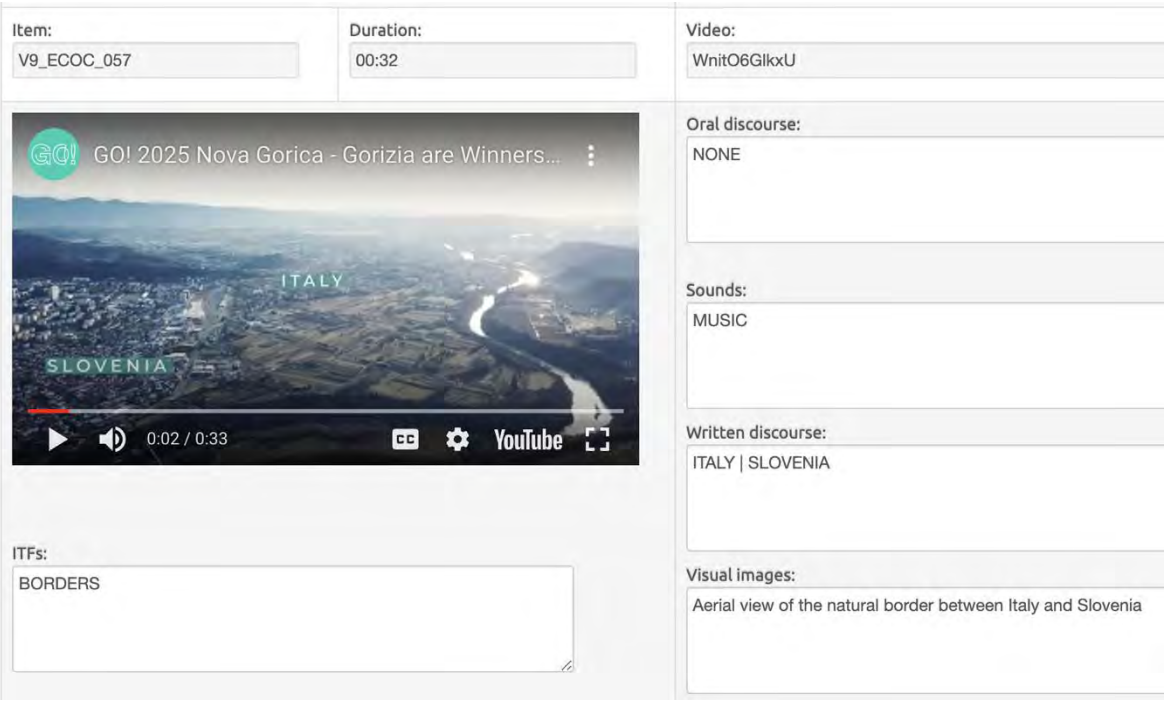


Figure 3
Example of sequence annotation in the Annotation and Transcription Panel.

The Annotation and Transcription Panel includes the video sequence that can be played to facilitate its analysis and some boxes where the researcher/annotator can add information about *ITF type*, *Oral discourse*, *Sounds*, *Written discourse* and *Visual image*. In the case of the sequence shown in Figure 3, this entextualizes the BORDERS ITF; as indicated by the annotation NONE, there is no oral discourse, but music (see Music box); the visual image shows an aerial view of the natural border between Italy and Slovenia which is indicated with written discourse in the form of the labels ITALY and SLOVENIA shown on the video. This annotation allows the corpus to be searched for ITFs using the platform's Search Panel (Figure 4): an ITF can be selected from a drop-down menu containing all the ITF types

[5] The videos quoted can be viewed in YouTube using the code given.

identified in the corpus (Figure 4-A) and this returns a list of sequences where the ITF is entextualized (Figure 4-B) which can be played by clicking on them.

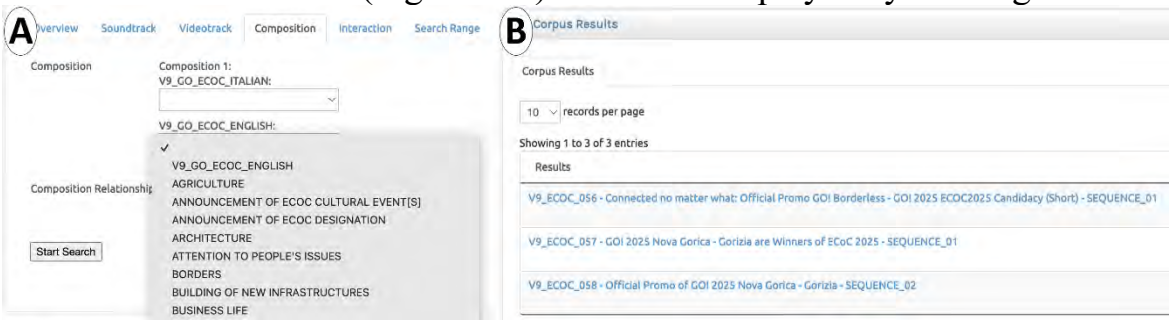


Figure 4
OpenMWS Search Panel.

Before presenting and discussing the results of the present study, a note on ITF annotation is in order. The present study has an exploratory nature, that is, establishing whether in the corpus under analysis recurrent thematics exist as well as rare thematics that can potentially highlight the uniqueness of the designated ECoC. For this reason, it was decided to annotate each ITF type only once in each video when an ITF occurred more than once in the same video.

# 5. Results and discussion

## *5.1. More frequent and rarer ITF types*

In the corpus 97 ITF types were identified. Table 1 shows the top five most frequent ITFs.

| | ITFs | OCCURRENCES |
|---|---|---|
| 1st | THE CITY | 42/60 |
| 2nd | LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE | 34/60 |
| 3rd | PERFORMING ARTS | 30/60 |
| 4th | FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES OFFERED BY THE CITY | 14/60 |
| 5th | LOCAL CULTURAL EVENT[S] | 13/60 |
| | TOURISM | |

Table 1
Top 5 most frequent ITFs.

53 of the 97 ITF types (i.e. 54.6% of the total) occur just once. Among these are CITY'S VALUES, DIVERSITY OF CULTURE, RESPECT FOR OTHER RELIGIONS, SENSE OF COMMUNITY and COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE. The last ITF is worth mentioning. It is present in a video promoting Sibiu (HMKhVcc1WXw); here tattoos of symbols of the Italian

Renaissance (i.e. the Mona Lisa and the Vitruvian Man by Leonardo da Vinci and the Birth of Venus by Sandro Botticelli) and of the Hellenistic period (i.e. the typical painting of Greek vases) hint at the European cultural roots. This reference to the past is interesting considering that Sibius was ECoC in 2007, the year when Romania joined the EU. In addition, this ITF is related to the idea of European dimension fostered by the ECoCs programme (see Section 2), namely commonalities between various European cultures.

The following subsections present and discuss further results; the discussion is supported by the information provided in the reports published on the EU website[6] dedicated to the ECoC initiative: the reports are particularly useful to understand whether the thematics entextualized in the videos are in line with the ones put forward by the ECoC for the initiative.

## 5.2. THE CITY ITF

It comes as no surprise that the most frequent ITF is THE CITY presenting the ECoC (42 occurrences in 60 videos, 70% of the total). This seems to be in line with Aiello and Thurlow's (2006) study which found that cityscape was one the more recurrent visual themes in the official promotional texts they analysed. What it surprising is that this ITF does not occur in all the videos considering that these are videos marketing and presenting the ECoCs. This can be related to the text type. A case in point is the video entitled *Culture to live together. San Sebastian 2016, European Capital of Culture* (-AeCHUMkTXM) which describes what culture means for the city of San Sebastian. Another example is a video for Pilsen as the 2015 ECoC (PRunTMLYAs4) focusing on the events taking place in the ECoC year as well as Pilsen's well-known symbol, beer.

When occurring, THE CITY ITF is entextualized mainly in the visual image where, to use Kress and van Leeuwen's ([1996] 2021) terminology[7], views of the city are 'offered' to the viewers: i.e. the city is the object of the viewers' gaze. This ITF thus represents an opportunity for the designated ECoC to build the image it wants to convey to viewers. For example, in the case of Elefsina, the visual images (see Figure 5) present the city as a heavily industrialized entity, an image the city itself aimed to change with the revenues from the ECoC title as highlighted by the Panel of experts in their report:

> [t]he city sees their bid as a major contributor to the progress the city has been making from its heavy industrial and polluted past, "a grey industrial city" to its

[6] https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/designated-capitals-of-culture (5.10.2024)

[7] Kress and van Leeuwen ([1996] 2021) distinguish between 'demand' image and 'offer' image; in the former, the represented participants look directly at the viewer as if demanding to enter into some kind of relation with them; in the latter, the represented participants do not look directly at the viewer but are "the object of the viewer's dispassionate scrutiny" (Kress, van Leeuwen 2021, p. 118) and the viewer plays the role of an invisible onlooker.

> new sustainable urban economy in the wider metropolitan area of Athens. (European Commission 2016, p. 7).

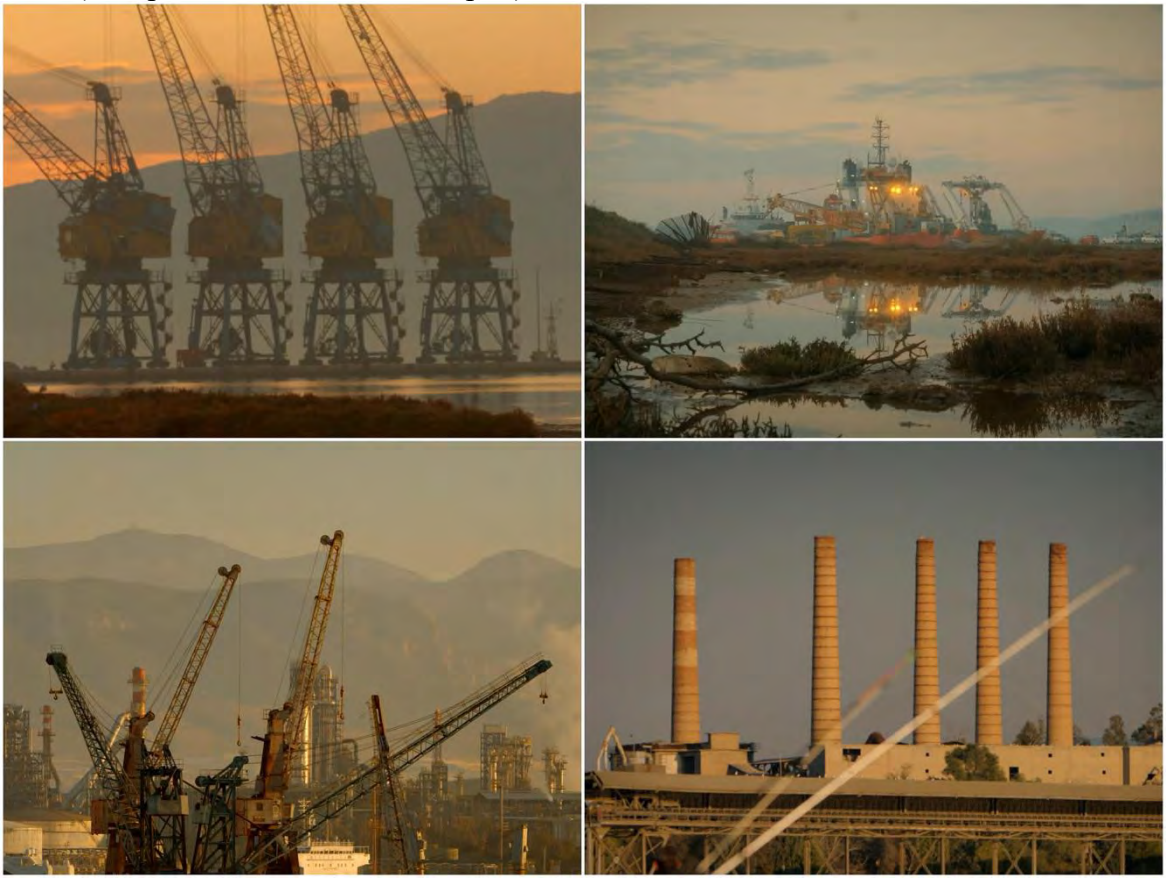

Figure 5
Representation of Elefsina as "a grey industrial city"
(European Commission 2016, p. 7) in an ECoC video (0Hwx9lWM4g4).

Besides images, some videos make use of written discourse to present the ECoC. A case in point is Liverpool (44K9bfxMqOw) which describes itself as: *dynamic*, *fresh*, *creative*, *real*, *inspirational*, *ironic* and *classical*.

While the majority of the THE CITY ITFs are entextualized mainly in the videotrack with images and in few cases with written discourse, there are some occurrences using entextualization in the soundtrack. One such example is Vilnius' (nJLvEM0aOSk) use of a very abstract videotrack (a kind of animation) which requires the support of an extensive description:

> Streets breathing nature, kind citizens and floating spirit of creativeness. It all lives here till these days. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.

The characteristics of the city are further highlighted in the videotrack with the keywords *nature*, *kindness* and *creativeness*. It is hard to say whether these are elements that Vilnius intended to marketise during the ECoC year: in the two

reports available on the EU website dedicated to the ECoC initiative this does not seem to emerge; one of the elements emerging from McCoshan *et al.*'s report (n/a, 80) is, on the other hand, the "strong emphasis [put forward by the city] on [the city's] long European history and cultural heritage": this is present in the video with the EUROPEAN DIMENSION ITF entextualized in the soundtrack as "[t]he most talented artists from all over Europe came to create grace and cherish this peaceful town." What seems to emerge from the sample analyses presented so far is the connection between an ECoC's programme and the way in which the ECoC is presented in THE CITY ITFs. This is a connection further discussed below with respect to other ITFs.

One final example of the THE CITY ITF worth mentioning is taken from a video relating to Umeå (GE0vsw1K8j4). What is highlighted here are the many affordances for people and this is conveyed by images of the city and a happy woman who says:

> I've lived in bigger cities all my life, and now we've moved here where there's lots of space, and we find that this gives us a lot of chance to be creative and inspired by the nature around. It's different, but it's opening up our minds in different ways.

## 5.3. The LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ITF

The second most frequent ITF type is LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE (34 occurrences out of 60 videos, 56.7% of the total). This focus on local cultural heritage seems to be in line with one of the objectives of the ECoC initiative, namely "highlighting the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe".[8]

According to UNESCO (2003, p. 3), the term *cultural heritage* refers to monuments and collections of objects as well as:

> traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. (UNESCO 2003, p. 3)

UNESCO distinguishes between tangible cultural heritage, that is, monuments, buildings and historic places, and intangible cultural heritage, that is language, folklore, customs and traditions. As shown in Table 2, various aspects of cultural heritage are presented in the videos.

[8] https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture (29.05.2024).

| | ITFs FOR LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE | OCCURRENCES |
|---|---|---|
| 1st | HISTORY | 11/34 |
| 2nd | FOOD AND DRINK | 8/34 |
| 3rd | RELIGION | 5/34 |
| 4th | DANCE | 4/34 |
| 5th | CLOTHES | 2/34 |
| | LITERATURE | |
| 6th | MUSIC | 1/34 |
| | PAINTING | |

Table 2
Aspects of cultural heritage presented in the videos.

HISTORY is the most frequent LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ITF (11 out of 34 occurrences, 32.3% of the total CULTURAL HERITAGE ITFs). What is represented in the videos highlights the long history of Europe characterized by old civilizations whose remains are still visible (e.g. Matera, dsWC576wlJU; Galway, 44QnS6aqgA0; Elefsina, 0Hwx9lWM4g4), or important historical figures who are remembered and celebrated in the city's statues as is the case of Jean de Valette[9] whose statue stands in a square in Valletta (izWmqkEiYJ0). However, in many cases it can be hard for viewers to understand the historical references especially when they have no or little knowledge about the history of the city promoted. Illustrative of this is the video on Valletta, a mini-documentary showing snapshots of the city against background music. No written or spoken discourse is used nor are labels or captions which could have guided viewers during viewings.

### *5.4. ECoC leitmotif-related ITFs: The case of Nova Gorica and Gorizia*

What emerges from the analysis is that some of the ITFs are connected with the ECoC leitmotif. A case in point are the ITFs CROSSING BORDERS and BORDERS present in all the videos for Nova Gorica and Gorizia which clearly refer to the two cities' special topography.[10] In this respect, the selection report of the 2025 ECoC in Slovenia points out that "Nova Gorica wants to grow together with its Italian bordering city Gorizia as if they were one" (European Commission 2021, p. 10). Figure 6 shows two occurrences of the BORDER ITF: the one on the left shows the Italian-Slovenian border line in Transalpina/Europe Square, while the one on the right shows the Isonzo River which is considered the natural boundary between the two countries.

[9] Jean de Valette was a French nobleman and a Grand Master of the Order of Malta. In 1565, he commanded the resistance against the Ottomans who had attempted to conquer Malta and in 1566 laid the foundation stone of La Vallette.

[10] After WWII, the Treaty of Paris between Italy and the Allied Powers (1947) annexed part of the municipality of Gorizia to Yugoslavia thus drawing a national border just off the town centre.


Figure 6
Two examples of the BORDER ITF.

Figure 7 shows two CROSSING BORDERS ITFs. The one on the left shows the mayors of Gorizia and Nova Goriza separated by a fence having what appears to be a friendly chat, thus giving the idea that despite the borders they can and do collaborate. The one on the right shows Tine Kancler, a Slovenian canoe athlete, canoeing on the Isonzo River and then saying: "Sono orgoglioso di essere entrato in acqua in Slovenia pochi minuti fa, e ora sono libero di uscire in Italia."[11]

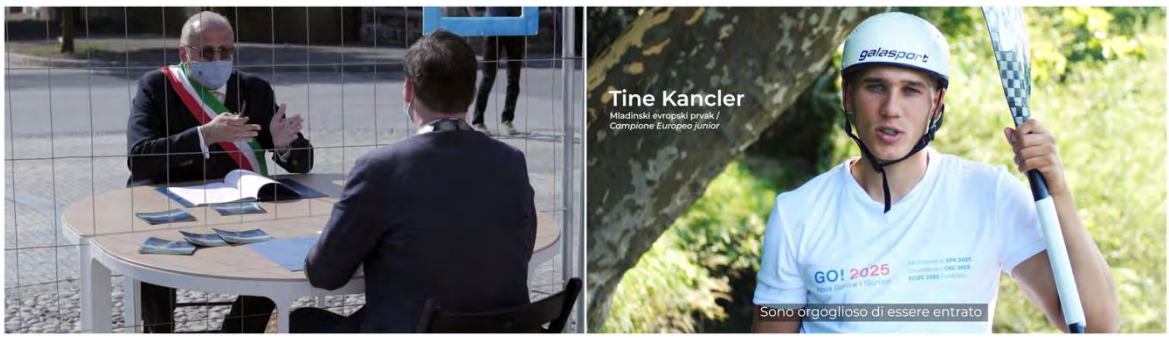


Figure 7
Two examples of the CROSSING BORDER ITF.

## Conclusions

This article has given a sociosemiotic perspective to the analysis of place branding and place identity *vis-à-vis* the ECoC initiative. More precisely, using a small corpus of 60 promotional videos of 35 ECoCs it has looked for recurrent thematics as well as rare thematics that can potentially capture the uniqueness of the designated ECoC. To do so, it has put forward a model

[11] I am proud of the fact that a few minutes ago I got onto the river in Slovenia and am now free to get out of it in Italy (author's translation).

drawing on Lemke's (1995a, 1995b, 2005) theory of ITFs. The article has also shown that the investigation is not limited to ITF types but also embraces the way in which they are enacted in the corpus. The results presented are preliminary and based on a small corpus; however, there is good reason to believe that the application of the model will allow researchers to quantify ITFs and provide a clearer picture of how place branding and place identity are enacted in videos.

In some ways even more significant perhaps is the article's demonstration of the importance of involving sociosemioticians in the place branding process which seems to pivot around a branding consultants-stakeholders co-operation. According to Eurocities (2011), indeed, an important consideration for successful place branding is the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. In the case of city branding, these should include the city's government, the private sector, tourism and civil society, but also external stakeholders. In a similar vein, place branding consultant Natasha Grand states that "[o]n the operational level, political leadership and support is an essential condition for the success of place-branding and identity work" (Kaefer 2021, p. 234). Stakeholders should, *inter alia*, work together to ensure brand creativity and share a vision for the future of the place overcoming their differences. This article puts forward the need for joint work between place branding consultants, stakeholders and sociosemioticians in an effort to find best practices for place branding and place identity. These strategies can be used by sectors of public policy and urban governance to marketise their place branding in various media channels and digital genres with the ultimate goal of attracting tourism and investments.

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# EXPLORING GENRES RELATING TO TOURISM MARKETING
# Part 1 – Wine glossaries and AR wine label videos as an integrated English language corpus-based resource

DEIRDRE KANTZ, ANTHONY BALDRY

**Abstract** – The chapter is concerned with the consolidation of links between the wine industry and tourism and their effects on the traditional genre set used to promote these enterprises to consumers. The chapter does so with regard to two interconnected research projects: the first relates to the use of online wine glossaries and their potential in a digital world to transcend glossaries' traditional functions; the second concerns the potential for cultural adaptation of wine labels in the light of AR-related data retrieval. Within the overarching framework of creating English language corpus-based CMDA (Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis) resources and structured pathways, further discussed in the second part of this study (see Baldry,Taibi, *this volume*), the chapter reflects on genre-led innovations in the marketing in Italy of *enoturismo* (wine-related tourism), arising from EU wine marketing legislation, that may have consolidated the use of QR-code wine labels but which have left many questions about the possible future impact of digital technologies unanswered.

**Keywords**: genre ecology; genre evolution; glossaries; wine industry; wine labels.

## 1. Introduction

Adapting to the needs of the digital age is a concern affecting all walks of life but is of special interest to discourse analysts exploring the evolution of tourism-marketing genres as they relate to the wine industry (Hannan, Negro 2022; Hommerberg, Don 2015; Vrigkas *et al.* 2021, 2022; Wertime, Fenwick 2011). In its exploration of wine-related tourism, the chapter presents two interconnected projects concerned with consumers' engagement with the cultural aspects of wine promotion and consumption. The first project relates to the use of online glossaries in wine marketing, while the second relates to the affordances of smartphone-based Augmented Reality (henceforth AR) technologies that enhance the traditional functions of printed wine labels but do so in an age when website experiential marketing of wine is beginning to

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downplay its reliance on wine labels. What ties the two projects together is the assumption that critical multimodal discourse analysis (hereafter CMDA; Vasta, Baldry 2020; Baldry, Kantz 2022) is well-placed to investigate the perception that:

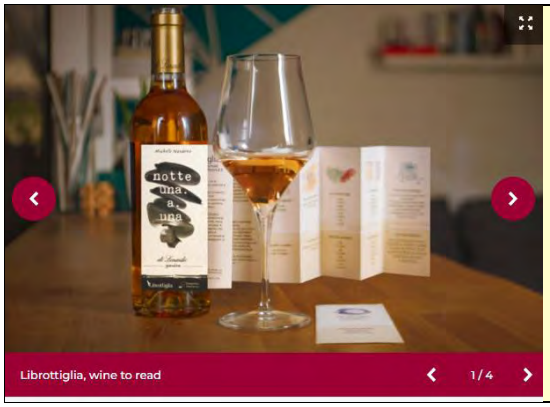
> genres matter for wine. In particular, genres affect how wines are interpreted and valued. They also serve as the building blocks of the collective market identities of producers. Producers are actively involved in these processes and in their communities, they have shaped the emergence of wine genres and their subsequent dynamics. (Hannan, Negro 2022, p. viii)

Those concerned with the analysis of genre (Bhatia 2014; de Oliveira 2002; Kress, van Leeuwen 2020; Ravelli, van Leeuwen 2018) may understandably balk at the use of 'genre' in the following examples to describe the names given to different types of wine and their production: however, they will also recognise that these descriptions (*our italics*) bypass the need to make finer distinctions (e.g. between 'variety' and 'varietal'), the latter referring, in particular in non-European winery culture to a wine made from a single type of grape variety; discourse analysts will also immediately perceive the crucial role played by glossaries in this respect as an interpretative resource:

> Thanks for the comments fellows. Barolo is a *genre* I have overlooked, at least in terms of popping corks, mostly because most of my bottles are still on the young side. (https://www.wineberserkers.com/t/93-barolo-falletto-di-seralunga-bruno-giacosa/21691/4)

> True, much of that production is pinot grigio and Prosecco. Both are largely generic, bland wines that are nonetheless highly popular. But just as the best-selling big-brand American wines do not suggest the potential for quality in the United States wine industry, these *genres* reveal little of how far Italian white wine has come in the last 30 years. From Sicily, south of the Italian mainland, to Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the northeast and the Valle d'Aosta in the northwest, Italy is overflowing with fascinating, distinctive white wines. (https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/21/dining/drinks/italian-white-wine.html)

While appreciating the time-tested role of glossaries in communicating wine culture, discourse analysts are, nevertheless, more likely to be intrigued by the marketing illustrated in Figure 1 that links wine 'genres' to more familiar narrative genres:




A bottle of wine "to be read". The label opens and turns into a little book, telling a story and combining two of life's pleasures: good wine and reading. It's called Librottiglia. The project involves six wines, distributed by Pellegrini, as the stars that transform tasting into a literary experience. It is a perfect pairing for those who love to read, as well as for those who love wine, to relish a moment to live and share. Each wine is combined to a narrative genre, and therefore blends the sensory suggestions of the wine with the scenarios created in the stories.

Figure 1
https://winenews.it/en/librottiglia-signed-by-pellegrini-each-wine-has-its-own-literary-genre_441583/

Such marketing complies with, and illustrates, the principle that:

> a genre ecology includes an interrelated group of genres (artifact types and the interpretive habits that have developed around them) used to jointly mediate the activities that allow people to accomplish complex objectives. (Spinuzzi, Zachry 2000, p. 172)

What follows thus assumes that a CMDA-based awareness of the meaning-making potential of today's digital genres justifies the claim that "genres matter for wine", though not perhaps in the sense that Hannan and Negro (2022) originally intended. Such awareness goes hand in hand with understanding that the wine industry *can* and *does* respond to a wide range of legislative and marketing requirements that potentially modify its genre ecology. How and why adjustments are made needs to be accounted for. In this respect, December 8th 2023 marked a watershed moment as regards digitally-read wine labels. On this date the inclusion of an electronic wine label became obligatory on all bottles of newly-produced wine in the European Union's twenty-seven member states.[1]

This date is thus a landmark in the long-anticipated revolution in digital labelling in the EU (Vaqué 2018), with potential worldwide knock-on effects in consumer behaviour vis-à-vis beverage and foodstuff marketing (Cervantes 2023). To give just one example, wine producers and marketers must now meet the new requirement to present obligatory data in all EU languages, a requirement met through the use of QR codes but entailing higher costs (Vaqué 2018); such costs can, in theory, be offset by smartphone-based marketing strategies not limited to QR codes but embracing AR technologies that read back (or other additional) labels introduced with new types of packaging (Brabazon *et al.* 2014). The new textual 'spaces' that the digital era has created

[1] EU LAW: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1306/oj.

for wine labels and glossaries thus generates a meaning-making potential illustrated below in Sections 2, 3 and 4 that needs to be assessed by stakeholders – producers, marketers, journalists and consumers alike – against the backdrop of the real uptake of digital technologies on the part of consumers (Vrigkas *et al.* 2021, 2022) and against the real changes in the set of genres used in wine tourism marketing, as further assessed in the concluding sections of this chapter.

## 2. Adapting wine glossaries to the digital age

The need for realignments in marketing strategies goes hand in hand with realignments in genre ecology but also with the type of marketing being pursued. Thus the engagements of content marketing are intrinsically long-term in nature and dictate the need for stability within the set of genres used for marketing purposes, notwithstanding inevitable realignments (Wall, Spinuzzi 2018). As discussed below, wine marketing (Deng 2023; Gebru, Hazi 2011) with its relatively stable set of genres can potentially conflict with the shorter-term goals of tourism-oriented experiential marketing (Goldsmith, Tsiotsou 2012; Le *et al.* 2019; Rather 2020), where creating a fun and unique experience for customers is of paramount importance: more precisely, tourism entails:

> a desire to experience as much as possible in the shortest period of time (chameleon-like behavior) [where], the role of experience can be noticed in all stages of the consumer behavior process beginning at the moment of making a decision to travel and choosing a place of destination as well as the offer components. It continues in the process of consumption (co-creation of service) until the holistic experience is received, which determines so-called post purchase behaviors and decisions to repurchase. Experience influences consumption habits and can determine other people's behaviors. (Niezgoda 2013, p. 105)

Thus, on the one hand, content marketing, with its long-term goals, is expected to build consumer confidence and trust in wine-related tourism, sometimes consolidating an entire nation's image:

> Due to the increasing development of wine tourism offerings (e.g., wine cellars, wine routes, wine events, etc.), wine tourism has great potential for branding Croatia on the tourism market […], In recent years, digital content marketing (DCM) has become the fastest growing content marketing strategy. This is supported by the fact that 90% of marketers actively used content marketing as part of their overall marketing strategy in 2022, an increase of 20% compared to 2019. […], Most recent research on DCM has focused on driving customer engagement, trust, and value, by emphasizing the importance of branded content

> marketing and loyalty […],. In designing an innovative wine product in a digital environment, the study and application of an attractive content marketing strategy is crucial for both the academic community and the wine industry. (Perišić Prodan *et al*. 2024, p. 34)

However, at the very same time, as the 'bottle of wine to be read' example in Figure 1 suggests:

> Immersive brand experiences add value to the consumer, and give something back, paving the way for innovating, market-leading brands to create longer-lasting and deeper connections with customers. (Smilansky 2017, p.15)

Just how immersive they are and what (at least potentially) is given back is briefly explored and exemplified in what follows in terms of the genre set actually used in wine tourism marketing in Italy. In this respect, let us accept**,** at least for the moment the premise that new digital labelling wants to move with the times:

> The wine industry has evolved thanks to the introduction of digital technologies in every aspect of the wine production chain […], which exploits multi-dimensional and multi-sourced data for creating engaging and interactive stories around wine labels**.** (Papadakos et al. 2023, p. 43)

This claim thus begs the question: what changes in the genre set are actually involved? Despite the example shown in Figure 1, the evidence gathered in the current research project points to a rather more cautious approach being at work: the Italian wine vineyard websites we have so far analysed lean heavily on terminology found in glossaries. Glossaries such as *CeRTem Sito Enologico* or the one shown in Figure 2, used to train sommeliers, are repurposed in consumer-directed winery websites such as the one analysed in Figure 3. Their lexis is designed to impress and to generate the feeling that the consumer is being invited to share the wine expert's register, or as one wine glossary put it to master basic wine terms you need to know "to sound like a pro."[2]

[2] https://discoverokanagantours.com/winery-blog/basic-wine-terms/.

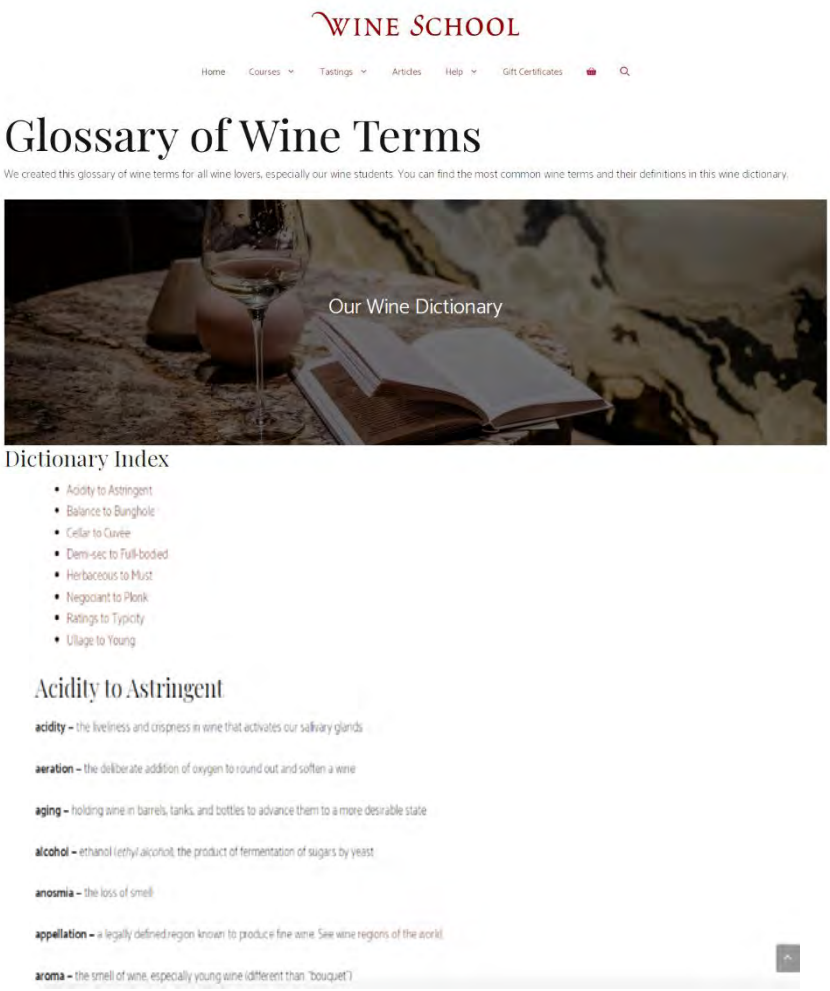



Figure 2
A typical wine culture glossary - https://www.vinology.com/wine-terms/

Figure 3 exemplifies the typical structured pathway found in Italian winery sites;[3] by integrating experiential marketing and content marketing these sites also merge wine sales with wine tourism. The menu of this particular site – the Malina estate lying a few miles to the east of Udine in the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia

[3] Typical sites in the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region, for example, include, those listed in https://www.winetourism.com/wineries-in-friuli-wine-region/.


Figure 3
A structured pathway merging wine sales and tourism
https://www.vignedelmalina.com/esperienze?lang=en

region – is organized in a way that takes the consumer along a pathway from the PHILOSOPHY menu bar option (with its presentation of slogans) to WINES and their description and subsequently to the menu bar's WINE SHOP option**.**

Steps 1 to 6 in Figure 3 reconstruct this part of the consumer's journey through the website. Besides illustrating products and their pricing, such sites, presented in Italian for domestic consumers and in English for international consumers, give details about wine characteristics and production methods based on terminology which repurposes the lexis of wine glossaries with the typical claim that they come from "wine cellar philosophy": thus *aroma*, closely identified with a young wine in Figure 2, is likewise so qualified in the relevant section of the Malina site as:

> The *aroma* is light and delicate, with *fresh floral tones*. According to the *winecellar philosophy*, this wine is dry, *suitable for aging* (our italics).

However, crucially, the consumer does not go directly from the WINE SHOP menu option to the sales cart (or E-SHOP); instead, at this point, the consumer is, taken to wine tourist EXPERIENCES, (Step 7) where "vertical tasting" is further described immediately below the image shown in Step 7 in Figure 3 in experiential marketing terms as:

> sampling different vintages of the same wine from a single producer in sequence. This method serves two purposes: assessing quality and observing the wine's evolution over time. There are two approaches to a vertical tasting: starting with the oldest vintage and progressing to the youngest, or vice versa. Typically, starting with the younger vintages allows for an appreciation of their simplicity before delving into the complexity of the older ones.

Compared with the same website 10 years earlier, this is a new departure, highly indicative of the growth of *enoturismo*: no mention is made of the "experiences" of wine tourism in the earlier site which instead focused on wine purchases explaining that the *wineshopmalina* point of sale was first opened on July 4 2011 and that "today, May 20 2014, online purchases are possible, although restricted to Italy."[4] Comparison of other sites suggests a similar pattern of development, to be viewed in the Italian context as a result of EU and Italian government investment since 1985 in *agriturismo,* where providing farms with the financial wherewithal to receive guests for meals and overnight stays has 'turned the tide' vis-à-vis the abandonment of rural communities.[5]

[4] *Wayback Machine*: https://web.archive.org/web/20141027070421/; http://venditavinomalina.it/, "Il 4 luglio del 2011 Vigne del Malina ha inaugurato il punto vendita wineshopmalina e oggi 20 maggio 2014 è possibile acquistare online, esclusivamente per l'Italia".

[5] Legge 5 dicembre 1985, n. 730: *Disciplina dell'agriturismo*. (Pubblicata nella G.U. n. 295 del 16 dicembre. 1985); see also https://www.tuttocamere.it/files/agricol/1985_730.pdf; https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development_en; https://italylawfirms.com/en/real-estate/agriturismo-italy/.

Figure 4 gives some clue as to the role that a regional tourism body plays in this respect.

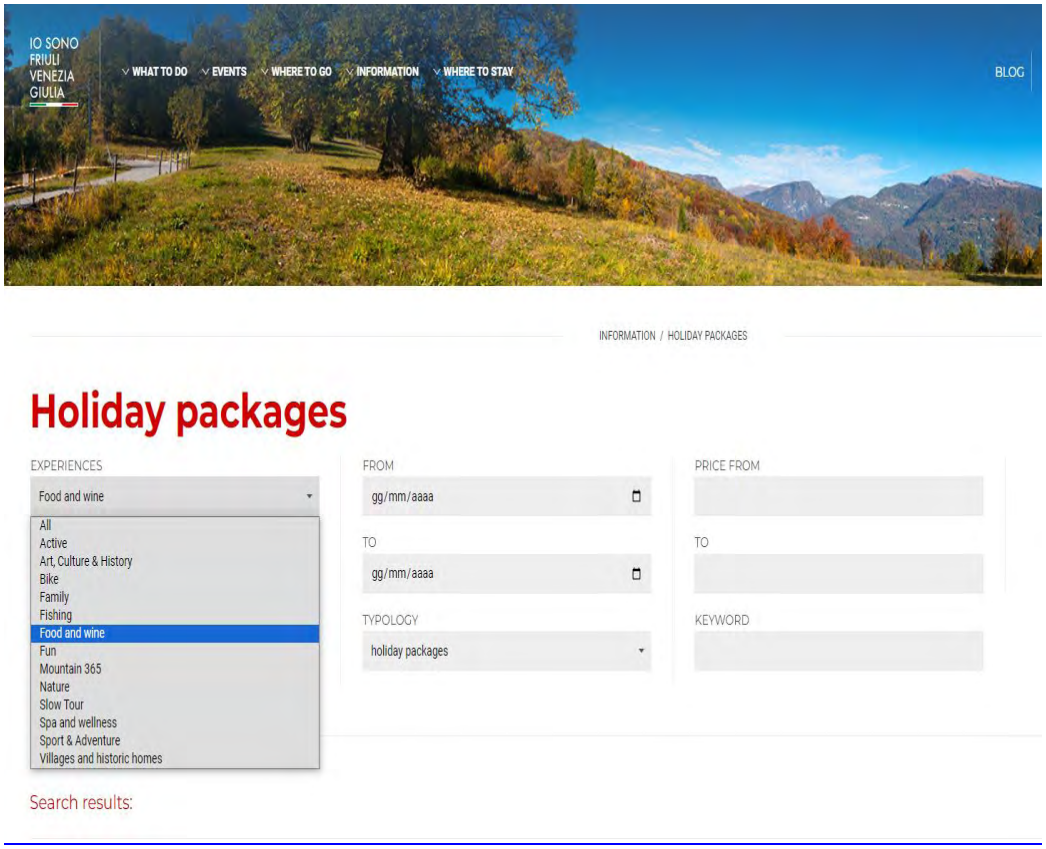



Figure 4
The Friuli-Venezia-Giulia's holiday package site includes Food and Wine experiences
https://www.turismofvg.it/special-offers/holiday-packages?Filter=2177&cat=1

## 3. Changes in digital labelling: corpus-based assessment

For those developing digitally-read wine label software, AR is often assumed to be a gamechanger: the set of genres introduced into marketing through such apps can:

> offer wineries a fantastic new way to capture audiences at that crucial decision-making point during sales, and it also offers engagement at the point of consumption. Wineries therefore have multiple opportunities to start conversations about their brand in a memorable way. The possibilities in which these stories can be conveyed are also endless: brands can use multimedia like video and sound to get consumers to interact with their wine labels while guiding them to the winery's website or social media channels. Alternatively, the whole brand experience can live on the label only, offering a fully immersive experience without distractions. (https://top500.co.za/news/disrupting-traditional-wine-marketing-one-augmented-reality-label-at-a-time/).

> A system specialized in wine-related information can help consumers make informed decisions about which wine to buy. Its users should be able to navigate through the available labels and wine characteristics, and finally find the wine that satisfies their needs. This kind of awareness can create a new relationship between the wine producer and the consumer, which will benefit both parties. Additionally, instead of exposing in a sterile manner the available information, the concept of creating a story from the available wine data (i.e., storytelling) can maximize the level of engagement and awareness of users to a specific wine brand. Storytelling can communicate the core values of the wine enterprise, by associating them with the product and its area of origin in a fascinating and memorable way that can emerge [*sic*], emotions. Also, it has been applied successfully in the wine industry as a strong marketing and communication technique, especially in the wine tourism domain. (Chrysakis 2022, pp. 1-2)

The reality, however, is rather different.[6] AR technologies have not yet provided a way of blending the various requirements in wine tourism marketing – at least in the Italian context. The process of constant adaptation and restructuring of wine bottle labelling is fraught in many parts of the world with controversies over the best way to achieve good solutions and best practices in the limited space available for example, on a printed back wine label. The added value of colour, for instance, has led some stakeholders in Australia's alcohol industry to advocate pregnancy warning labels on products that use red to enhance warnings, but others to express concerns about additional costs. Figure 5, an extract from an online news report, illustrates this particular controversy.

As the previous sections have explained, expectations for further development of wine labels linked to technologies other than QR codes abound, not merely as a way of abating increased costs of the labels that printed QR code labels certainly entail, but also as a way of expanding and exploiting labels in the linkage with tourism. Figure 6 represents a mock-up of the model that might have been expected to emerge. It takes as an example prestigious Friuli-Venezia-Giulia branding that appears both on the winery's bottle labels and on its website (https://liviofelluga.it/); the mock-up suggests how a bottom-right hand marker on the wine label in the form of an outline map of the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region might be read by a smartphone or tablet. Such a reading might be linked to a different set of genres concerned, for example, with an exploration of special places and buildings (Weston, 2003) in towns and cities in the region such as museums, churches and squares in contrast to the more rural contexts presented in Figures 3 and 4. The structured pathway presented in Figure 6 involves a step-by-step passage from one genre to

[6] Both these claims are accompanied with reference to specific wineries. In the first case, a brief mention is made by the winery in question https://kwv.co.za/cathedral-cellar-comes-to-life-with-augmented-reality-labels/ but with no visual illustration; in the second case, no reference was found on the English website of the named winery.

another, cementing user engagement through the transition from a historical map to a modern one.


"What should have been a simple exercise was made infinitely more complicated when bureaucrats at FRSC (Food Regulation Standing Committee) and FSANZ (Food Standards Australia New Zealand) continued to put forward a proposed design that was not in keeping with the clear direction given to them by Governments" (Young 2020)

Figure 5
Old and new wine label warnings on drinking during pregnancy
https://theshout.com.au/industry-backs-pregnancy-warnings-but-concerns-grow-on-colours-cost/


Figure 6
A simulated AR pathway: one way a prestigious wine label might promote FVG tourism.

However, a corpus-based analysis of 100 YouTube English-language videos selected on the basis of the video titles' reference to AR readings of wine labels, suggests that in the 2015-2023 period there were virtually no linkages between wine-labels, tourism and AR technologies. This appears to be due to the predominance of videos produced by AR companies, the precise

distribution being: 46 AR companies; 39 winery brands; 9 news reports; 6 wine associations. Moreover, as Figure 7 shows, even though an effort was made to include as many examples relating to Italy as possible, countries where English is the first language made up two-thirds of the corpus.

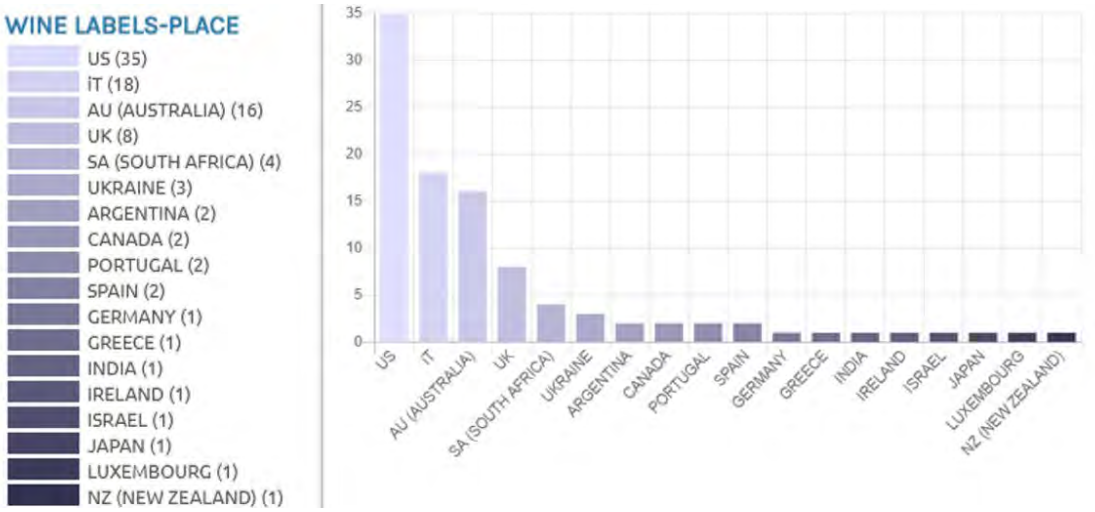



Figure 7
An OpenMWS printout of countries referenced in the AR readings of wine labels.

Despite the celebrated use of wine labels to tell crime-related stories (Wise, McLean 2021) that target a highly specific market segment,[7] many AR-enhanced wine label videos merely focus on the ease with which smartphone users can undertake such readings and are thus adverts advocating the use of this technology rather than wines or wine tourism. As Figure 8 shows, the focus is thus typically on special effects (e.g. of the floral type also present in Figure 10) rather than on structured pathways guiding wine consumers to tourist destinations as proposed in Figure 6; as Figure 3 above has shown, such pathways are in fact often implemented in winery websites. The general concern for illustrating special AR-generated effects is so strong that videos demonstrating AR's capacity to generate audio-enhanced labels (32 talking; 1 singing) do so without ever illustrating the use of voices as tour guides.

[7] As Wise and McLean (2021) point out "Using Augmented Reality and interactive story-telling, 19 Crimes wine labels feature convicts who had committed one or more of 19 crimes punishable by transportation to Australia from Britain. The marketing of sparkling wine using convict images and convict stories of transportation have not diminished the celebratory role of consuming "bubbly". Rather, in exploring the marketing techniques employed by the company, particularly when linked to the traditional drink of celebration, we argue that 19 Crimes, while fun and informative, nevertheless romanticises convict experiences and Australia's convict past"; see also Lyons (2020) and Szentpeteri (2018).


Figure 8
A typical AR company's promotion of consumer's use
of smartphones to read wine labels.

Figure 9 shows that the vast majority of the videos in the corpus illustrate a vertical smartphone position with just the eleven videos shown in Figure 9 illustrating mixed horizontal and vertical positions, with a further 4 videos (not shown) illustrating a horizontal position to the exclusion of a vertical one.

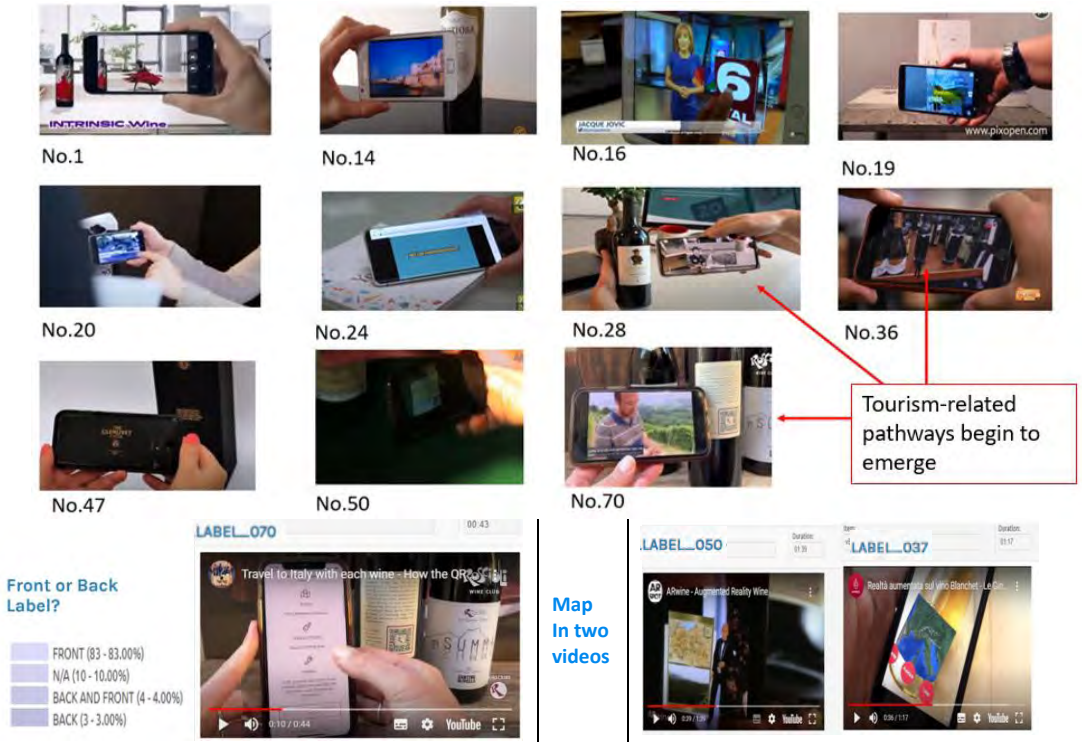



Figure 9
OpenMWS analytics: visual fact checking on AR wine label readings.

While three of the videos in Figure 9 show that a horizontal position will favour *enoturismo,* it is striking that in their 7,562 seconds of combined footage, the

videos only dedicated 79 seconds to the horizontal position (i.e. barely over one per cent). The much-claimed use of back labels proves to be restricted to a small percentage (7%) as does the inclusion of a map (2%). The creativity required in experiential marketing appears not to be taken into consideration with very few of the videos in the corpus bearing any relation to tourism.

## 4. Genre ecologies and marketing strategies

From what has been stated above in Section 2, it is clear that English-language marketing of wine-based tourism in Italy has relied heavily on individual companies' digital marketing. However, in the last fifteen years, specialist companies operating travel booking and tour planning for wine-related travel experiences have emerged; as well as allowing consumers to browse through wineries and to book tours, such sites provide services enabling wineries, smaller ones in particular, to participate in wine tourism.[8] Likewise, over a slightly longer timescale, regional institutions and small regional tour operators have emerged specializing in the marketing and execution of food and wine tours.[9] Such sites allow enthusiasts to immerse themselves in wine culture by acquiring information about the locations of various wineries and vineyards, their history, types of wine produced and tour availability. As such, these sites already constitute an immersive form of *enoturismo,* allowing consumers to experience the special features of a particular wine, or a particular winery. Yet, in recent years, within experiential marketing, such virtual journeys have taken a further immersive step by allowing consumers to buy a package consisting of a customised interactive online video tour while sitting at home enjoying the wine that has been shipped to them; hence:

> During the video calls guided by producers, participants will not only taste exquisite wines and gastronomic products but also have the opportunity to establish direct contacts with producers, enhancing the experience and

[8] Sites with Italian destinations include the following: *Divinea* (https://www.divinea.com/) with an English and Italian language site for bookings in many Italian regions (founded in 2019); *Windering* (https://www.winedering.com/) with a site in English, Italian, Spanish, French and German for bookings predominantly in Italy (founded in 2016); and *Winerist* (https://www.winerist.com/) an English-only website whose worldwide offering includes Italian destinations (founded in 2011); *Winetourism.com* (https://www.winetourism.com/), founded in 2018, with bookings in claims to be the "largest online booking platform designed to make wine tastings and tours more accessible to interested wine drinkers around the globe" (https://www.winetourism.com/about-us /).

[9] Examples of the many such regional tour operator sites directed to English-speaking audiences include: *Arianna & Friends* https://www.ariannandfriends.com/wine-food-tours/ (founded in 2007; *Abruzzo With Gusto tours* https://abruzzowithgusto.com (founded in 2002) and *Beescover* https://www.beescover.com/en which defines itself as "*una Community dedicata al turismo sostenibile ed esperienziale nel Triveneto*" (i.e. a Community dedicated to sustainable and experiential tourism in the North East area of Italy).

> solidifying the bonds between the team and the vibrant world of Italian winemaking. (https://divinea.com/blog/en/online-wine-tasting/#how-it-works)

When promoted through social media, such as YouTube videos, the realignment in the genre set deployed in the marketing of such packages emerges even more clearly; seeking customer engagement and bonding, already present in the previous example, is more forcefully expressed in the following instance where the focus falls on stories not about the product itself but about the people who make it:

> A presentation of our exclusive service: a private wine tasting session of 90 minutes associated to a wine box that we ship to you. First of all you choose the wine box you prefer among our offers. Then we will set a live streaming online guided wine sampling session in which our guide will present all wines and tell you a lot of interesting stories about the wine makers and the company. (Guided wine sampling session with Tuscan wine & food tour guide02: Arianna and Friends https://youtu.be/45cCynSk6iI).

Invariably, this type of marketing visualises the use of computers rather than smartphones with the result that, as Figure 10 shows, AR-based smartphone readings are seldom used for the purposes of promoting wine tourism.

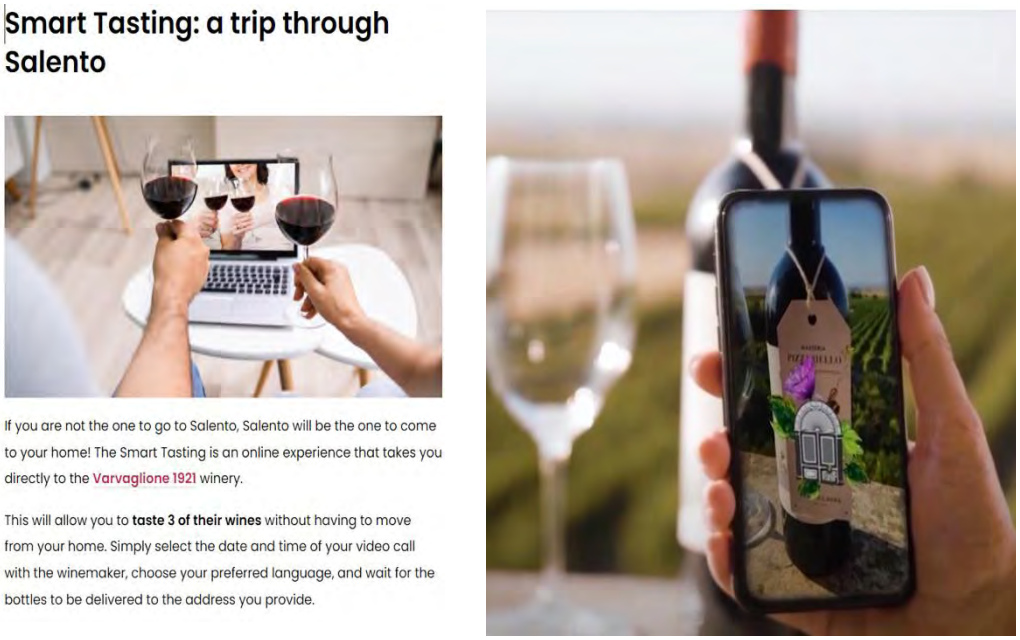



Figure 10
Left: https://divinea.com/blog/en/salento-vacations-7-winery-experiences-you-cant-miss/; #smart-tasting-salento; Right: https://youtu.be/kNp1E2X6Fd8; at 1'3"

Indeed, while the left-hand side of Figure 10 illustrates the home-to-winery link, the right-hand side shows a frame in which the very same brand,

Varvaglione1921, has experimented with smartphone-read labels. The latter solution is presented as little more than an eye-catching experiment in various media reports and is absent in the company's website (https://www.varvaglione.com/en/) whose genre set resembles that of other websites such as the one analysed in Figure 3 albeit with some media-oriented additions.[10]

## 5. Conclusions

This chapter has provided a brief study about how genres relating to wine promoting tourism marketing might be explored, one that interprets the need to "unveil the multifaceted aspects of tourism discourse by offering an analysis of traditional tourism genres from a professional and promotional perspective and, at the same time, [proposing], new investigations carried out on novel and interdiscursive genres characterized by unconventional forms of communication pervading our contemporary society." (Maci 2020, p. *i*). When attempting to interpret such a need, the chapter has included the results of analyses of websites and a corpus of 100 videos, a basis for fuller CMDA corpus-based fact-checking that helps establish how tradition and innovation offset each other in a constant game of potential and actual realignments of the genre sets used in *enoturismo* in Italy. At a time when wine-related tourism is being consolidated by digital marketing, updating and extending the original corpus to focus more specifically on Italian wines and wineries will allow testing of the assumption that AR will, in the future, register a shift from being a technological seven-day wonder to one promoting wine tourism more substantially. While traditionally glossaries are viewed as subordinate subtexts in printed volumes, in the digital world their functions have changed becoming part of the set of genres used in marketing to reach a wide variety of audiences. So far, AR applications to wine labels have relied on a limited range of genres, and have failed to support *enoturismo*. Potentially hybrid solutions combining, for example glossaries (Piccardo 2010; Rossi 2009a/b, 2013) and examples from other industries where AR technologies have encouraged virtual tours might provide a way forward (Baldry *et al.* 2023). However, inventing new multimodal genre sets for marketing purposes presupposes an ability to analyse how multimodal genres work together in specific contexts. Thus, besides posing questions that need further detailed answers in future research, the chapter has outlined the methodological bases through which a corpus-based resource, as well as being capable of supplying fact-checked responses to

[10] Specifically, the main menu bar includes BLOG, PRESS and GALLERY media marketing options, where the term GALLERY refers to social media outlets such as YOUTUBE and INSTAGRAM.

marketing claims, might better capture the notion of structured pathways. This is further discussed in the second part of this two-part study.

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# EXPLORING GENRES RELATING TO TOURISM MARKETING
# Part 2: Building OpenMWS as an integrated corpus-based platform for engagement with social media resources

ANTHONY BALDRY, DAVIDE TAIBI

**Abstract** – This chapter adds to the chapter by Kantz and Baldry (*this volume*) by providing a second perspective on tourism marketing genres in the digital age: it explores the effects of AR and AI technologies for would-be tourists and for users in the field of Education by encouraging the development of structured pathways that potentially enrich and amplify the SG (serious game) genre. The proposed developments include, in particular, the integration of podcast and video corpora so as to anchor SG simulation in explorations of real places and reconstructions of their place in history. The desire to provide a better interplay between entertainment and knowledge about people and places is backed up by suggestions of how current authoring tools could be reworked to provide a single platform through which users, whether teachers, tourists, students or others, can access pre-existing structured pathways and/or easily add to them.

**Keywords**: social media; tourism marketing; structured pathways; AI/AR technologies

## 1. Introduction

"When is a place not a place?" As Figure 1 shows, one of the many possible answers to this riddle is when, as is the case with the blue plaques in cities like London, somewhat anonymous and rather uninspiring buildings become part of a virtual network of places associated with historical figures; once part of cyberspace, such buildings come to acquire a special cultural significance unrelated to their physical form. A building's meaning potential (O'Toole 2004, p. 15) thus comes to be transformed: specialised icons like London's blue plaques mark them out as enticing starting points for storytelling journeys and gateways to explorations about people and places. When part of classroom experiments or projects, users quickly discover the potential such icons have to become a source of insightful reflection on a digital society that constantly



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repurposes (Bolter, Grusin 1999) and adds new meanings to its texts and genres: as Figure 1 shows, blue plaques recall an often-forgotten past, a first step in regenerating interest in places so branded.


Figure 1
Branding buildings.

Below we explore the provision of specialised technological supports and pedagogical foundations for the use of video and podcast corpora that document and encourage virtual explorations of people, places and the activities associated with them: our brief exploration of tourism marketing genres focuses on virtual tourism linked to famous people in cities like London and to wine-related virtual tourism in regions like Friuli Venezia Giulia. When describing these supports, we assume that, behind virtual explorations, lies a need for critical awareness of the multimodal nature of texts and genres and of the empowerment that such awareness brings (Baldry, Thibault 2006; Kress, van Leeuwen 2021; Vasta 2020a, 2020b); such awareness will often be stimulated by 'reworking' places as stories that transcend reality, a good example of which is blue plaques' propensity to initiate imaginative explorations as demonstrated by the video series *Plaque to the Future*; as shown in Figure 2, the first episode in this series links a miniature blue plaque, similar to the one in Figure 1, to an imaginary Iconophone Switchboard, that allows Ada, a contemporary teenager, to cross space and time and engage in a fictitious but witty conversation with Virginia Woolf.


Figure 2
The blue plaque remediated as a memento of a time-bridging Iconophone call.

Figure 2 thus points to one answer to the aforementioned riddle: now transformed into a medallion, the blue plaque acts as a memento of a 'phone call' that took place a century earlier, or more precisely in 1925. In other words, though still visually and intertextually referencing the original plaque, the icon has become an interface providing access to the fictional worlds and fantasies enacted as structured pathways in this video series. Each such pathway in this series is based on careful diachronic research into past vs. present contrasts and relies for its implementation on young people's eagerness to participate in the series' realisation.[1] In the case of *The Woolf of Callstreet* episode described above, the pathway took the form of question-and-answer routines within a fictitious conversation encouraging reflection between past and present and included feminist-related observations about differences between today's world and the past, but also more veiled comparisons about the transformation over time that has affected phone calls: as described below, mobile technologies such as smartphones underpin today's tourism marketing

[1] For *Plaque to the Future* and *Plaque to Basics* see *Shout Out Loud's* YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/@shoutoutloud1941); for details on *Shout Out Loud,* English Heritage's national youth engagement programme, see https://www.shoutoutloud.org.uk/about/. Each episode in the Plaque *to the Future* series has a follow-up episode in which the actors and production team discuss how the episode was researched and acted out; in the episode in question audio recordings of Virginia Woolf's voice were analysed so as to foreground contrasts between today's oral discourse and that of Londoners 100 years or so ago. The *Ways to get involved* section of the *Shout Out Loud* web page advises that if "Aged between 11–16 and part of a youth group, you may be able to take part in our creative projects" and that "If you're 18 or over you can apply for a paid placement. Roles include social media, film-making, research, and evaluation" [sites retrieved May 7, 2024].

subgenres (Bengesser, Waade 2021; Kim, Law 2015; Garau 2014) in a way that landlines never did.

In keeping with *Plaque to the Future*'s thought-provoking comparative approach, the current chapter adds to the illustration of the potential/actual outcomes of teacher/student partnerships in relation to tourism marketing genres in a digital world heavily influenced by Artificial Intelligence and Augmented Reality (henceforth AI and AR). The challenges represented by AI, and, in particular, generative AI tools such as ChatGPT (Schicchi *et al*. 2023), are such to warrant critical assessment of their potential when investigating specific tourism marketing subgenres. The same is true of AR, where the authors have broached the issue of AR semiosis in relation to the *Blended Realities* corpus (Baldry *et al.* 2023) hosted on the specialised video corpus hosting platform, OpenMWS (http://openmws.itd.cnr.it) that they have designed in collaboration with others for the construction and annotation of audio and video digital corpora (Taibi 2020, 2023; Baldry, Kantz 2022; Baldry *et al.* 2020; Bianchi *et al.* 2022). Indeed, the *Blended Realities* corpus, which includes simulations relevant to virtual tours of 'indoor' and 'outdoor' places (Baldry *et al.* 2022), is the result of online partnerships based on research agreements between ITD/CNR and Italian University departments providing users, teachers and students alike, with online distance-learning resources and guidance in the construction of digital corpora;[2] the OpenMWS project does so with reference to the possibilities for analysis of videos and podcasts accessed virtually (Arizzi 2021; Cambria 2023; Coccetta 2022). In the furtherance of the aforesaid partnerships, what follows explores two case studies envisaging greater integration of AR and AI in the construction and management of the structured pathways that, ultimately, this chapter seeks to characterise and, where possible, define.

## 2. Case Study n° 1: AR as a support for structured pathways

Figure 2 shows that London is, and has been since the 19th century, home to the eye-catching blue roundels illustrated in Figures 1 and 3, a specialised subgenre through which many buildings in London that would otherwise have attracted little, if any, attention have collectively come to be branded within a celebratory network creating tourist-linked economic opportunities ranging from grassroots ventures such as walking tours suitable for "those visitors who

[2] Four such partnerships between ITD/CNR (co-ordinated by Davide Taibi) and University Departments have been set up to develop the OpenMWS platform: in temporal order, they are: DILL, University of Udine (co-ordinated by Nicoletta Vasta), DSLCC, Ca' Foscari-Venezia (co-ordinated by Francesca Coccetta), DICAM, Messina (co-ordinated by Mariavita Cambria and Maria Grazia Sindoni) and DSU, Salento (co-ordinated by Francesca Bianchi and Elena Manca).

want to construct their own experiences from the raw materials that the city provides" (Maitland 2007, p. 85) to institutional ones such as charity-based fund-raising or investment in downgraded areas (Smith, Graham 2019). However, in the smartphone age, such a network of icons is also a clear invitation to use AR technologies as a means for "escaping from the institutional limitations of each separate genre, program, or website, to make something uniquely our own and uniquely free" (Lemke 2009, p. 291).


Figure 3
English Heritage on London's Blue Plaques: https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/

As such, AR technologies constitute an entry point into what Lemke has called *transmedia traversals* through which, by hopping "between websites, across institutional, genre, and even language and culture boundaries […] we are stretching our penchant for making meaningful wholes to its limit" (Lemke 2009, p. 291). Indeed, the combination of the real world as seen by users and the virtual world, as it were 'generated by a computer', augments reality by integrating visual and/or verbal information to what is seen in 'real' life, and thus challenges us to go beyond conventional boundaries.

As well as by a computer, such traversals are made possible using a mobile device such as a smartphone or a tablet; besides hypertext links, they can make use of marker-based links between texts: thus, for a tourist visiting London and wanting to learn more about a person mentioned on a blue plaque, a simpler and faster alternative to entering the name of the person on their smartphone and browsing through web pages is to access the many YouTube

videos associated with the person in question by simply framing the plaque with the smartphone's camera, i.e. without even taking a snapshot. A further step is to match this 'marker frame' against a pre-existing database of icons and to follow a structured pathway made available, for example, by a platform such as ARLectio (Farella *et al.* 2020, 2021; https://www.arlectio.eu/). This prototype AR authoring system recognises smartphone or tablet markers and, with its simple user interface and limited set of functions, is designed to facilitate the application of AR to written texts, videos and images. Since ARLectio works with preconstituted sets of virtual markers, it provides many affordances for virtual tourism in educational contexts and, with further development, could be used in tandem with other resources, such as the OpenMWS platform, to explore the use of AR resources. For instance, as suggested in Figure 4, one of the blue plaques in the subnetworks *de facto* established by the professional roles of those celebrated (writers, scientists, musicians and politicians) might be used as a pathway's starting point for an integrated ARLectio/OpenMWS pathway.

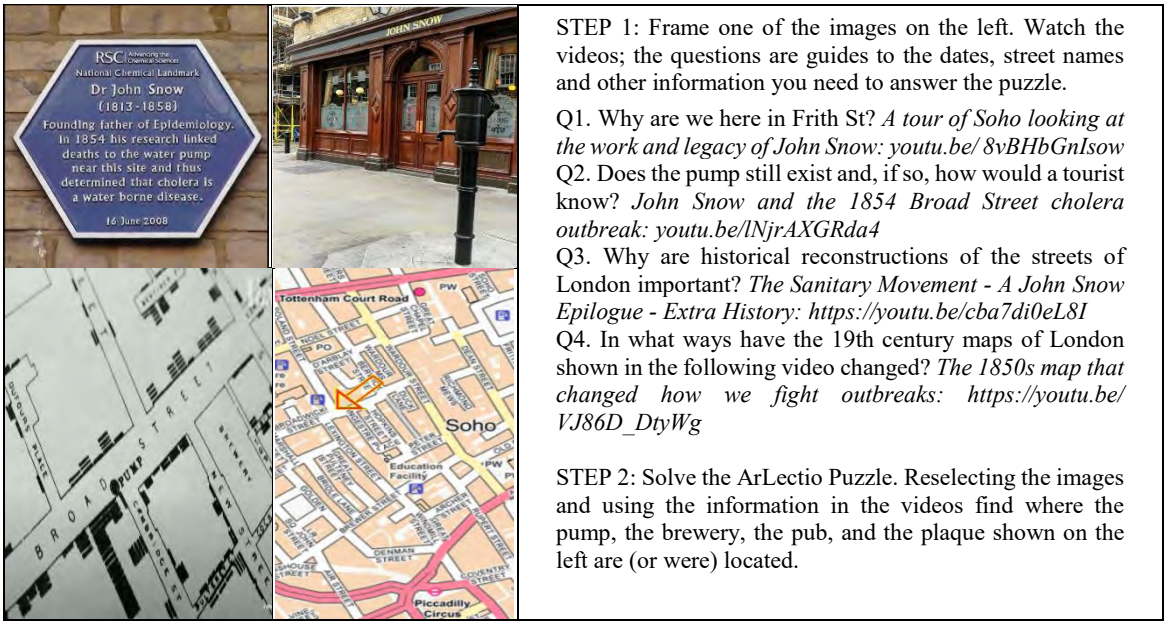


Figure 4
A structured pathway: a video playlist as a series of steps to solving an AR puzzle.

Indeed, Figure 4 relates to the possibility of exploring (and ultimately marketing) London's connections with biomedical sciences through a pathway recalling the achievements of scientists who lived in London, based on selections from the many videos about them found on video-hosting platforms

such as YouTube or Vimeo.[3] The goal of such a pathway might be to signal the relevance of visual information in the breakthroughs achieved by scientists such as John Snow: the segments of videos selected for viewings could very well relate to the maps of London that he annotated in his quest to demonstrate, by pinpointing the source of the cholera outbreak (the pump shown in Figure 4), that cholera was waterborne and not airborne. In so doing, the role of maps, tables and charts, and their relevance to tourism marketing genres, would be highlighted (Baldry, Thibault 2006, pp. 24-34); indeed, in the example illustrated, as part of a virtual historical tour of 'scientific' London, the links between people, places and the origins of a particular science (in this case epidemiology) would be highlighted.

The pathway posited in Figure 4 is a two-step puzzle in which the successful completion of the second step is dependent on solving the first: indeed, when accessing the pathway, a user's mobile device frames one of the four images shown (whether as a digital or printed resource), allowing the user, by way of introduction, to watch an explanatory video linked to that image-cum-marker. The relevant video sequences can then be viewed in any order to grasp the scientific thinking underpinning the pathway, and especially the temporal and causal aspects involved. However, until users have acquired a complete picture, their attempts to proceed to the second step in the puzzle are blocked: the puzzle is completed by correctly locating the correct square on a map of today's London suitably divided into many such squares. This is also designed to be an AR-supported learning experience and, as such, is based on a Treasure Hunt case study (Farella *et al.* 2020, 2021), which road-tested the ARLectio framework as an authoring support when engaging with AR technologies. Like all treasure hunts, the experiment included various challenges and enigmas to be solved by middle school children and, for example, included a "We respect our Earth" sustainability-oriented puzzle exploring an aquatic environment in relation to the themes of animal extinction, climate change, pollution and water contamination.

The pathway posited in Figure 4 attempts to simplify the authoring task by re-using first-step images in the second step. Even so, from an authoring standpoint, this pathway requires video selections to be made that involve AI-based techniques, such as working memory, to keep track of the various sequencing permutations and hence decide which next steps in a given pathway a user may take. To this end, adjustments would be required to both the ARLectio and OpenMWS platforms to improve their capacity to select, display and switch between specific video sequences, while discarding others. However, beyond such technical adjustments, there is a greater need to come

[3] See the English Heritage page calling for greater representation of scientists (https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about-us/search-news/more-blue-plaques-for-scientists/ [retrieved May 11, 2024]).

to terms with the genre and subgenre configurations lying behind such an endeavour, as this is likely to encourage more sophisticated pathways (Taibi 2020) than the simple two-step solution illustrated above. Indeed, one of the goals of the initial development of ARLectio was to demonstrate how AR can be used to teach and communicate by borrowing from the architecture of the serious games (hereafter SG) subgenre interpreted as "an application with three components: experience, entertainment, and multimedia" (Laamarti *et al*. 2014, p. 4) in which the user's experience of reality is preserved in a way that will "narrow the gap between virtual and real spaces, enabling experiential learning techniques to be more readily and effectively applied" (Liarokapis *et al.* 2017, p. 372).

Since data relating to participant activities can be collected and analysed to monitor learning experiences, the structured pathways in question are not a-free-for-all-experience but rather an empirical basis on which to carry out research since quanti-qualitative data can be gathered and analysed (Taibi 2021). Yet, while, as a result of such research, the SG subgenre has evolved to include immersive experiences, it cannot be overlooked that efforts to reconcile the gap between real and virtual spaces will often embrace different subgenres: for example, the use of AR to visualize a museum's artefacts digitally is unlikely to adopt the structured pathway solution described above unless further development (see Section 3) is undertaken to re-imagine how users interact with such artefacts. While the Treasure Hunt map SG is certainly well established (Bellotti 2013; Lameras 2015), and can make good use of AR technology (as participants compete to reach different target locations by correctly interpreting the clues proposed to them),[4] such an SG is far from being the only framework for the structured pathways envisaged.

## 3. Case Study n° 2: AI supports for podcasting as a marketing genre and its interpretation by students

Hence the description in this Section of a different interpretation of activity-based tourism marketing which potentially merges the two different 'worlds' of the Museum Visit and Treasure Hunt subgenres (Baldry 2012); the former is predominantly concerned with indoor spaces, the latter with outdoor spaces, but both require critical thinking about the meaning potential of space, such as the mutual positioning of objects and people within space (Benford *et al* 1994;

[4] An example of this is where, in the Treasure Hunt experiment described above, the problem of pollution from factories to groundwater was posed, with the participants asked to solve a physics problem: using an AR chart, they had to work out how many years it takes to restore environmental contamination caused by the spillage of harmful substances (Farella *et al.* 2021, p. 152).

Licoppe, Inada 2008; McMurtrie 2016) and how to manage this within the types of structured pathway posited in this chapter.

This case study looks at the step-by-step inclusion of generative AI, and in particular ChatGPT3.5, in the furtherance of an SG template capable not just of incorporating the visual and the sonoral, but also of approaching the analysis of tourism marketing genres through the comparative but corpus-based lens of critical multimodal discourse analysis (hereafter CMDA) incorporated within the framework of interactive software (O'Halloran *et al*. 2011). That the structured pathways in question can extend the corpus-based structured pathways described above to the voices and sounds of wine-based tourism marketing has never been in doubt: numerous podcasts and videocasts about wine production and marketing in specific Italian regions, such as Friuli-Venezia-Giulia (hereafter FVG), now exist as illustrated in the top row of Figure 5, which relates to the construction of a pilot podcast corpus about FVG wines and vineyards.[5]

What was, and still is, in doubt is instead the development of frameworks for the critical awareness of the likely impact of AI and AR technologies on tourism marketing genres. Take, for example, another instance of icon-based branding of places, namely the brass cobble-stone commemorations that lead tourists to bend down in streets, read and take photos of these miniature plaques so as to share this experience with others; known in Italy as *pietre d'incampio*: each of these stumbling stones (from the German original *Stolperstein*)[6] names deportation victims who died in Nazi concentration camps. Since each such stone is found embedded in the road where the victim lived, it requires little imagination to see how a structured pathway could be devised linking up the individual experiences of tourists as they tour FVG, with, for example, indoor, museum-based commemorations of a collective nature, such as the museum in FVG's capital, Triest, which is dedicated to these victims.[7]

[5] The corpus is constructed using an Excel-based template which when uploaded to the OpenMWS platform produces the searchable sequence-based corpora described. The Excel template used consists of three sheets: the first (*Overview*) includes playlist data such as the title, address and duration of the audio (mp3) and video (mp4) files included in the corpus, with each file typically corresponding to an episode in a video or podcast series; the second (*Transcripts*) contains the transcription of what is said in each of these files, divided into time-stamped sequences corresponding to speaker turns within the exchanges characterising interview-based podcasts or, in the case of single-speaker narratives, reflecting the division into microphases (Baldry and Thibault 2020); the third (*Multi-summaries*) contains summaries of each episode, with the possibility of providing more than one summary per video. In this case, the pilot FGV wine and vineyard corpus was constructed under the research agreement between ITD/CNR and the DSU Department, University of Salento.

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stolperstein [retrieved May 11, 2024].

[7] https://www.museoebraicotrieste.it/en/digital-map-of-the-trieste-stumbling-stones/ [retrieved May 11, 2024].

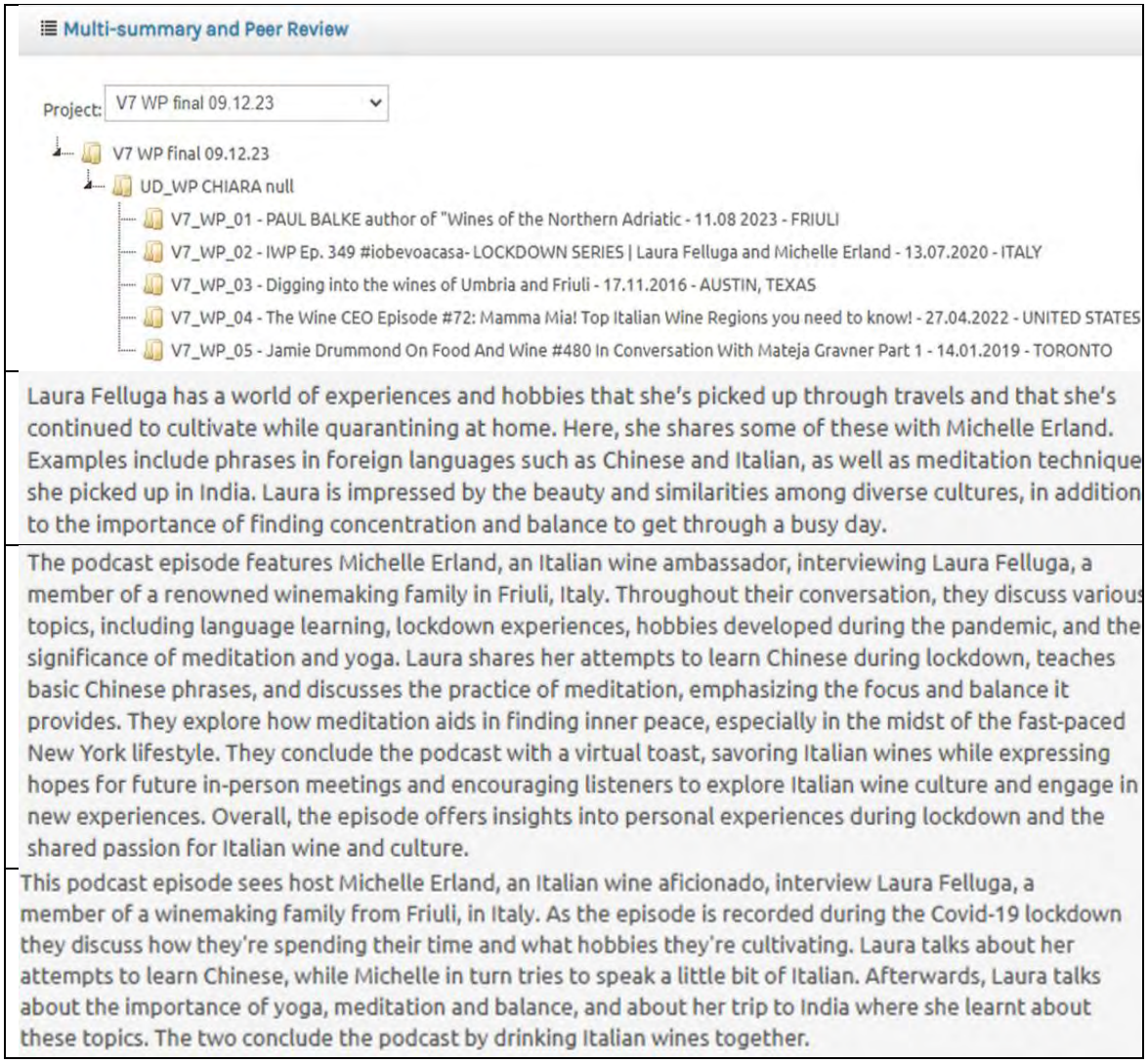


Figure 5
A pilot video and podcast corpus for FVG wines and vineyards.

However, within the authoring perspective that underlies this chapter, such an undertaking presupposes the existence of templates which, as indicated above, facilitate the co-existence within the SG subgenre of various other genres, while remaining within the reasonable learning curves achieved for corpus construction in the OpenMWS project with the use of Excel-based templates. Such templates need to encapsulate other genres. One example that meets this criterion is the reusable template model (Baldry *et al.* 1994), designed with a view to training university students in the complexities of oral discourse: this template consisted in "a re-usable, application-independent model of interaction […] which links a tactical level […] to a metalevel which provides a move-by-move commentary on interactional theory" (Baldry *et al.* 1994, p. 27). In other words, in this solution the structured pathways described above now transcend the tactical game-oriented level of many SGs; their gated-access techniques are extended beyond conditioning and constraining the next-step

moves in an SG puzzle and function instead as the gateway to a strategic, metatextual level that comments on the users' various moves as they work through the SG; this metatextual level will typically take the form of a pyramid-like hierarchy of increasingly abstract theoretical concepts that users can only access having made smart (or maybe dumb) moves. In this respect, the step forward that the OpenMWS research project makes is to replace the typical simulated discourse of SG applications with a data-driven approach (Coccetta 2022) in which corpus-based data provides an appropriate balance between real discourse, theory-related interpretations and an SG's fun-and-games entertainment.

At the tactical level, one such re-usable model might cast the end-user as an imaginary tourist visiting FVG encountering real places and the real experiences of other tourists (both of these video and/or podcast-based) while, at the strategic level, it might take the form of a CMDA-based exploration simulating the interactions of an online travel research company, such as TripAdvisor, which defines itself as "a family of brands that connects people to experiences worth sharing" (https://ir.tripadvisor.com/). Such a model would specifically include analysis of AI and AR affordances: while posts on TripAdvisor show that today's savvy travellers already know about the network of stumbling stones found in Italy, on the other hand, TripAdvisor has only recently introduced "generative AI & Large Language Models (LLMs) to distil user reviews into a helpful and intuitive set of review summaries" (Varuni, Raja 2024). Thus, on the one hand, such a reusable template could provide links to the various travel trajectories described in the various articles in this volume, or, on the other hand, it could be used, for instance to explore experiences of space: for example, bending down to take a picture of a stumbling stone requires an unusual and, for some, a difficult orientation in space whose description can benefit from the theory-based analyses and exemplifications of space mentioned above; the same goes for map-based visits where it might be expected that the wine labels described in the previous chapter (Kantz, Baldry, *this volume*) would constitute the initial marker.

The development of such SG models is a step-by-step procedure. A preliminary step in this otherwise forthcoming research relates to the likelihood that tourists' interactions with online travel research sites such as TripAdvisor, Expedia, Booking.com describing their tourist experiences (e.g. evaluating hotel stays) will become increasingly interactive with both parties (i.e. the 'site' and the individuals using the site) using generative AI in their efforts to synthesize and summarise their experiences. Accordingly, already armed with wariness about "Ask AI to do anything" claims, a group of university students was asked to explore summary writing in relation to the pilot podcast corpus

about FVG wines and vineyards described above.[8] Three types of summaries were envisaged: the first taken from the podcast website; the second, a podcast summary generated by ChatGPT on the basis of the transcription of the podcast that the students undertook; the third a summary produced by the students themselves. Unlike the ChatGPT summaries, the students' summaries were characterised by an interesting emphasis on crucial details missed by the automatic system. A student user can *see* events and *hear* sounds and can thus report what people *did* and what *happened* that (at the time of writing) freely available AI tools such as ChatGPT3.5 cannot, except where explicitly stated in the documents they are fed with – in the case of the OpenMWS project, the written transcripts of what is said by podcast and video participants.

Figure 5 reproduces part of the *Multisummary and Peer Evaluation* functionality that OpenMWS uses to display these different types of summaries through which critical comparisons of summary writing can be made (Cambria 2023). A crucial element that is missing in all three summaries is that the genre in question is that of a video call in which the two speakers are linked in time but not space. There is nothing in the first summary – taken from the YouTube page for Michelle and Livia Felluga's Lockdown Series chat (https://youtu.be/iDcoWKZ55TM) – to suggest that the two participants are not in the same room but instead communicating in a video call. Likewise, although the second summary produced by ChatGPT3.5 describes a 'virtual toast', it fails to explain that this toast was not directed to viewers but, instead, referred to the fact that the participants could not clink their glasses together as they were separated by hundreds of miles. Only the last summary (the one by the student) explicitly states that the video was 'recorded during the Covid 19 lockdown'; as such, of the three, it comes closest to recognising that this is an example of a video call; that the student had known this, is suggested by her emphatic use of "together" as the very last word in the summary: this seems to mean that despite their physical distance, a video call still allows the two participants to partially perform the synchronised, co-ordinated actions that they would have taken if they had been in the same place. All three summaries present shortcomings as regards the identification of generic features that a combined SG tactical/strategic template would potentially resolve by

[8] See the *Advanced manuals page* http://openmws.itd.cnr.it/pages/advanced_manuals.jsf. This is the part of the OpenMWS platform which hosts the online manuals produced by students in relation to AI supports within the CNR-University partnerships. One of the first of these illustrates the simple prompts needed to convert a pre-existing transcription into a ChatGPT-generated summary and further explains that once inserted into the *Multi-summaries* sheet of the Excel template, that when uploaded to OpenMWS a title to will be automatically associate to the summary by retrieving it from the Excel template's *Overview* sheet. Other manuals produced by students relate to AI support in storyboarding and speech-to-text conversion in the production of transcripts, e.g., through the combined use of TurboScribe and ChatGPT.

guaranteeing a CMDA metatextual level without which the role of genres in guiding social interactions would be sorely missed.

## 4. Conclusion

In this paper we have explored genres relating to tourism marketing as springboards for other initiatives that lie beyond tourism and financial gain and which instead focus on Education and training within an interdisciplinary framework which views the multimodal features of place branding as a centrepiece for academic research. The chapter has described the interdisciplinary foundations so far undertaken to create easily accessible but culturally-inspired virtual journeys that enhance an understanding of people and places and the co-existence of present and past times. In many cases we have resisted using AI merely for the sake of using AI where simpler techniques perform as well or better. However, we ourselves could not resist the temptation to ask ChatGPT3.5 for answers to the riddle posed at the outset. The prompts given in relation to the "When is a place not a place?" riddle generated the following answers:

> "When it is in a state of flux or change." In other words, a place ceases to be defined as a fixed location when it is constantly changing, thus not fitting the usual static notion of a "place." […]
> "When it exists only in the mind." This suggests that a place that is imagined or dreamed of is not a tangible, physical place, but rather a creation of thought.
> "When it is a metaphor." Sometimes we refer to concepts like "a dark place" or "a good place" metaphorically, rather than as physical locations.
> "When it is a transition." A place might not be considered a stable, fixed location when it is merely a point of transition, like a train station or an airport.
> "When it is a memory." A remembered place exists in the past and in the mind, not in the present physical world.

Though expanding the concept of place beyond physical locations, in many respects, the definitions were little more than a summary of the various evolutionary, metaphorical, real vs. virtual perspectives described above of what a "place" can be considered to mean. ChatGPT certainly demonstrated an intriguing pattern-matching capacity to mimic wording conventions of riddles. For example, when asked to give an answer rhyming with the word *place*, the response complied with the fact that genre norms will guide and constrain the microstructures used, in this case those typical of Q&A routines:

> "Sure! A rhyming answer to the riddle 'When is a place not a place?' could be: 'When it's just empty space'."

However, a better answer might have been "*no longer* an empty space *but one full of meaning*". Indeed, while acknowledging that ChatGPT plays a significant role in stimulating critical commentaries and reflection on the relationship between textual and metatextual levels in discourse, the authors contend that as regards the contribution that specific technologies can make when exploring, for example, genres relating to tourism marketing, valuable solutions will emerge from the use of AI and AR only when they are combined with other tools, whether conceptual, pedagogical and/or technological in nature. Research of the interdisciplinary type envisaged in joint CNR-University research projects, such as the OpenMWS project, is thus needed to ensure that such a toolkit is constantly in place.

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# MUSEUM OF THE SEA AND ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY. RETHINKING MUSEUMS IN MILAZZO

CRISTINA ARIZZI

**Abstract** – Siso is the skeleton of a sperm whale that hangs from the vaulted ceiling of a deconsecrated church in the castle of Milazzo, a coastal city in the North-East of Sicily. Siso was stranded below the cliffs along the Milazzo peninsula in 2017 and its skeleton was rescued and reconstructed by a small group of volunteers in the deconsecrated church that would soon become the site of MUMA, Museo del Mare (https://www.mumamilazzo.com/site/). Siso's huge body with its tail helplessly entangled in one of the many illegal fishing nets abandoned in the sea shack, tugged on the local population's conscience and changed their vision of museums, tourism, and ecology. Starting as a private endeavour, MUMA has now established various forms of collaboration with local institutions and offers experiences to visitors that include, but go beyond, digitalisation, virtual and augmented reality. In particular, MUMA identifies as an inspirational and educational site where visitors, children in particular, participate, experience, and undertake a Dantesque path towards a novel awareness of the need to protect the sea and its creatures. MUMA is now a partner of the Chersoneso D'Oro ecomuseum, a community-based heritage project that supports sustainable development and offers tourists with experiential opportunities. The chapter concludes with some reflections on how grassroots realities such as ecomuseums can shape the perception people have of the place where they live or they visit. Such participatory realities encourage further cooperation and foster the improvement and appreciation of the natural environment and historical heritage.

**Keywords:** museums, museum of the sea, ecomuseum, ecosophy, ecological identity

## 1. Introduction

This chapter investigates the role of museums in projecting values and framing the identity of a place. The focus is on the case of Milazzo, a small resort at the northern-most point of Sicily's coastline, as a way to reflect on the best practices of creating (and maintaining) such a place's cultural and ecological identity (Clayton, Opotow 2003; Milstein, Castro-Sotomayor 2020) – one that will possibly provide the city with a novel place in the tourism imaginary of Sicily. In fact, despite its numerous natural and architectural attractions, the

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potential for tourism in Milazzo has never been fully exploited. Today Milazzo is trying to redeem itself from its reputation as a refinery city, the result of the financial choices made in the early 1960's that favoured industry rather than tourism; it wants to prove its inclination towards a more harmonious coexistence with nature, starting with the sea that is the primary element of its natural environment. This evolution is engrained in an innovative museum driven by a bottom-up impulse to modernization and change. The Museum of the Sea (in Italian *Museo del Mare*, hereafter MUMA), provides the specific case analysed below and offers the opportunity to reflect on the connection between a place and its natural environment, in this case a city and the sea that surrounds it, reflecting on how it forges the values concerning sea preservation and how it can promote proactive behaviour.

MUMA embodies the characteristics of an ecomuseum being an offspring of positive interaction between private initiative and local institutions and is connected in a network with other partners insisting on the territory, such as Area Marina Protetta and the ecomuseum Chersoneso D'Oro. Starting from the specific story of MUMA and the analysis of its website, the chapter intends to reflect on what kind of identity for cities museums will shape and how they will maintain it over time.

## 2. Place branding, museums and innovation

Places have always promoted the image they want to be identified with through the conceptual, but more often than not through the visual association with local cultural, aesthetic, architectonic, historical peculiarities. Logos and visual images are associated with places and disseminated as a means of place promotion. This type of promotion leads people to respond to place names in the same way as they respond to brand names, with positive or negative associations generated by the symbols or visuals that accompany the place name. Thus, the process of place branding refers to diverse attempts at enhancing the brand image of a place in ways that are believed to make the place famous (Anholt 2010). Place marketing and place branding are considered emergent scientific domains; however, despite existing since the 1970s, they still suffer from a lack of conceptual clarity and theoretical foundation, with conflicting definitions that make the identification of the subject matter somewhat confused (Vuignier 2017). However, investigation on place marketing and place branding has generated intense dissemination of best practices resulting in a positive impact on the development of places in terms of tourism. Thanks to place branding, in fact, a distinct positive identity of a place (Qazimi 2014), be it a city, region, or country, is clearly and effectively communicated, thus enhancing the reputation of a place, making it memorable

and distinguishable from its competitors. Apart from visitors and potential investors, place branding also appeals to local residents, fostering community pride and possibly creating job opportunities. Unique local attributes, cultural heritage, and economic opportunities are emphasised creating a cohesive image of the place that resonates globally. Effective place branding can boost tourism, attract talent, and drive economic growth by positioning the place as a desirable and vibrant destination.

As instances of the diverse resources an area offers, museums play a significant role in the complex process of place branding. Museums act as cultural and historical vehicles that help define the identity and uniqueness of a place. Apart from showcasing local art, history, and heritage, museums serve as iconic landmarks, contributing to the overall narrative and image that a place aims to project through its branding efforts. In this perspective, the function and identity of museums need to be rethought: traditionally filled with exhibitions and artifacts, museums are undergoing an evolution as regards their offer that has expanded to include diverse multimodal and sensorial exhibitions (e.g. Cortez 2023; Ostman *et al.* 2023). The implementation of a museum's offer thanks to virtual and augmented reality (Baradaran Rahimi *et al.* 2022) has led to hybrid museums that combine physical artifacts and virtual and augmented reality displays that change how museums are perceived and improve audience experiences.

Moreover, the very essence of museums is challenged by the new practice of ecomuseums (Davis 2011; Reina 2014), i.e., a community-driven heritage project that aids sustainable development (Davis 2007). Only indirectly is the prefix "eco" referred to the preservation of the natural environment; instead, it refers to the local nature of the private initiative which, in practice, however, very often works to conserve natural and cultural heritage. The concept of ecomuseums is based on the integration of cultural and natural heritage, emphasizing community involvement, and advancing sustainable development. In her definition of ecomuseums, Stokrocki (1996) emphasises the difference in perception between ecomuseums and traditional museums: "Usually we think of a museum as a storehouse of arts objects, a temple of goods, and culture in a box. [...] the ecomuseum is a communal place of integral relationships – one of organisms living in harmony with their past, present and future environment. This concept of a community learning centre mediates transitions in a culture at a time of rapid change. Its mission is to protect human dignity and to link generations" (Stokrocki 1996, p. 35).

According to De Varine (1978) ecomuseums are an opportunity to run with new ideas; they are foremost a community with an objective: the development of the community itself. Ecomuseums are dynamic in that they have the potential of designing real actions, changing society and improving

landscapes. They blend general involvement and shared responsibilities: public officers, volunteers and other local actors all play a vital role in an ecomuseum.

The ecomuseum paradigm is flexible by nature, which allows it to adapt to local needs and the individual nature of places (Davis 2024). It is a dynamic way in which communities preserve, interpret, and manage their heritage for a sustainable development […] based on a community agreement (Declaration of Intent of the Long Net Workshop, Trento, Italy, May 2004). Ecomuseums can be a mediator of a landscape, of natural and geological resources, with their neighbourhood (Canavese *et al.* 2018, p. 45).

One of the possible functions of ecomuseums is to make people aware of the importance for human beings of living in harmony with the other animals and natural species sharing the same territory. In one of the pioneer studies on this subject, Thomashow (1995, p. 3) talked about "ecological identity" in terms of "the way people construe themselves in relationship to the earth". Thus, MUMA presents itself as a promoter of ecological wisdom, or ecosophy (Naess 1973). The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess introduced the ideas of ecosophy and "deep ecology"; compared to ecology, deep ecology aims to ask deeper questions relating to value theory. Ecosophy involves "a shift from science to wisdom" (Session 1995, p. 27). The term ecosophy is a combination of the Greek words *oiko*s, which means household, and *sophia*, which means wisdom. According to Leversque (2016, p. 512), from the ecosophical perspective, our *oikos* is the Earth, as the place that we inhabit. Næss (1973, p. 99) talked on ecosophy in terms of a philosophy of ecological harmony. Xiang (2014, p. 67) creates the term ecophronesis considering that ecosophy is connected with a special type of wisdom (*-sophia*) projected towards action, what the ancient Greeks called *-phronesis*. In Xiang's view, Ecophronesis refers to the wisdom that supports practical action aiming at good, combining theoretical knowledge and practical life, in that phronesis is the capacity to deliberate referring to the best practices men can realise.

Whatever it is called, ecosophy or ecophronesis, an outlook that considers harmony between humans and nature as a primary value is embodied by MUMA and the ecomuseum it is part of. What this outlook prompts is the need to act by doing the right things in ecological practice. How is it possible to understand and communicate what the right things to do are? How can the right thing be done? In this sense, activities connected to ecomuseums are grounded in the territory and include actions to undertake beyond the walls of the museum. The ecosophy and related activities are communicated through multimodal vehicles, including a website that uses discursive multimodal strategies (Baldry *et al.* 2020) to pave the way for dissemination of values and best practices.

## 3. From reality to website and back

Milazzo has been inhabited since the Neolithic period. Its history has been influenced by the many civilisations that have controlled the area, including Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, not to mention several French and Spanish dynasties. This historical heritage is still visible in local archaeological sites, of which the Castle, built around 1000 AD, is probably the most important witness. MUMA is located in one of the most ancient parts of the Castle.

The analysis of the MUMA website entails the exploration of discursive multimodal strategies used to sculpture an ecologically-oriented place identity and channel a new ecosophy that has the power to change the local population's outlook towards the environment in which they live. In this sense it is strategic to determine not just the goals of the museum but also its target, and assess whether it is limited to tourists or whether also includes local inhabitants.

The story of MUMA started in 2017, when a young male sperm whale that was swimming around the Aeolian islands swam into a drifting illegal fishing net, which became entangled in his tail and caused his death, despite many efforts to free him. The currents drove his body towards the rocky coast of the Cape of Milazzo. This unprecedented event weighed on the conscience of many inhabitants, including a sea biologist, Carmelo Isgrò, who would later become the founder and director of MUMA. He thought that what happened to the sperm whale had to become a loud and clear warning about human actions resulting in sea pollution endangering marine species. He gave the sperm whale a name, Siso, a voice, and a second life. After defleshing the whale bones, Isgrò launched a crowdfunding campaign to collect the money for a museum of the sea which could raise awareness about illegal fishing and plastic as sea pollution; in fact, a huge amount of plastic was found in the sperm whale's stomach. The whole procedure took more than two years and the museum was inaugurated in 2019, in an ancient deconsecrated church in the Castle. The city municipality provided the location. Figure 1 shows when the body of the sperm whale was stranded on shore and its final location in MUMA.

MUMA is an atypical museum, that intends to blend disciplines and discourses to communicate its founding values at different levels and with different strategies. The museum's mission relates to: the protection of the marine environment; a reduction in the anthropogenic impact on nature, and the creation of a new ecological identity. It is a dynamic museum that integrates permanent and temporary exhibitions and provides space for many cultural events of a different nature, including photography exhibitions, readings, the setting for photography shoots and much else.

Figure 1
Death and exhibition of Siso - the Sperm Whale.

The website offers a virtual tour of the museum exploring 3D space; it moves along the visiting paths but providing the chance to stop and watch explanatory videos at important points in the museum marked with blue or red spots. Some videos are produced by and for MUMA; others are taken from YouTube, some of them are educational; others offer experiences such as simulations, such as the one in Figure 2 which invites visitors to empathise with sea creatures stuck in a plastic bag.

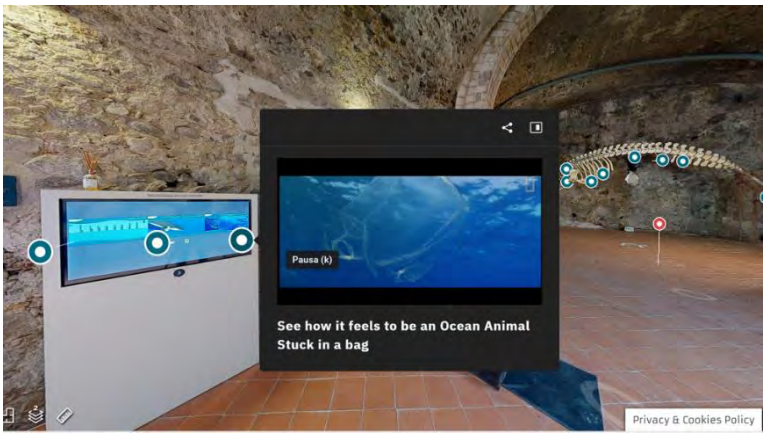


Figure 2:
Virtual tour of the MUMA.

While technology functions as a vehicle for communication and dissemination of values, other discursive strategies are used to involve users. The first is personalisation (Fairclough 1995). The whole museum is created around personalised content, in which Isgrò and other volunteers are in constant contact with users, speaking directly to them in the videos, where they look straight into the camera to create engagement. Also, addressing users with imperative forms (e.g., *become a volunteer* [diventa volontario]) using

possessive adjectives as "your" and "our" (e.g., *your free time* [il tuo tempo libero], *our sea* [il nostro mare]) make users feel included and involved in MUMA's mission (Figure 3). The emotional appeal created by the experiences offered by the involving virtual tours and videos enhance the persuasive power of the communication.

Another communicative strategy that is pervasive in the website is nomination (Reisigl, Wodak 2009), that is the discursive representation of social actors, objects, phenomena using labels that identify them. The whole museum is grounded on nomination, i.e., on the identification of the sperm whale with a name, Siso. Having a real name, the sperm whale is no longer one of the many sea creatures that have died because of heinous human actions, but becomes a specific creature, with an identity and a story. The terms chosen for nomination can frame an issue in a particular light, guiding the audience's perception and interpretation. In this case, the name given to the sperm whale is the nickname of one of the volunteers who died in a motorbike accident the day after helping to move the sperm whale's skeleton to its final destination. Attributing an identity to the sperm whale and associating him to another tragic death of a young man who was well-known in Milazzo has made all the difference.


Figure 3
Example of personalisation as a discursive strategy.

The website introduces the ecosophy of MUMA on the home page, where MUMA is presented as a "spiritual journey". The map of the museum (Figure 4) shows the befitting location in a deconsecrated church where the reconstructed skeleton hangs in the holiest part, where the altar was located, invoking the perception of the sacredness of sea and the sacrifice of its creatures because of human misbehaviour. However, the role of visitors is not limited to the passive attitude of those who contemplate the destruction wrought by human actions; instead, visitors are given agency as they are invited to undertake a spiritual path to acquire awareness of the destruction taking place at sea and redeem themselves.

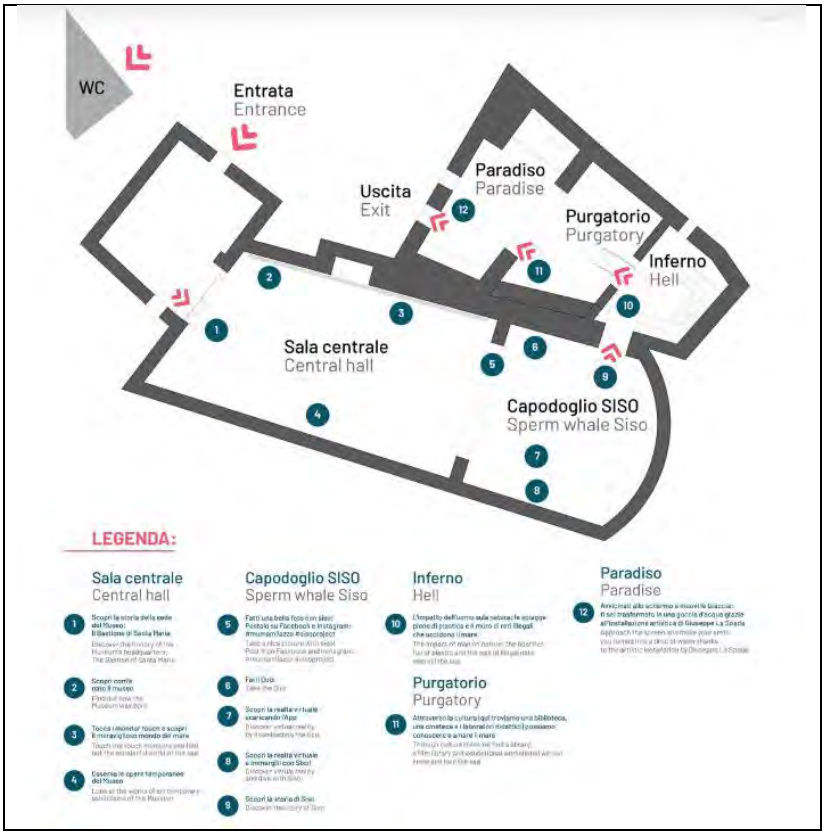


Figure 4
Map and spiritual path.

Leaving the central hall, the museum route takes visitors on a personal growth journey: reproducing the pattern of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the path starts in Hell. Visitors follow a route that guides them through a staircase to the basement and find themselves immersed in the destruction that humans have caused to nature. In an ontological metaphor (Lakoff, Johnson 1980), going down is connotated with negative meanings and represents bad, evil, destruction. The descent is accompanied by visuals showing whale hunting, which is still illegally practiced in some parts of the world, sea turtles killed by or caught in fishing nets, but above all, the descent occurs in an environment filled with plastic waste. The plastic positioned in the exhibition is only 3% of the plastic collected by volunteers in one of the most iconic beaches in Milazzo in a single season. To make the metaphorical journey even more dramatic, the descent is illuminated with red lighting, a colour that symbolises danger, which adds extra pathos to the visualisation of the impact of uncontrolled human behaviour on marine life (Figure 5). Thanks to a virtual tour, the website offers the corresponding experience with the possibility of accessing extra virtual material, e.g. a video with an explanation of the experience.


Figure 5
Spiritual path to Hell, in reality (left) and through a virtual tour (right).

The spiritual journey continues in Purgatory, the next infotainment room where visitors can reflect on the anthropogenic impact on nature. The objective of this room is learning, and the specific target is younger generations; in fact most of the books about the sea in the reading area are designed for different reading levels; educational videos are continuously shown and several practical activities are offered, including looking at the skin of a shark under a microscope (Figure 6). All activities imply interaction. Even though the content is mostly targeted at children, the simplicity of the message reaches adults' conscience as well; information about how long plastic takes to decompose is meant for everyone. It is in Purgatory that visitors gain awareness about the production of plastic, its anthropogenic impact and the drawbacks on sea life. Visitors leave Purgatory with a new mindset, having learnt about the endangered beauties of nature, which will encourage them to act and respect the environment.

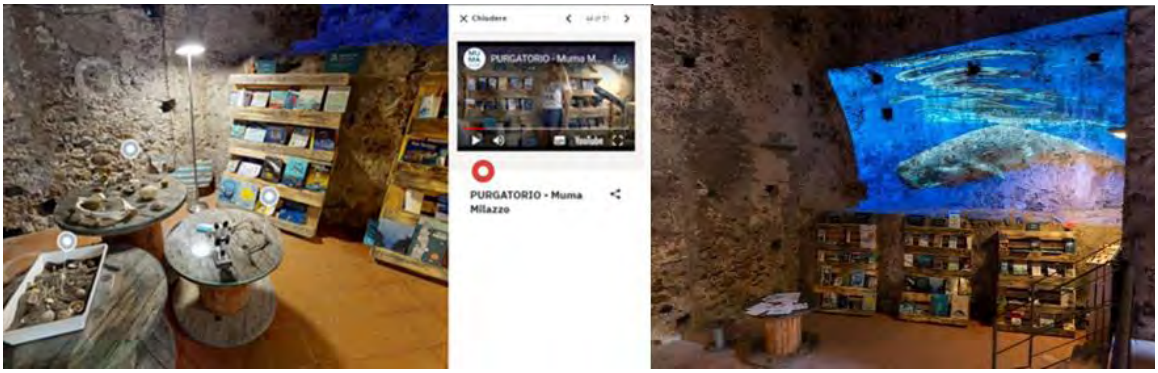


Figure 6
Spiritual path through Purgatory.

The last room in the spiritual path, Heaven, is dedicated to art. In Heaven visitors gain hope for the future and turn the knowledge acquired in Purgatory into proactive behaviour, being aware that we can only protect the things that we understand, appreciate and love. The end of the journey, Heaven, is

designed as a gateway to real life, where this ecological wisdom will inform future positive behaviour.

## 4. Conclusions

Moving beyond the concept of museums as limited spaces that treasure antiques and instruct visitors about past cultures and civilisations, processes of innovation have started that aim to make museums more meaningful and successful in contributing to the cultural development of their catchment area. They have implemented the traditional offer with more appealing and entertaining innovations. In fact, Covid-19 mobility restrictions obliged museums to accelerate a previously-begun drive towards modernisation, blending education with entertainment mostly based on a digital multimedia offering that reshaped museums' identity. This process makes museums more appealing and thus conducive to the implementation of the local (cultural) economy. This was the case with MUMA which was inaugurated in 2019, just months before being compelled to close to visitors. Website and multimodal communication were essential in making the museum live on. MUMA was able to reinforce its position in Milazzo thanks to its rich virtual offer that is continuously updated even in the post-Covid-19 era in which physical visits are again possible. The digitalised offer presented through institutional websites and social media has been accompanied by the offer of *in loco* experiences of virtual and augmented reality that engage visitors.

On the other hand, the evolution of museums leads to the construction of wide, dynamic and inclusive networks of enterprises involving the local population in fostering values and culture connected with the area. MUMA is also included in the ecomuseum "Chersoneso D'Oro", one of these private and public enterprise networks that incorporate a variety of sites and experiences within a specific geographical area. The participatory approach of MUMA and ecomuseums in general ensure that the local population feels committed to the ecosophy promoted by these museums. They participate as shareholders and are involved in the decision-making process, raising awareness of the cultural heritage and sharing responsibilities for the enactment of good practices about place management and promotion. A museum like MUMA responds to the community's need for a repository, a meeting place, exhibition areas, educational facilities, resource integration, problem-solving, and environmental protection and appreciation. Visitors, be they local people or tourists, enjoy the experience and are enriched by the ecological wisdom they acquire, turning into responsible guardians of the sea and marine creatures.

MUMA has provided a good example of positive action based on commitment, collaboration, and construction of an alternative identity for the

city itself. Indeed it seems that Milazzo is following a path similar to the spiritual journey offered by MUMA. Milazzo has already passed through Hell – represented by its conception as a refinery city, and is now going through its Purgatory, constructing its new ecological identity and acquiring awareness that only through knowledge and love can the territory be protected. Thus, the future mission for Milazzo is to implement the functions of its ecomuseum and their entrenchment in society as only through participation can a new identity of the place be achieved and truly felt by people. And this is the first essential step for any place branding strategy.

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# RADIO MAGICA'S COMMUNITY TALKING MAPS®: DIGITAL, LINGUISTIC AND COGNITIVE ACCESSIBILITY FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE

ANTONINA DATTOLO, ELENA ROCCO

**Abstract** – The Talking Maps® project aims at developing a "digital common good" based on multimodality to promote the dissemination of Italian Cultural Heritage through a narrative language, enjoyable and accessible by a wide range of users, including non-experts such as children, and individuals with cognitive disabilities or linguistic special needs. Maps are both digital and paper-based. Digital contents connected to each Talking Map® comprise multimodal stories and fun-facts developed by a multidisciplinary team of experts and artists, in line with the principles of universal design. Maps are conceived as community maps, since the production methodology involves citizens of all ages. Empirical investigation conducted between 2018 and 2023 made it possible to point out the strengths of the project and analyze its development on a longitudinal basis.

**Keywords**: Accessibility; Cultural Heritage; Universal Design for Learning; Community Maps; Information and Communication Technology.

*"Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone".*
(G. Dei, "Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy", 2009).

## 1. A "magical" radio for promoting inclusion and accessibility to culture

Radio was born as a tool to bridge distances. For decades, radio waves have built invisible connections through which countless voices, music, and news travel every day, reaching people and communities spread across the planet. Since Marconi's time, radio has evolved: with the advent of the web, radio broadcasting has transformed, amplifying the opportunities to give voice to new broadcasters, even very tiny ones. This evolution has set the stage for podcasting, streaming and



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social media interaction, resulting in a multiplying diffusion effect of its contents and transforming it into web radio.

The richness of channels through which audio content is made accessible today constitutes another evolutionary leap: video can be associated with audio giving rise to visual radio. An audio channel augmented with a visual channel further enhances radio accessibility, as it opens up the way for the use of languages and non-verbal languages, such as sign language, thus expanding the boundaries of communication in favor of people who use these communicative resources in their daily lives. For instance, the American Council of the Blind (ACB) Radio offers a variety of audio programming tailored to the interests and needs of people who are blind or visually impaired. Their programming includes not only audio streams but also some content with visual elements accessible through their website. Similarly, the Accessible Media for Everyone program by National Public Radio (NPR) provides accessible content for individuals with disabilities. This includes transcripts, podcasts with detailed descriptions, and sign language videos for selected programs.

In the integration of audio and video lies the basis for the innovations pursued by Radio Magica and its projects the Talking Maps®, which are the subject of this chapter, included. Radio Magica[1] is an Italian foundation created in 2012 by a team of academicians and entrepreneurs advocating radio for educational purposes (radio education), particularly for children and young people. The adjective "Magica" takes its inspiration from a phrase coined by Roald Dahl – "those who don't believe in magic will never find it" – and qualifies its mission, which is to overcome barriers created by lack of knowledge, skepticism or prejudice and thus truly contribute to breaking down linguistic and cognitive barriers by promoting access to culture for all, especially for children and young people with disabilities. Radio Magica nowadays broadcasts multimodal contents for free: audio, video with subtitles, videos in Italian Sign Language (LIS), videos using symbols of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), videos with audio description, audio texts downloadable for free and available in high legibility fonts. Some contents are also available in English, German and Slovenian. The multimodal approach allows Radio Magica to create books in many formats, and disseminate the concept of "bibliovariety", to ensure everyone's right to stories (Corniglia 2023). Moreover, bibliovariety is a means of spreading a new culture of inclusion, making different languages of communication broadly known to all.[2]

The goal of this paper is to present a project developed by Radio Magica Foundation, with the support of a wide network of professionals, to create a

[1] Visit Radio Magica at www.radiomagica.org.

[2] For further information, watch the Video Campaign on bibliovariety https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-Swsd735XI.

highly accessible tool to make the beauty and richness of Italy's Cultural Heritage known to all. Three dimensions of accessibility have been examined and developed in the project: digital, linguistic and cognitive. The following Sections present the project and its evolution from 2018 to 2024, pointing out benefits and implications.

## 2. The Talking Maps®

### *2.1. Multimodality for Cultural Heritage*

Since its inception, Radio Magica has primarily focused on bibliovariety: in agreement with publishers, authors, and illustrators, the foundation regularly publishes on a section of its website – named "Libri per TUTTI/Books for ALL" – existing children's books, making them accessible in one or more formats, as described in Figure 1.


Figure 1
Bibliovariety: alternative formats to support accessibility.

The experience gained in the publishing sector constitutes the starting point of the Talking Maps®cultural project, devoted to the humanistic and scientific dissemination of Italian Cultural Heritage through accessible contents. The inspiration for this new project came from the widely known British radio program "A History of the World in 100 Objects", a unique and compelling radio program produced by BBC Radio 4 in collaboration with the British Museum. The series first aired in 2010 and was presented by Neil MacGregor, the Director of the British Museum at the time. It ambitiously explored the history of humanity through 100 artifacts carefully selected from the museum's vast collection. Later, in the preface to a volume, a spin-off from the radio

program, Neil MacGregor explains that he initially felt the endeavor was an "impossible mission" (2012), but BBC experts were very optimistic, "they knew that imagining something also means appropriating it in a unique way [...] by building a personal story of the world". The successful British radio program was replicated by many radios, demonstrating the successful association between radio and cultural heritage.

Radio Magica's Talking Maps® can also be considered as a special radio program on cultural heritage: its contents are broadcast on Radio Magica's web radio and, thanks to partnership agreements, on other FM radios as well (Rocco, Porzio 2022). However, Talking Maps® can be defined as more than a radio program: they are a multipurpose, multimodal tool for the accessible dissemination of Italian Cultural Heritage. They are multipurpose as their contents can be implied for educational, tourist and even marketing goals. For instance, stories narrated through Talking Maps® are suitable for children from the age of five, to learn about local art, traditions and history. The engaging narrative, enriched by drawings and videos, is useful both for tourists interested in knowing more about a territory, and for regional marketing strategies. Talking Maps® are also multimodal, following the bibliovariety approach described in Figure 1.

They are available through a dedicated digital platform, developed by the SASWeb Lab of the University of Udine (Italy), called #smARTradio® and freely available online www.radiomagica.org/smartradio. The platform represents an extension to the Radio Magica website whose function is to disseminate material and immaterial Italian Cultural Heritage in an "ART-istic" way, leveraging the potential of multimodal storytelling to ensure maximum accessibility to its contents. In a nutshell, the goal of the project is to combine beauty and accessibility, exploiting the talents of various artists. For this reason, each of the Talking Maps® involves a multidisciplinary team, made up of artists (writers, illustrators, videomakers, screenwriters, musicians, actors), heritage scholars (historians, researchers, archaeologists, museum curators, guides), computer scientists and experts in accessibility.

## *2.2. Digital, linguistic and cognitive accessibility*

A wide literature presents the concept of accessibility, exploring different dimensions and specialized guidelines per specific disabilities (Dattolo *et al.* 2016; Dattolo, Luccio 2017). This section proposes the accessibility goals pursued by the project, followed by the illustration of the six-stage methodology underlying the production of each Talking Map®.

### *2.2.1. Digital Accessibility*

Digital accessibility refers to the design and development of digital content, tools, and technologies in a way that ensures that they can be accessed and used byanybody, regardless of ability or disability. This encompasses websites, mobile applications, software, and electronic documents. Key components of digital accessibility include:

1. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG): standards developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to make web content more accessible. These guidelines focus on providing text alternatives for non-text content, creating content that can be presented in different ways, and ensuring that overall functionality is available from a keyboard.
2. User Interface (UI) Design: Creating interfaces that are easy to navigate and use, respectful of screen readers' needs, keyboard navigation, and other assistive technologies.
3. Responsive Design: Ensuring digital content is accessible on various devices, including desktops, tablets, and smartphones, with adjustments for different screen sizes and orientations.
4. Captioning and Transcripts: Providing captions for videos and transcripts for audio content to assist users with hearing impairments.

### *2.2.2. Linguistic Accessibility*

Linguistic accessibility involves making content understandable and usable for people who speak different languages or who have varying levels of language proficiency. This can be achieved through:

1. Multilingual Content: Providing translations of content into multiple languages to cater for diverse audiences.
2. Plain Language: Writing content in clear and simple language to ensure it is easily understood by a wide audience, including those with limited literacy skills.
3. Language Support in Technology: Offering language options in software and applications, including support for different scripts, fonts, and linguistic conventions.
4. Cultural Relevance: Ensuring that translated content is culturally relevant and appropriate for the target audience, considering idiomatic expressions and local nuances.

### 2.2.3. Cognitive Accessibility

Cognitive accessibility focuses on making content and technology usable for people with cognitive disabilities, including learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and other neurodiverse conditions. Key aspects include:

1. Simple and Clear Layouts: Using straightforward and uncluttered designs to reduce cognitive load and help users focus on the content.
2. Consistent Navigation: Providing consistent and predictable navigation structures to help users understand and remember how to move through the content.
3. Multimodal Content Delivery: Using multiple methods to present information, such as text, images, audio, and video, to cater to different learning preferences and abilities.
4. Error Prevention and Correction: Designing forms and interactive elements to prevent errors and provide clear instructions and feedback for correcting mistakes.
5. Memory Aids: Including features like reminders, prompts, and visual aids to support users with memory difficulties.

Ensuring digital, linguistic, and cognitive accessibility involves a comprehensive approach to design and development that considers the diverse needs of all users. By implementing these accessibility practices, creators can make their content and technology more inclusive, benefiting a broader audience and fostering greater participation and engagement.

## 2.3. Talking Maps®' development methodology

Talking Maps® are both paper-based and digital, as shown in Figure 2.

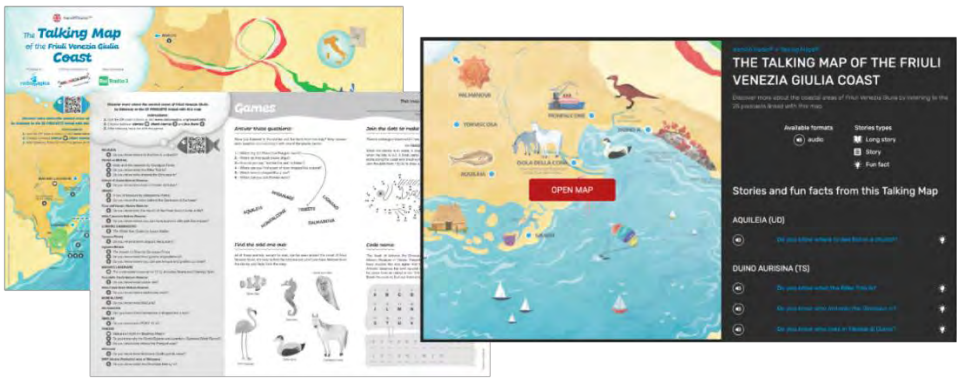


Figure 2
The front and the back of a paper-based Talking Maps® (left);
the same map in a digital format (right).

The front of the paper-based map represents the territory and its meaningful cultural objects through an artist's illustration. A QR code printed on the front, leads the user to a dedicated web page on the digital #smARTradio® platform containing the digital map and its multimodal contents. Each content corresponds to the cultural objects depicted in the illustration. On the back of the paper-based Talking Map® is a description of the project, its goals, partner institutions and sometimes children's puzzle games related to the cultural objects that trigger creativity and curiosity.

To apply the accessibility principles described above effectively, Radio Magica has developed a six-stage methodology, illustrated in Figure 3.

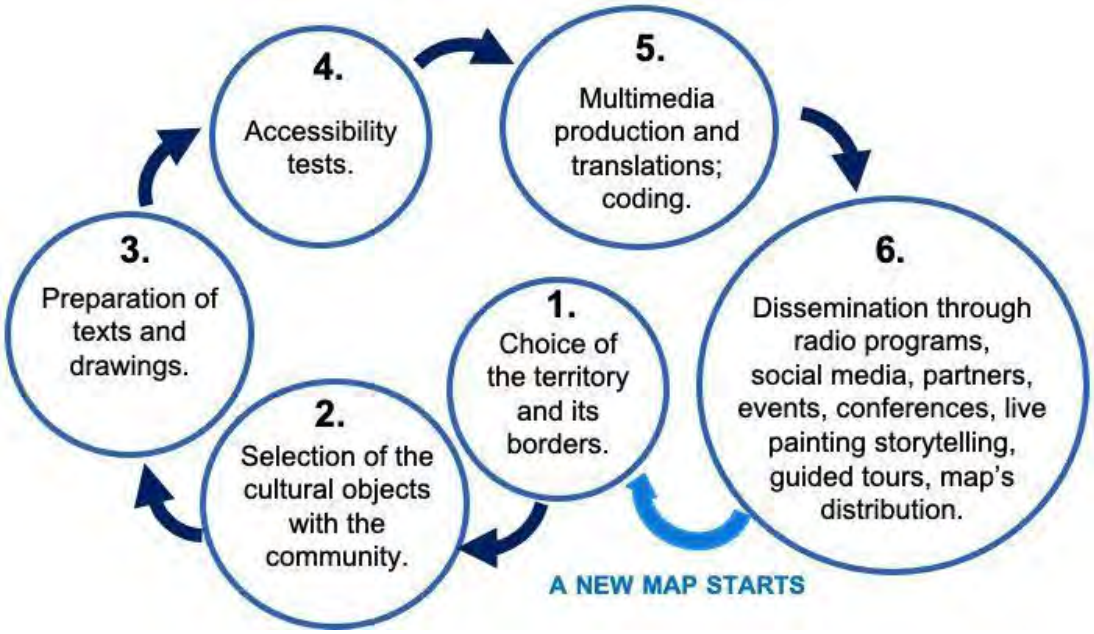


Figure 3
Talking Maps®' development methodology.

This methodology is carefully supervised by one of Radio Magica's scientific committees made up of three researchers, an editor and two to three experts of digital, linguistic and cognitive accessibility.

The first stage coincides with the selection of the territory and its borders. The territory can be a neighborhood or a town, a city or more extended regional area. Focusing on small territories allows Radio Magica to go deeper and tell the story of the objects in the area in greater detail.

The second stage is devoted to the selection of the objects to be depicted and narrated in the Talking Map®. Each map is conceived of as a "community map" (Rambaldi *et al.* 2006). This explains why the second stage is particularly relevant in triggering community participation and eliciting the unique sentiment of appropriation toward the local heritage, in accordance with the

Faro Convention's principles. Radio Magica employs both face to face interviews and online questionnaires to invite both experts and citizens of all ages, including families and children, to pinpoint the relevant cultural objects that should be presented on the map. The community may select up to three objects such as specific artwork, parks, characters, cultural sites, monuments and legends. The scientific committee collects the community's preferences and selects the most voted and most relevant objects in the territory that will be described on the map.

Production starts in the third stage. The scientific committee entrusts a group of writers with the drafting of the texts. Texts can be short stories (about 2300 characters) or fun-facts (about 600 characters) and authors are given guidelines for linguistic accessibility (Rocco *et al.* 2018; De Appolonia *et al.* 2021). For each selected object, there is at least one story or fun-fact. Some objects in the territory, e.g. a museum or a cathedral, may also generate several stories and fun-facts. At the same time, a renowned illustrator or artist prepares the map's draft, following the scientific committee's instructions for optimizing cognitive and linguistic accessibility. The Talking Map® is evocative of the past and hence may represent symbolic or historically important objects that can no longer be seen in the territory. Similarly, historical or legendary characters may appear on the map and be described by a story or a fun-fact.

Once the texts and materials are ready, the committee begins the painstaking work of testing (Stage Four). The aim is to find a balance between a text's or an illustration's appeal and its accessibility to audiences with special needs. To optimize accessibility, artists and the committee work side by side, conducting tests on sample users and employing indices for measuring linguistic complexity, such as the Gulpease index (Benjamin 2012; Vajjala 2014; Venturis 2022). The latter allows the committee to rapidly identify complex sentences or words. The application of guidelines for linguistic accessibility (Rocco *et al.* 2018; De Appolonia *et al.* 2021) promotes a narrative faithful to the principles of universal design for learning, thus ensuring equal access to content. Even though Talking Maps® do not aspire to being a "comprehensive encyclopedia", heritage scholars ensure the texts' and drawings' correctness and scientific rigor. Talking Maps® utilizes multimodality for improving accessibility. According to the "dual coding" theory (Clark, Paivio 1991), verbal and visual messages are processed by the human brain in a distinct but mutually reinforcing manner, making it easier and faster to grasp a concept through both supports (visual and verbal). Hence, more complex texts are supported by videos based on a storyboard divided into scenes. Each scene supports the storytelling with drawings and subtitles.

The fifth stage is dedicated to the multimodal production and digital implementation of the map: audio and video makers, sound engineers,

musicians, illustrators, actors and actresses, sign language experts, web accessibility and software engineers collaborate with the scientific committee to produce and publish audio and video contents. All stories and fun-facts are available in audio and downloadable text printed in easy-to-read fonts. These formats support accessibility for users who cannot read (e.g. the visually impaired), or have reading difficulties (people with dyslexia or cognitive impairments). Based on budget constraints, contents are made available in video format as well. Artists study the storyboard and prepare drawings with different techniques (watercolor, black ink) working side by side with the videomakers. When videos include Italian Sign Language (LIS), the LIS expert becomes part of the video, and interacts with the animations. The goal is to create a product for deaf people and, at the same time, contribute to a culture of inclusion through videos appealing to everyone. Typically, videos using sign language are for deaf people and are thus produced with no audio as they generally circulate within the deaf community. Multimodality and simultaneous use of video, LIS and audio overcome useless barriers among different linguistic communities, promoting cohesion and identity building. This stage also includes a translation of some content into English, German, and Slovenian for tourists and international users.

Figure 4 depicts a second digital Talking Map®, while Figure 5 shows the graphical layout of a cultural object described in it (the legend of St. Martin's Cloak).


Figure 4
The Talking Map® of Saint Martin in Veneto (front page).


Figure 5:
Graphical layout with details of the digital Talking Map®.

The final stage is dissemination. Talking Maps® are multipurpose: they are designed to be used at home, at school, in museums, while preparing a trip with the family or after a visit, to learn more about a territory. According to the specific purpose, dissemination of each map leverages a combination of channels. Once printed and published on the digital platform, Talking Maps® are launched with a press conference and promoted through Radio Magica's social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube). Partners contribute to the dissemination online and offline. For instance, local radio stations broadcast the audio contents and regularly invite members of the scientific committee and authors to present the new maps or their upgrades when Talking Maps® are enriched with new content. Printed maps are sent to schools when teachers make a request, often before a visit. In some sites, like Aquileia, the success of a Talking Map® gave rise to guided tours for schools and families managed by Radio Magica. Also, tourist offices and museums support their dissemination, displaying the maps and showing their videos to visitors. International partners, such as the Dante Alighieri Society and the "Ente Friuli nel Mondo", have brought the project to a wider audience. Another important channel of dissemination is the performance called "live painting storytelling", organized in theaters and museums, as well as in local festivals. with a heritage scholar acting as an anchorman on stage, plus several artists: one or more actors, musicians and an illustrator. While the actors read a story or a fun fact accompanied by music, the illustrator sitting nearby quickly draws the objects and a projector displays it on a big screen. The anchorman

presents each story or fun-fact offering a brief explanation about the cultural objects that are the event's protagonists. On some occasions, the event involves on-stage students– for instance, as readers or musicians. They might even be the same students involved in the selection of the cultural objects (Stage two). The goal is to elicit community participation and turn young people into ambassadors for their cultural heritage.

In 2023, Radio Magica started to involve young adults with cognitive disabilities as on-stage readers. This step follows the guidelines settled by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted in 2006 by the United Nations. Among the key points that the United Nations have established regarding the involvement in culture of people with disabilities are: the need for accessible formats to allow persons with disabilities to take part on an equal footing with others in cultural life and opportunities for developing and utilizing creative, artistic, and intellectual potential. This means the right of individuals with disabilities to develop and utilize their creative, artistic, and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit but also for the enrichment of society. By promoting the active involvement of those with disabilities in cultural life, the United Nations aims to foster an inclusive society that values and benefits from the diverse contributions of all its members.

Another valuable channel of dissemination for the Talking Maps® are the theatrical guided tours mentioned above, both for children or teenagers and adults. During the tour, an official guide presents the territory and its heritage. Along the path, one or multiple historical characters dressed in period clothes appear in sequence and engage visitors in storytelling experiences using and expanding the map's contents.

The sixth stage typically marks the beginning of a new Talking Map®, as a proof of the success of the participatory approach associated with the project's accessibility goals. The final result is a multisensory and multidimensional experience that involves listening, watching, touching, sometimes even smelling and tasting the cultural heritage, in the spirit of the principles of universal design for learning.

### *2.4. Talking Maps®: lessons learned*

In recent years, there has been an exponential growth in on-demand audio content supporting the dissemination of cultural heritage. Besides radio programs, podcast platforms now offer a wide variety of narratives dedicated to art and museums. Storytelling is a great ally for cultural dissemination.

The challenge raised by the Talking Maps® relates to ensuring that this cultural dissemination is comprehensible and engaging for everyone. It is a

very ambitious goal because the barriers involved are numerous and subtle: they can be related to age (children and the elderly are users usually in need of accompaniment), to physical or cognitive disabilities or both, to the lack of a cultural background that is vital for the narration to arouse interest. Lack of background may arise with users characterized by weak cultural preparation or foreigners coming from other cultures; for the latter, accessible storytelling must consider the need to create forms of mediation, where no historical or cultural reference is taken for granted.

A valuable support, in this respect, comes from the language of tourism. The discipline works on tourist discourse from the perspective of translation. However, the heuristics for successful transcultural communication can also be applied to intra-cultural communication. This happens especially when the recipient requires mediation (s/he is a child or s/he has a low scholastic level, or s/he has physical or cognitive impairments). In these situations, the language of tourism has become an ally for accessible writing in that it sheds light on the invisible barriers of communication (Calvi 2000; Agorni 2016).

Over five years (2018-2023), the project has allowed us to experiment with various solutions for accessibility and learn lessons from the field. First of all, it is important to employ different strategies to conduct accessibility tests (Stage 4, Figure 3). Linguistic studies offer readability indices of the text that allow its linguistic complexity to be measured. The Gulpease index, for example, is calibrated to the Italian language and allows relating a text to the user's educational level (elementary, middle, or high school). It considers two linguistic variables: the length of the word and the length of the sentence in relation to the number of letters. Tools like these have undeniable value in identifying critical elements and consequently favoring accessibility, but they are not sufficient. Experience with Talking Maps® has demonstrated the importance of submitting text that is read out to people with disabilities or difficulties and, through their feedback, introducing adjustments that, while maintaining the charm of the story, make the content presentation simpler. The two stages must be applied both to text and drawings (cover image of the story, storyboard drawings that will later be animated in videos) to meet the needs of people with vision difficulties, low vision, or blindness.

As the "dual coding" theory cited earlier also highlights, using multimodality enhances understanding where it is entrusted to multiple channels, both auditory and visual, because the human brain creates relationships between channels that make learning more intuitive. Moreover, multimodality raises end users' interests and curiosity.

The second lesson learned during this project concerns the dissemination strategies of the Talking Map® as a product. End users, especially very vulnerable ones, must be involved in the dissemination process to leverage their emotional experience and enforce their inclusion. Indeed, a well-written

narrative is no guarantee of accessibility and inclusion. The narrative must be accompanied by cultural mediation, which can take different forms; the theatrical guided tours, conducted both online (during the Covid-19 pandemic) and in person, organized for three age groups (children, teenagers, and adults) have so far been one of the most appreciated dissemination strategies. Each theatrical visit involves groups that are accompanied to discover a territory with the cultural mediation of a tour guide and one or more actors or actresses playing the characters presented in the Talking Map®. The dialogic game between the guide and the actor extends to the spectators, even those who visibly show reticence, to make the visiting experience pleasant, engaging and accessible for everyone.

Similar success is shown by storytelling performances in theaters or museums, with live painting, during which the Talking Map® is presented and the stories are read by professional actors accompanied by live illustrations and music (Stage 6, Figure 3). One strength of these performances is bringing children, teenagers, and people with disabilities on stage as readers. Users who usually belong to these fragile categories assume a new role and become ambassadors for their territory's cultural heritage. The benefits are manifold, both in terms of the appropriation process, because fragile users are upon called to engage in a learning process with an active role in a significant project, and in terms of inclusion. Placing the fragile user center-stage (literally as well as metaphorically) while reducing the distance between them and cultural heritage also changes and reduces the distances between people, between strong and weak users: people typically classified as "fragile" are entrusted with the task of narrating for a "strong" audience. Cultural heritage thus becomes a source of cultural renewal that eliminates barriers and prejudices and gives everyone the right to take part in the "community of heritage" envisaged by the much-cited Faro International Convention (Council of Europe 2005). The utopia of creating storytelling truly for all, capable of activating a participatory and inclusive enhancement process, becomes a possibility with the Talking Maps®.

## 3. Conclusions

This paper attempts to broaden the discussion on accessibility to cultural heritage by experimenting with Talking Maps®' inclusive storytelling. There is a dual goal: increasing accessibility to content and inviting more fragile people as the ambassadors for their territories. Involvement starts from the beginning, as Talking Maps® are conceived as a community map with a

bottom-up participatory approach, in keeping with the principles of the Faro Convention.

The mission of Radio Magica Foundation is to take concrete steps to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In this respect, the Talking Maps® project leverages traditional storytelling and digital technologies to establish new frontiers in the promotion of cultural heritage.

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# ENGLISH AUDIO DESCRIPTION: SELECTED LINGUISTIC FEATURES AND APPLICATIONS FOR ESL CLASSROOMS[1]

ELISA PEREGO, PIERGIORGIO TREVISAN

**Abstract -** This chapter focuses on audio description (AD), a form of accessible translation delivered orally and consumed aurally that was originally conceived to make visual content accessible to people who are blind and visually impaired. Recently, AD has started to be used successfully by several secondary audiences, and especially in the language classromm, where it has a great potential. In this chapter, we take into account diverse classroom applications of both art and screen AD. In the first part of the chapter, we set the foundations of this discipline and highlight a selection of linguistic aspects of professional English AD for the art. Then, we show some possible applications of art AD in the English language classroom. In the second part of the chapter, we describe AD as a versatile resource for university students learning English and illustrate a university course aimed at teaching how to write English ADs for the screen. Finally, we showcase an example of art AD simplification targeted at audiences with cognitive difficulties.

**Keywords:** audio description; translation; simplification; accessibility; linguistics; didactic; Easy English, Plain English

## 1. Introduction

As the field of accessibility, and specifically accessible communication, continues to evolve, there is growing recognition of the need for language that is widely comprehensible for all. Audio description (AD), an accessible form of audiovisual translation (AVT) that enables blind patrons to access visual content through a verbal narration, is meant to be "vivid" (Giansante 2015; Perego 2017; Snyder 2014) and engaging, which often results in descriptive texts that are linguistically complex (Perego 2018a, 2024; Secchi 2014, 2022), especially for audiences who need linguistic support. The integration of AD and simplification[2] techniques

[1] Both authors contributed equally to the scientific content of the manuscript. E. Perego dealt specifically with § 1, 2 and 3; P. Trevisan dealt specifically with § 4, 5 and 6.

[2] In this paper, the term "simplification" refers to the practice of making texts easier to understand. "Easy-to-Understand" (E2U) (Inclusion Europe 2009) is an umbrella term used to cover specific and established forms of language comprehension enhancement such as Plain Language and Easy Language (Degener 2016; Lindholm, Vanhatalo 2021; Maaß 2020; Matamala 2021; Matausch, Nietzio 2012; Perego 2020; Perego, Brumen 2023; Piemontese 1996; SELSI 2023, 2024; Trevisan, Brumen 2023).



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presented in this chapter (§ 4 and § 5.2) reflects a current cogent concern, offers a promising direction for future research and practice, and illustrates the pedagogic potentials of both authentic and simplified AD in the English as a second language (ESL) classroom. By bridging the gap between complex and accessible artistic verbal description, we can work towards a more inclusive approach to culture appreciation in all its aspects and degrees of complexity, and foster a more aware and motivating AD-based language learning process. We will illustrate how in this chapter, which is organised as follows: sections 2 and 3 introduce the notions of art as a means of expression, of visual disability as an invisible disability that can be compensated by accessible translation, of audio description as an accessible practice, product and service; these sections focus on a selection of typifying linguistic aspects of English art audio description based on a corpus of professional stand-alone English ADs of paintings. Such features (i.e. the longest derived, complex, bahuvrihi or possessive adjectives, adjectival conversions from phrases or clauses, complex colour names and art AD syntax) are illustrated and liaised to possible practical ESL classroom applications. Subsequently, sections 4 and 5 first present some European projects concerned with audio description and language simplification; they then introduce a University course aimed at combining the teaching of English AD writing techniques with language simplification practices to ensure additional accessibility to audio described content.

## 2. Translating visual art into words for people who are blind

Broadly speaking, art is one of the most effective and powerful modes of communication that exists for both artist and audience, enabling humans to express particular ideas, identities, moods, or emotions (Dewey 1934; Finlay 2020; Gombrich 1950/1995; Mittler 2006). While art is not necessary for physical survival, it plays an essential role in our lives. Sighted people exposed to a traditional painting, a sculpture, an archeological item, an installation, or any other form of static or dynamic art will have a sudden reaction to the aesthetics of the item they see, irrespective of their personal taste. Thanks to their sight, they will be able to enjoy artworks visually in an immediate fashion. This is not the case when people are blind or sight impaired. Their access to art, mediated by senses other than sight (e.g. hearing or touch), is necessarily slower and more analytic, active and successive (De Coster, Loots 2024; Secchi 2014, 2022). It would be wrong, however, to think that the counterpart of the processing immediacy experienced by sighted people is total darkness on the side of sight impaired people. Only a small percentage (around 15%) of people with eye disorders have a severe loss of vision or complete blindness, and experience visual perceptive absence (namely blackness or no light perception) (Jones 2023). In fact, eye disorders come in diverse forms. A variety of simulators of vision conditions

online could offer the curious reader an interestingly extensive range of unexpected situations.[3] The vibrant oil on canvas by Wassily Kandinsky Group in Crinolines (Figure 1) will be blurred, dimmer and less colorful for people with cataracts (Figure 2), and mostly black for people with severely compromised peripheral vision (Figure 3).

Figure 1
*Group in Crinolines* (W. Kandinsky, 1909).[4]

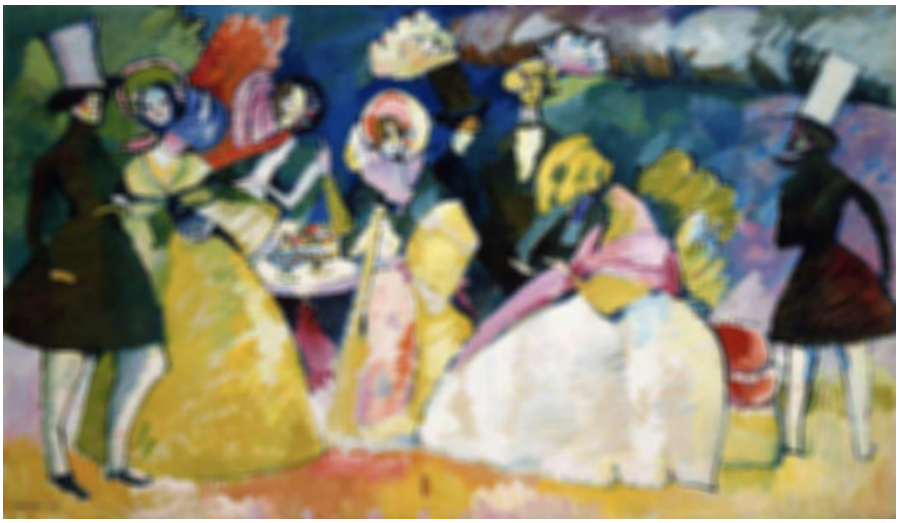


Figure 2
*Group in Crinolines* seen through the eyes of people affected by cataracts.

[3] For instance, the simulator developed by Richmond Eye Associates (https://versanthealth.com/vision-simulator/) sees through the eyes of someone affected by glaucoma, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, presbyopia, glare, and macular degeneration. The Janssen Vision Loss Simulator (https://www.retina.janssen.com/visionsimulator/index.html) offers an interactive web-based experience that lets us explore eye diseases and their effect on vision.

[4] The sources and the type of CC license of the paintings' photos used in this paper are listed under the Acknowledgement section.

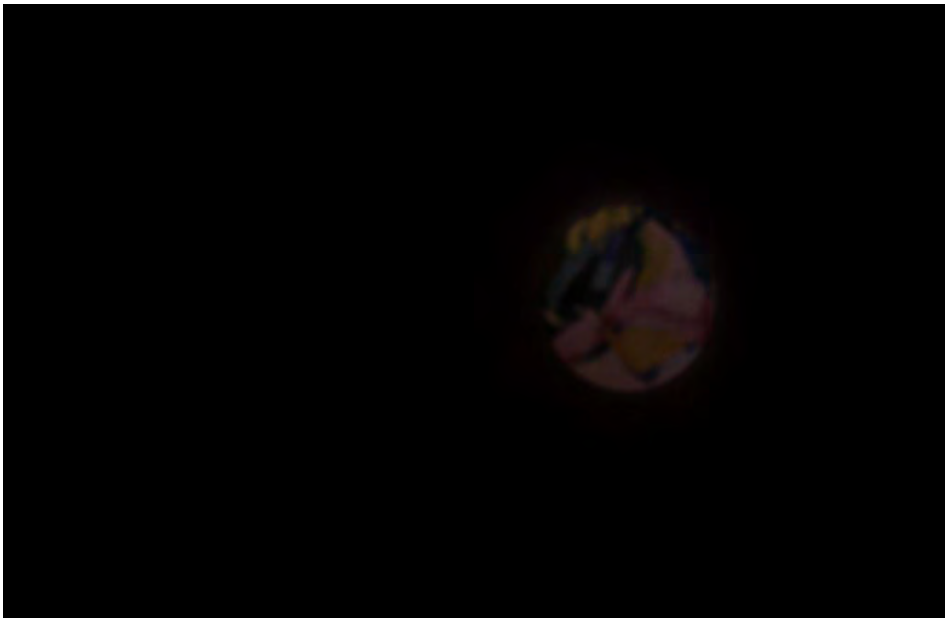


Figure 3
*Group in Crinolines* seen through the eyes of people affected
by severely compromised peripheral vision.

Even when colours are not ingredients of an artwork, visual impairment can compromise the overall art experience. The following figures show how the bronze figure (500 BC) exhibited at the British Museum would be perceived by sighted visitors (Figure 4), by visitors with cataracts (Figure 5), and by visitors with severely compromised vision (Figure 6).

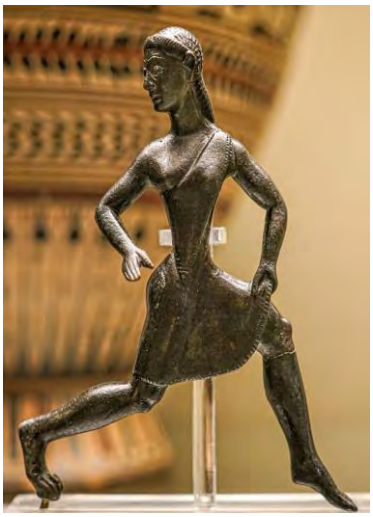


Figure 4

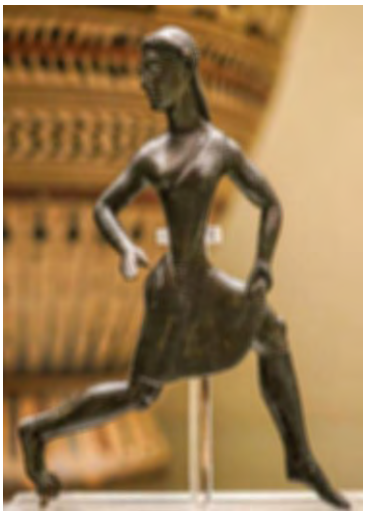


Figure 5

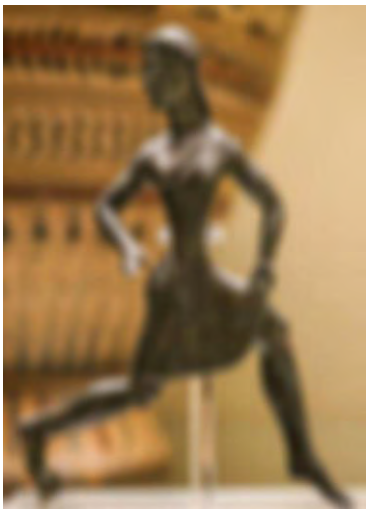


Figure 6

Figures 4-5-6
*Spartan running girl* perceived by sighted visitors (Figure 4), people affected by cataracts (Figure 5), people affected by severely compromised vision (Figure 6).

Although for sighted museum-goers seeing, enjoying, accessing, and giving a meaning to the beauty of art is perceived as normal, such experience is very different for people who are blind or visually impaired. Blindness, which is just one type of invisible disability, prevents people from accessing whatever includes a visual component: art, culture, audiovisual content, or simply everyday life – which is mainly multimodal and often visuocentric. Today art can be accessed and understood despite one person's (dis)ability, including blindness, thanks to what is known as accessible translation (Manfredi, Bartolini 2023; Matamala 2006; Perego 2017).

The process, product and service that enables people with sight loss to access the visuals is called "video description" (Piety 2004) or, most commonly, "audio description" (shortened as AD). AD is an intersemiotic translation process comprising the transfer (or a retranslation; see Gürçağlar 2009; Koskinen, Paloposki 2010) from a nonverbal system of symbols (visual semiotic signs or images) to a verbal system of symbols (acoustic verbal signs or spoken language). When describing visual content, one can be very succinct or very detailed (Table 1) depending on the AD's specific *skopos* and on its time constraints, which might (or might not) enable an audio describer to include details and make the AD as powerful and imaginative a tool as possible, capable of conveying particularly vivid images of what is on display. This is in fact the primary aim of AD: to select and convey visual details that are relevant to *understand* and *visualise* visual content. An equally essential aim is to enable visitors to *enjoy* the described experience as a whole (e.g. watching a film, visiting a museum, going to the theatre, seeing a football or a tennis match) and to enhance their *engagement* and *immersion*. The latter is a state of complete concentration on, as well as heightened and energized focus in, any tasks or activities, enhanced by motivation (Csikszentmihàly 1990), and can have a major effect in settings where information retention is crucial, such as in language learning and acquisitional settings.

| | |
|---|---|
|  | • Pencil<br>• Yellow pencil<br>• Sun-yellow pencil<br>• Hexagonal sun-yellow pencil<br>• High-quality hexagonal sun-yellow pencil<br>• High-quality hexagonal sun-yellow pencil with rubber<br>• High-quality hexagonal sun-yellow pencil with rubber and brand name embossed<br>• High-quality hexagonal sun-yellow pencil with rubber and brand name embossed in black capital letters |

Table 1
Diverse levels of head-noun modification in describing a simple item.

The descriptive flexibility of AD could be used in the classroom to guide students - depending on their level of proficiency - to explore diverse naming expressions for the same referent (Biber *et al.* 1999; Jeffries 2010); to expand or contract a head noun's pre and postmodifiers; to identify and discuss the major structural types of premodification in English (Biber *at al.* 1999); to focus on the most effective collocations to be included in a Noun Phrase, or on the length of sequences of its multiple premodifiers; and to look for the most appropriate descriptive word(s) to portray even a seemingly trivial visual element in the most effective way. Working comparatively in a given language pair, or introducing an active (i.e. reversed or L1-L2) or a passive (i.e. standard or L2-L1) translational dimension to the exercise, are both supporting additions to boost language learning and comparative awareness through focus on form.

Anyone who has experienced an AD tour or listened to the professional AD of an artwork might have been impressed by its beauty and linguistic complexity, and felt engaged and immersed. Art ADs can resemble literary texts (cf. for instance their sometimes striking, peculiar and unconventional uses of language which invite users "to create an imaginary alternative world"; Verdonk 2002, p. 13), and can be very elaborate pieces of complex, highly informative descriptive-expository writing. Loretta Secchi, the Director of the Tactile Museum Anteros in Bologna, maintains that pieces of art that are aesthetically sublime cannot be conveyed verbally using basic language (Secchi 2014, 2022). Professional ADs confirm this claim, as we will show by focusing on a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of a corpus (henceforth "the painting corpus") of 55 pre-recorded stand-alone[5] ADs of paintings produced professionally by British and American audio describers, covering a variety of styles and art movements that range from the 15th to the mid-20th century (see Perego 2024 for details on the corpus).

## 3. The painting corpus of English ADs: linguistic features and classroom applications

The total size of the painting corpus is 26,659 tokens and 4,655 types. Its high lexical diversity (STTR=0.70)[6] relates directly to the informational load and lexical precision required by this text type, while the mean value of its lexical density (54.31%) likens that of written fiction and general prose (Biber *et al.* 1999). Both measures relate to the planned nature of pre-recorded art AD and to its core communicative aim: making relevant visual elements of artworks available to blind and visually impaired patrons through vivid, varied, and engaging language (Perego 2018a). Such language can be lexically and

[5] Stand-alone ADs are ADs that can be consumed independently, and in any order, and are not part of a structured itinerary, i.e., an audio description tour.

[6] STTR = standardised type token ratio.

syntactically complex, as the painting corpus shows. The average mean word length in characters (4.56, SD = 2.41) suggests a preference for native words, which are normally shorter and easier than borrowed and technical words. However, even if painting ADs seem to actually avoid excess art-related terms, very long literary abstract and highly descriptive lexical units constellate the corpus. Such language choices make ADs poignant and evocative (Perego 2024, p. 89) and brand its style or distinctive manner of expression, but at the same time make it more complex to process for some users – who might experience information overload –, or, conversely, very interesting to exploit for others – such as learners of English as a second language and language teaching professionals as further illustrated below in section 5.

A focus on the morphology and the semantics of the longest lexical units found in the painting corpus (Perego 2024, ch. 3) illustrates their quantitative, distributional and qualitative nature, and proves how they can be exploited in a language-learning setting. Quantitatively, adjectives stand out in the painting corpus (and in general in art ADs; Perego 2018a, 2024), and represent the biggest percentage among the lexical items with 15 characters or more, i.e. 75% vs. 12.5% of nouns and 12.5% of adverbs (Table 2). Long nouns include derived and compound nouns, mainly abstract in meaning (*cool-headedness*, *experimentation*, *shoulder-blades*, *Wellington-mania*); all adverbs are *-ly* manner adverbs (*extraordinarily*, *disconcertingly*, *meteorologically*, *naturalistically*); adjectives, mainly attributive, are embedded in complex Adjective Phrases (e.g. *indicates a graphic,* ***two-dimensional*** *sensibility; has* ***tightly-clustered*** *seven-petaled floral pinwheels of gold over a background of royal blue*). Specifically, the 24 longer-than-15-characters adjectives identified in the corpus include derived adjectives, complex adjectives or adjectival compounds, bahuvrihi or possessive compounds, and adjectival conversions from phrases or clauses. A closer look at such adjectives follows, with hints to possible practical classroom applications.

| Characters | Lexical Items in Alphabetical Order |
|---|---|
| 15 characters | [extraordinarily]$_{ADV}$, [cool-headedness]$_{N}$, ornately-carved, two-dimensional, distinguishable, not-too-distant, middle-distance, [experimentation]$_{N}$, straightforward, [shoulder-blades]$_{N}$, chocolate-brown, impressionistic, crimson-colored, straight-backed, bare-shouldered, [disconcertingly]$_{ADV}$ |
| 16 characters | near-translucent, non-naturalistic, disproportionate, downwards-curved, [meteorologically]$_{ADV}$, [Wellington-mania]$_{N}$, representational, [naturalistically]$_{ADV}$ |
| 17 characters | tightly-clustered, three-dimensional, tangerine-colored, triangular-shaped |
| 18 characters | head-and-shoulders, seventeen-year-old |
| 19 characters | more-than-life-size |
| 22 characters | gold-diamond-patterned |

Table 2

Lexical items longer than 15 characters in the painting corpus (Source: Perego 2024). Nouns and adverbs are tagged. The untagged lexical units are adjectives.

### 3.1 Derived adjectives

Derived adjectives are the result of a lexical process whereby affixes are added to a base to generate a new word. Derived adjectives include more than one syllable and can be very long, especially if they are multiple-derived words containing different derivational affixes (Biber *et al.* 1999; Friedline 2011; Jackson, Zé Amvela 2000; Pavesi 1994). Identifying short-derived adjectives in art ADs can be easy if a common adjectiviser is used, as in the case of the adjectival suffix *-y* (e.g. ***cottony*** *clouds;* ***rocky*** *cliffside*), or when participial adjectives not part of a compound word are used (e.g. ***bundled fishing*** *nets; a* ***captivating*** *oil on canvas*). However, depending on the learners' language proficiency, the difficulty and effectiveness of this activity can vary. In any case, working on multiple-derived adjectives may favour students' derivational competence (Richards 1976; Tyler, Nagy 1989) by enabling them to receptively focus on (and later productively use, Nation 2001) the English multiple affixation process, and to notice its affix-ordering constraints. An adjective such as *non-naturalistic* (16 characters) includes a class-maintaining negative prefix (*non-*) freely used as an English formative with a simple negative force implying negation or absence of something; a lexical morpheme or base (*nature*); a very common and exceptionally highly productive class-changing derivational suffix or adjectiviser (*-al*) (Biber *et al.* 1999, p. 528 for details on corpus findings); and a class-maintaining adjectival word-forming suffix (or class-maintaining adjectiviser; Jackson, Zé Amvela 2000) (*-istic*) that changes the semantic traits of the new word rather than its word class:

| non- | natur(e) | -al- | -istic |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prefix [NEG] | Base | Der [ADJ] | Der [ADJ] |
| Class-maintaning | Lexical morpheme | Class-changing | Class-maintaning |

Starting from this deconstruction, students can be encouraged to find similar derived adjectives in other ADs[7] (or in any other text types selected by their instructor), thus exercising their receptive morphological knowledge and become aware of the semantic transparency of several English words and

[7] Nowadays, several museums make at least some of their ADs available online. Alternatively, professional ADs are available on the website of the Audio Description Associates website (https://audiodescribe.com/), an association directed by audio describer Joel Snyder, and on the website of the British service provider VocalEyes (https://vocaleyes.co.uk/). The ADLAB PRO webpage dedicated to its course materials is rich in art ADs and art-AD-related video lectures and guided tasks (https://www.adlabpro.eu/coursematerials/); Module 4 is entirely dedicated to art AD (Perego 2017). Unit 3B of the EASIT webpage dedicated to its training materials (https://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/easit/) includes some authentic art ADs and offers video lectures and guided tasks for AD simplification.

(Pavesi 1994, p. 22) as a basis for the development of their productive morphological knowledge.[8]

### *3.2 Complex adjectives*

Complex adjectives or adjectival compounds are a combination of more than one word, resulting in a compact expression of information (Adams 2001; Biber *et al.* 1999). Adjectival compounds can take many forms, but are usually hyphenated and their meaning is clear from the combined words. Adjectival compounds are very helpful economy devices in a text type that works within severe constraints (art ADs should be no longer than 2-3 minutes to avoid overwhelming museum visitors; Giansante 2015), and can effectively substitute longer constructions, typically relative clauses. Working on adjectival compounds that students can be asked to identify in a given AD can be a prompt for noticing the condensation potential of English: *ornately-carved* substitutes the longer *that has/had been carved* (or *cut*, if we wish to resort to a Plain English verb) *in a way that has a lot of complicated decoration*; reflecting and exercising on oral or written reformulating tasks that rely on diffusion strategies (Taylor 1998) and which enable students to unpack compressed adjectival compounds into the same language via an intralingual translation process (Jakobson 1959), and/or into their mother language via an interlingual translation process; encouraging students to use English independently and creatively and to exploit a morphosyntactic feature of English that is recursive and productive.

Linguistic, metalinguistic and translational reflections can also derive from a work carried out in conjunction with AI. How do different AIs translate particularly vivid words, multi-word units or even highly descriptive sentences taken from a given professional AD from an intralinguistic or interlinguistic perspective? Some insight can be gained from analysis of the compound adjective comprising a participial form *tightly-clustered*, and from the AD excerpt from *The Coronation of the Virgin* by Gentile da Fabriano which contains it: *The Virgin's robe, which she holds close to her, has* ***tightly-clustered*** *seven-petaled floral pinwheels of gold over a background of royal blue* (Figure 7).

When asked "Can you reformulate "***tightly-clustered***" in English?", ChatGPT, for instance, answers (hesitantly) as follows, offering alternatives that encourage reflection on the adequacy of its reformulations, the importance of the context of use of the adjective, and synonymity:

[8] "Receptive morphological knowledge entails that a learner can recognize that a word is divisible into parts and that those parts contribute to the overall meaning of the word. Conversely, productive morphological knowledge entails that a learner can construct a morphologically complex word and use it appropriately within a given context" (Friedline 2011, p. 18).

Sure! Here are a few alternatives to "tightly-clustered":
- Densely packed
- Closely grouped
- Concentrated
- Compactly arranged
- Closely bunched

Each of these phrases conveys a similar idea of items being very close together.

When asked to translate *tightly-clustered* into Italian, ChatGPT promptly answers with an unconvincing target collocation: *strettamente raggruppato*. When asked to translate the whole sentence, this is what we get: *La veste della Vergine, che tiene stretta a sé, ha pinwheel floreali a sette petali strettamente raggruppati in oro su uno sfondo di blu reale*. An outcome that lends itself to discussion on translation adequacy, idiomaticity, pragmatic equivalence, translation revision and editing, the appropriacy and implementation of amplification or diffusion strategies (vs. reduction or condensation) while translating from English into Italian (e.g. Taylor 1998), let alone the idea that word-for-word translation is less frequently possible than students usually expect.

Figure 7
Detail from *The Coronation of the Virgin* (G. da Fabriano, 1420).

### *3.3 Bahuvrihi compounds*

Similar class activities can be applied to bahuvrihi (or possessive) compounds in English. These are a specific sub-category of (unidiomatic)[9] exocentric descriptive adjectival compounds that denote a usually living referent by specifying a certain characteristic (e.g. appearance) or quality (e.g. personality and character) the referent possesses (Adams 2001; Ruppel 2017). An example in the painting corpus is the *-ed* ending hyphenated *straight-backed* ("with his/her back standing straight") from the AD of *The Portrait of Wellington* (S. Gambardella, 1860): *With feet turned out in an upside-down V, he stands* ***straight-backed****, body turned slightly to the right*. Bahuvrihis' last constituent is usually a noun and can include an *-ed* suffix, as in this case, while the whole compound is a noun or an adjective carrying the tonic stress on the first constituent. Adams refers to bahuvrihis as "[s]equences analysable as two-element nominal base + *-ed*" (Adams 2001, p. 94), which are declined as adjectives.

### *3.4 Adjectival conversion*

The last type of adjectives belonging to this small sub-group of longer-than-15-characters words comprises conversions from phrases or clauses. Conversion (also known as zero derivation or functional shift) is a particularly productive word formation strategy in English, whereby "a word belonging to one word class is transferred to another word class without any concomitant change of form, either in pronunciation or spelling" (Jackson, Zé Amvela 2000, p. 86; see Pavesi 1994, p. 29). Not only does conversion enable single words to change word class (pepper > to pepper), but it also works with whole phrases or even clauses, which may undergo conversion and act as a different word class. In the corpus, whole phrases are often converted into attributive adjectives. An example from the AD of *Woman I* by de Kooning (1950-52) shows this word formation strategy: *Woman I is a tall, rectangular painting, dominated by the powerful, ferocious,* ***more-than-life-size*** *figure of a woman*. The hyphenated expression *more-than-life-size* precedes the noun *figure* and is used attributively, thus packing up information that would have been otherwise diluted (e.g. *dominated by the powerful, ferocious, figure of a woman* ***whose size is larger than the actual size***). This strategy seems to enable AD writers to avoid predicative adjectival constructions that would be longer and less impactful. Furthermore, exploiting complex noun phrases that "package up" information or ideas rather than diluting them within clauses treats such noun phrases as given information and therefore makes them less open to debate or questioning (Jeffries 2010, p. 19-26). In some circumstances, e.g. when using

[9] Idiomatic bahuvrihi compounds have the same structure but an opaque meaning (e.g. *big-headed* meaning "being proud of oneself").

appraisal words, this (possibly unconscious) strategy or linguistic pattern can reveal the writer's "mental, emotive, and even ideological orientation" (Verdonk 2002, p. 29) As Jeffries (2010, p. 23) puts it, "there is a huge potential for ideological packaging which could encourage the recipient to accept ideas that ought to be open to debate or questioning". Today, this is an unexplored – yet compelling – aspect of AD that could deserve focus in the advanced language class, or in advanced research paths, and that can open up new perspectives of analysis for English learners, especially those interested in critical discourse analysis and in stylistics applied to English AD.

### *3.5 Colour adjectives*

Moving away from the small sub-corpus of long adjectives, we will now focus on colour adjectives, a category of adjectives that is very frequent in the painting corpus (Perego 2024). Colour conveys visual qualities and has cultural, symbolic, and emotional connotations that people who are blind do understand. In the painting corpus, countless colour shades and hues are used to describe infrequent or very specific colours – as in *She clutches a* ***ruby-red*** *purse with the* ***lime green*** *claw-like fingers of her right hand*, an AD excerpt from Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* (Figure 8).

Figure 8
Detail from *Street, Dresden* (E.L. Kirchner, 1908).

Some colour nomenclatures occur only once in the corpus, thus contributing to its lexical variety – as in the description of the vase of the famous *Sunflowers* by Van Gogh: *[T]he vase […] is crudely outlined. The only suggestions of volume are a* ***buttery*** *highlight on its glazed dark yellow upper half and…*", where *buttery* (*butter* + *-y,* "resembling butter" or in its more figurative - but very appropriate in the AD context - meaning "thick and smooth like butter") is a representative example of an abstract colour name created out of a food-related (dairy products) noun by suffixation (see McNeill 1972 for more details of colour terms and their formation).

What is interesting, is the morpho-syntactic variety of expressions referring to colour: we range from the simply derived *gingerish* in the AD of the 1882 *The mill* by Burne-Jones (*her* ***gingerish*** *hair pinned up*) to the complex compound *pinkish-peach*, which itself includes derivation, in the AD of the 1907 *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* by Picasso (*five naked women, painetd in* ***pinkish-peach*** *flesh tones*), to the multi word unit *golden mustard yellow* in the AD of Kandinsky's *Group in crinolines* (Figure 1)[10] (*Her* ***golden mustard yellow*** *dress is touched with lime and jade green*). Focusing on colour adjectives offers the possibility of being exposed to several that use the common informal approximative *-ish* suffix that can be added to adjectives to make them less precise. And it also offers the possibility of tackling adjective order, which is a challenging aspect of the English adjectivation system. Often found difficult by English learners, the order of English adjectives is dictated by the intended meaning of the interlocutor, though it is strongly influenced by the type of pre-modifiers (Biber *et al.* 1999, p. 598). Even if a preferred order does exist (Adv + Adj + Colour Adj + Participle + N + head N), English has no absolute rules but tendencies, whereby adjectives are normally ordered from general to specific, from less inherent to more inherent to the modified head noun, and from subjective to objective.

### *3.6 Syntax*

To conclude this overview on a selection of characterizing features of painting ADs, we shall briefly consider their syntax. The mean sentence length in words in the painting corpus points to sentences that are approximately 18 words long (i.e. they have a "standard" but not "very easy" length according to data and literature on English readability), but the standard deviation (SD = 9.16) indicates that sentences can reach a considerable length and syntactic complexity, which can increase the overall text difficulty, and comprehensibility – at least for some visitors (Perego 2024, p. 76). If we consider the opening lines of the AD of Mondrian's Neo-Plasticist *Broadway*

[10] You can listen to the AD of *Groups in Crinolines* online, where its translation into American Sign Language is available as well.

*Boogie-Woogie* (Figure 9), we notice that it is a stunning 71-word-long single sentence:[11]

> Broadway Boogie-Woogie: The title of the painting, Broadway Boogie-Woogie, is a nice collision of two delighted references to things that made Mondrian so enthusiastic about his new life in New York City: Broadway, a very busy, broad, thoroughfare full of interesting stores, but also full of theatres representing the novelty and the liveliness of the American musical tradition, and boogie-woogie, the jazz music that Mondrian discovered here and loved so much.

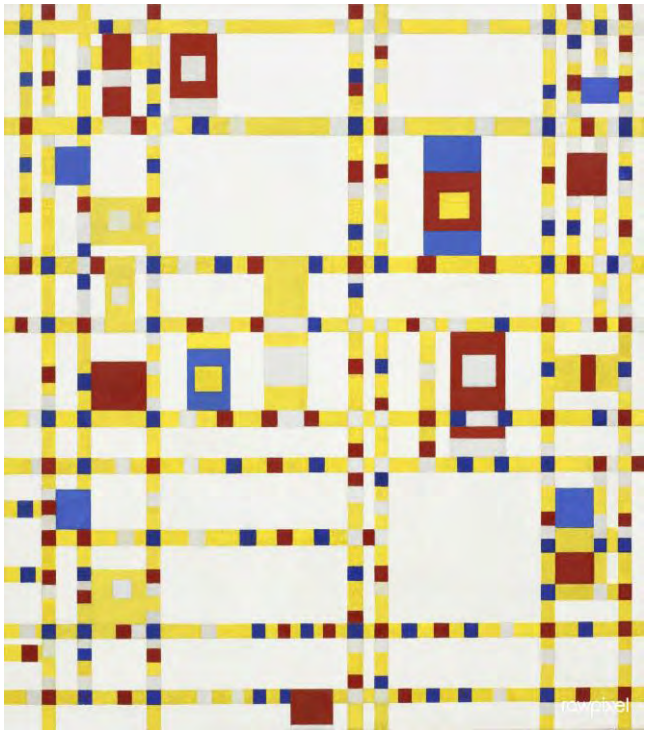


Figure 9
*Broadway Boogie Woogie* (P. Mondrian, 1942-1943).

Bearing accessibility in mind, we might wonder whether such a long, dense yet evocative sentence is easy to understand for all, but also if long, abstract, highly informative lexical units such as the ones analysed previously are easy to understand for all, or whether, overall, professional art AD is accessible for all. The readability of the whole painting corpus calculated using the Gunning Fog Index (10.47) indicates a text that requires over ten years of formal education to be understood on first reading, and possibly on first listening (Perego 2024, p. 76 and Table 3.2; see also par. 5.2 in this chapter for the online *Analyze My Writing* software; see also Blunden 2017). This is why researchers in the field of audiovisual translation (AVT) have started reasoning on whether and how

[11] Using an online revoicer that instantly generates high quality voiceovers (e.g. Murf AI) gives a better idea of the listenability (or lack of it) and the comprehensibility (or lack of it) of such a long sentence.

AVT should be simplified to be extended to larger audiences, including people with cognitive difficulties, people who are poorly literate, very young (sighted and blind) children, or even low-competence language learners or users. The EU project EASIT (Easy Language for social inclusion training; see par. 4 in this chapter) laid the bases for such considerations in the fields of subtitling, audio description and web journalism. Today, similar ideas are the focus of another EU project, SELSI (Spoken Easy Language for Social Inclusion; see section 4 in this chapter), which deals with simplification in oral settings – and AD is a "written to be spoken" text: it is delivered verbally and consumed aurally. The next section focuses on this paramount aspect specifically applied to AD, and suggests how simplification can be effectively exploited in the English language classroom.

## 4. Evolution of accessibility initiatives: from Easy Language development to university course integration

At least since the mid-20th century, many successful projects have been implemented to remove architectural barriers and foster inclusion. One pivotal moment was the passage of the *Architectural Barriers Act* of 1968 in the United States, which mandated that buildings constructed or renovated with federal funds should be accessible to people with disabilities. Since then, sensitivity to obstacles faced by people with disabilities has grown considerably, and at least since the 1990s, attention has been addressed more consistently to obstacles experienced in communication.

In 2009, the NGO Inclusion Europe, with the support of the European Commission, officially released the first *European Standards for Making Information Easy to Read and Understand* (2009). This initiative, described as a process of linguistic empowerment by Mimosa Ravasio (2023), aimed to make language accessible to everyone, rather than only to those who can quickly decode it. Since 2009, research on Easy Language has grown considerably, with projects exploring the topic in all its facets, including museum audio description and audio-visual formats. The Erasmus+ project EASIT, for example, investigated the use of Easy-to-Understand (E2U) Language[12] in subtitling, audio description, and audiovisual journalism, providing useful materials for professionals working with people who need language simplification (see also Matamala 2021). More specifically, the project, led by Anna Matamala of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain brought together a strategic partnership of stakeholders from different countries and fields to address innovation in higher education, with a major

[12] Easy-to-Understand" (E2U) (IFLA 2010; Inclusion Europe 2014) is an umbrella term used to cover specific and established forms of language comprehension enhancement such as Plain Language and Easy Language. See also Perego (2020, p. 17).

focus on one of the European priorities in the national context: social inclusion. The materials produced, including several video lessons addressing linguistic aspects of subtitling, audio description, and journalism, are freely available on the project website (Figure 10).

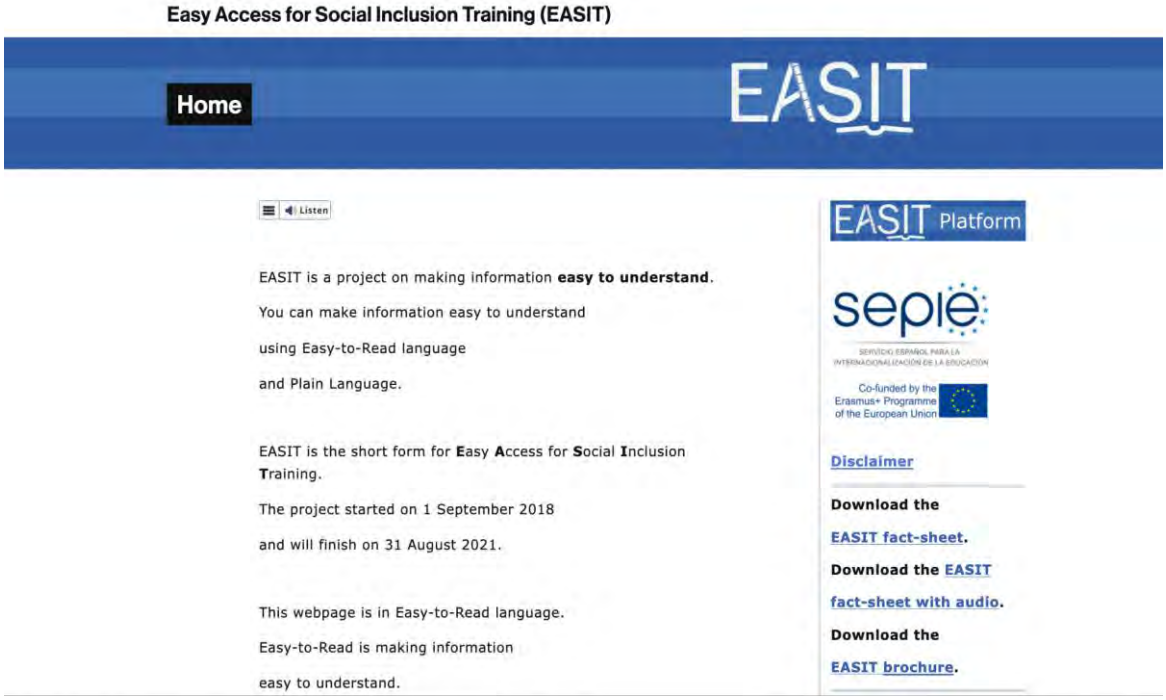



Figure 10
EASIT homepage, retrieved from https://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/easit/

In all these facets, Easy Language has been researched almost exclusively as a writing methodology (see, for instance, Degener 2016; Inclusion Europe 2014; Lindholm, Vanhatalo 2021; Maaß 2020; Matausch, Nietzio 2012; Piemontese 2012; Sciumbata 2017), whereas spoken communication has only recently begun to receive more attention (Perego, Brumen 2023; Leskelä 2022; Schulz *et al.* 2020; Trevisan, Brumen 2023). Very relevant work is currently being done in the context of the SELSI (Spoken Easy Language for Social Inclusion) Erasmus+ project, primarily aimed at carrying out research regarding the simplification of both one-way and two-way spoken interactions.

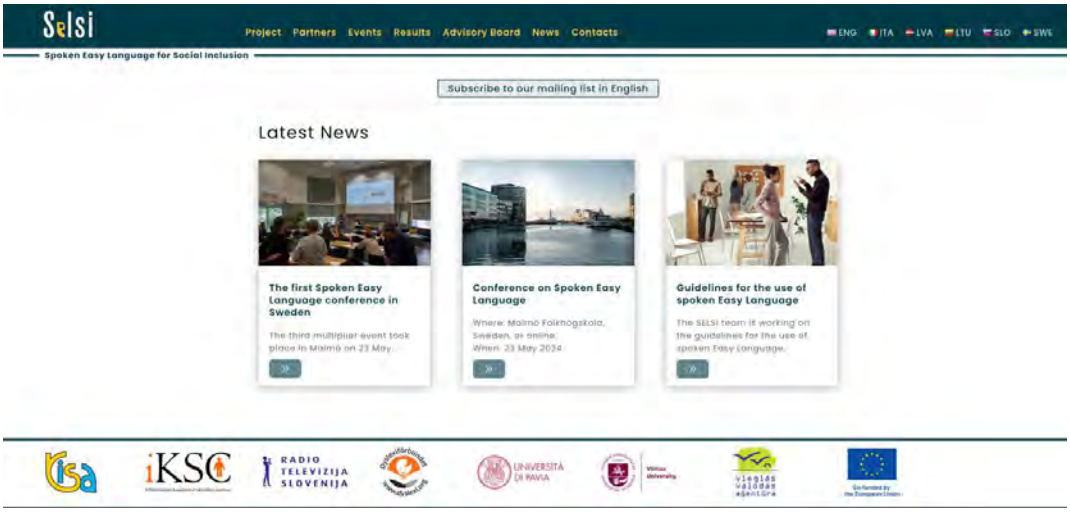



Figure 11
SELSI homepage, retrieved from https://selsi.eu/

Starting from the assumption that spoken communication is one of the most effective and common communication channels in everyday life, the SELSI project's main aim is to outline the first-ever European guidelines for Spoken Easy Language to support educators and learners from vulnerable groups in their daily interactions. To achieve this goal, the project is structured into four work packages involving various academic and non-academic institutions in five European countries (Italy, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Sweden). Each country has collected data from professionals and users through an online multilingual survey questionnaire aimed at mapping good practices, approaches, and resources in the field of Spoken Easy Language in Europe (SELSI 2023). Ultimately, a multilingual, multimodal online tool for introducing an innovative inclusive methodology for Spoken Easy Language will be designed (SELSI 2024).

The following sections of the chapter will describe how a university course on audio description, conceived as a type of intersemiotic translation, can be combined with strategies aimed at making the language of the audio description easier to understand (Maaß 2020; Matamala 2006, 2007, 2021; Perego 2020). The goal of this approach is to ensure additional accessibility to cultural products for both individuals with vision impairments and those with various forms of cognitive disabilities.

## 5. Designing a university course on screen AD and simplified art AD

The course on audio description and simplification described in the present section is offered at the University of Trieste (Italy), as part of the MA programme in Foreign Languages and Literatures. Its main aim is to equip

students with enhanced English language competence and practical skills in the areas of audio description and English language simplification.

According to Matamala (2006), the competences professionals need to develop expertise in AVT can be summarised in six items:

- The ability to undertake intersemiotic translations (turning images into words), both intralinguistically and interlinguistically, depending on the task commissioned.
- An excellent command of language and conventions.
- The ability to summarize information in order to adapt the text to the limited space available, keeping the original meaning, by means of rewording and using synonyms.
- The ability to adapt the linguistic style to the target audience and the product, by mastering different linguistic registers.
- The ability to critically select the most relevant information.
- Regarding live AD, good oral expression and excellent diction.

To address all the items listed above, the course begins with an overview of the social aspects of audio description, which include the following (see also Matamala, Orero 2007):

- Intended audience
- Short history of audio description
- Guidelines in Italy and other countries
- Audio describer profile

Following this general introduction, the course's practical activities begin. Students are divided into groups of two or three, with each group working on one computer. The subsequent sections of this chapter will detail these activities. Specifically, section 5.1 describes the screen audio description activities, while section 5.2 focuses on the art audio description tasks and simplification activities.

## *5.1 Screen audio description*

Traditionally, the first activity involves asking students to close their eyes and listen to the first five minutes of a film. This film contains scenes with a high density of dialogue alternated with scenes that have no dialogue at all, but only the sounds of objects or the characters' movements. The aim of this preliminary activity is to start raising awareness of what it means to experience a film with a visual impairment and to begin reflecting on the central linguistic aspects that need to be described. More specifically, discussions are held regarding which

attributes of characters or of settings need description, together with initial considerations regarding cultural aspects that may prove crucial for meaning making.

Students are therefore asked to try and produce a description of the very first moments of the film they have just listened to: this task is usually very hard, as it combines skills they do not possess at this stage, such as the use of succinct yet vivid language that effectively conveys the essential visual information, understanding the importance of timing and prioritizing descriptions based on the flow of dialogue and significant visual cues, adhering to established AD guidelines and conventions while adapting to the specific needs of the film (Fryer 2016; Matamala, Orero 2007; Perego 2018b; Piety 2004). After the initial awareness-raising activity, the course delves deeper into the theoretical and practical aspects of AD, involving first and foremost linguistic competence.

To enhance the development of awareness regarding vocabulary, terminology, syntax, and style, two lessons are devoted to the introduction of basic corpus tools such as collocations and occurrences.[13] The platform www.english-corpora.org, which includes TV corpora as well as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC), is introduced in class. Students are asked to study the frequency of specific terms in a corpus and their more frequent collocations. They generally find corpus tools very useful as they provide insights into language that prove crucial for the audio description activities they will undertake later. For example, many Italian students struggled with the phrasal verb "eat up", which was chosen by one student during the composition of an AD starting from a scenario proposed by the course professor in which a dog ate some food left unattended during a picnic. The platform *English Corpora* was used to find numerous examples of the expression in context, helping them to determine whether that option was the most suitable or not (Figure 12). The expression occurs 1,024 times in the COCA, and some students found it too informal for the required context. They therefore looked for synonyms and found that the verb "consume", besides being more formal, occurred 8,708 times (Figure 13). This indicates that the term is generally more preferred than "eat up" in American English. They ultimately opted for "consume" and proceeded to look for collocates that could work well with the word. With these collocational insights, the students crafted several example sentences fitting the task requirements. They discussed these along with corpus data justifying their lexical choices for an effective, formal alternative to the original informal phrasing and reached the following agreement: "At the picnic, the large dog approaches the unattended table. It quickly consumes all the sandwiches, leaving only empty plates behind". Using "consume" instead of "eat up"

[13] For a good introduction to Corpus Linguistics see, among the other, McEnery (2019).

avoided the casual tone of "eat up", which may be considered too informal for an AD.

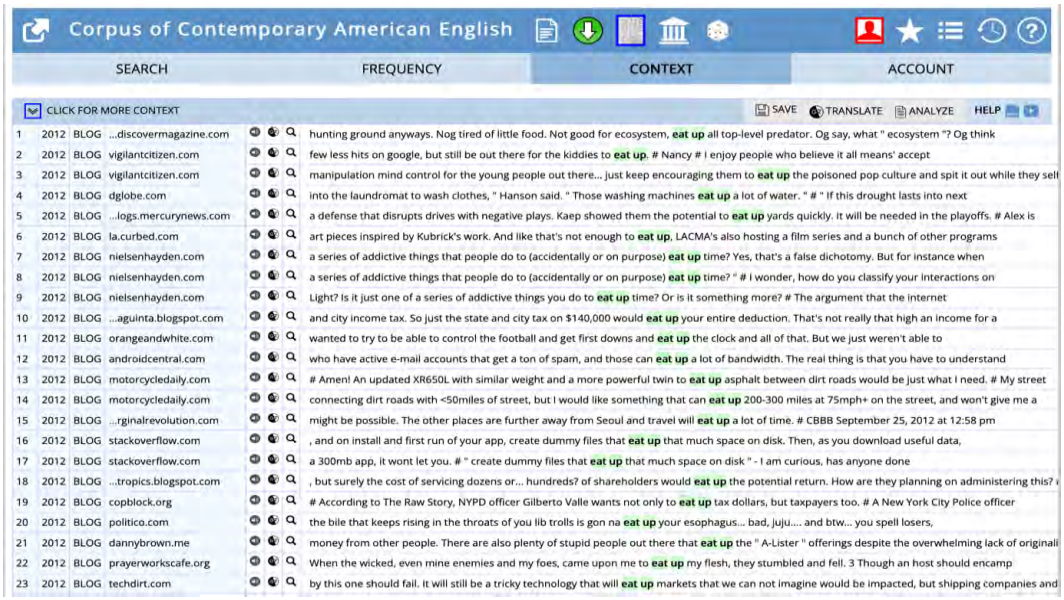



Figure 12
Concordance of the expression "eat up"
in the Corpus of Contemporary American English[14]

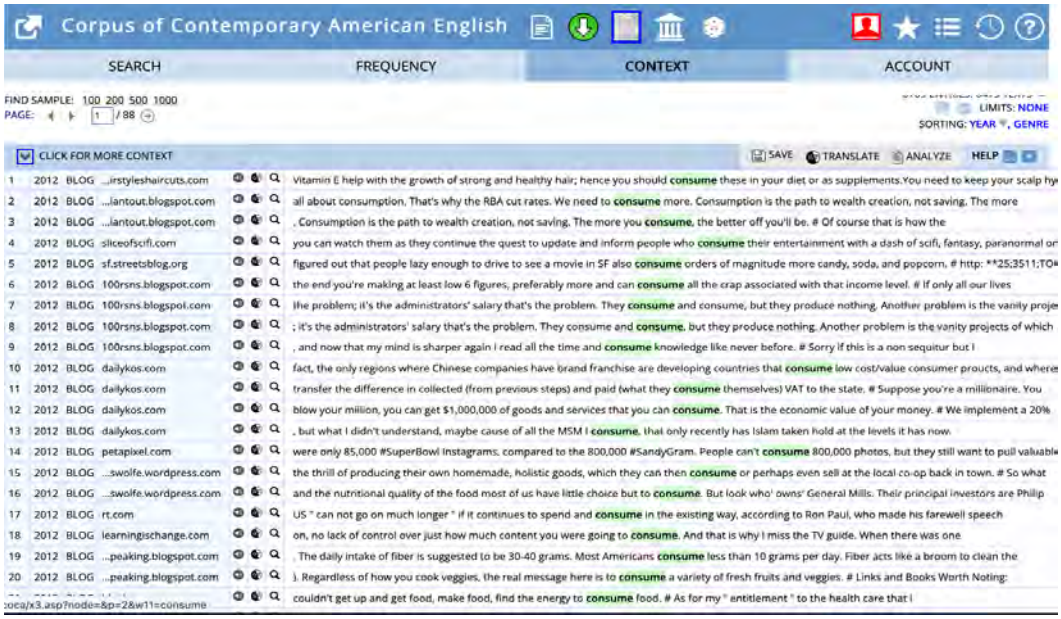



Figure 13
Concordance of the verb "consume"
in the Corpus of Contemporary American English.

[14] A concordance is a list of all occurrences of a particular word, phrase, or pattern in a corpus, along with its immediate context (usually a few words before and after).

Once students are familiar with these basic corpus tools, they move on to analysing film clips, where they begin to apply the skills acquired in previous exercises. The film clips are carefully selected based on several criteria: 1) They represent a variety of genres and visual styles to expose students to different descriptive challenges; 2) They include scenes with varying levels of dialogue and action, allowing practice with different time constraints; 3) Each clip is approximately three minutes long, providing enough content for meaningful description while keeping the task manageable for students. Additionally, we prioritise films that have official audio descriptions available (such as those on Netflix or other streaming platforms) to allow for comparison and discussion of professional AD techniques. The clips chosen introduce added complexity, requiring students to factor in time constraints when selecting relevant information for their descriptions. Specifically, students are required to describe five types of scenes, each presenting unique challenges in audio description:

*Three minutes of linear action*
Here, the chosen extract depicts a sequence where actions unfold sequentially. For instance, in a scene from the TV show *Better Call Saul* (Thomas Schnauz 2022, season 6 episode 7), four characters are seen conversing in a room. Suddenly, one character pulls out a gun, threatens another, and ultimately kills him. In their description, students are required to identify specific terms related to gun parts and to describe the fear experienced by the characters by focusing on their body reactions.

*Three minutes of a clip with no dialogue*
In this selected extract, again from *Better Call Saul* (Vince Gilligan 2022, season 6 episode 8), a deserted beach is portrayed with a car parked on the sand, and scattered shoes. The car door remains open, playing music from the radio. Various camera movements highlight different elements of the landscape, revealing clothes emerging from the waves. This audio description task presents greater complexity than previous ones, as students have a lot of time to select which elements to include or omit. For instance, mentioning the scattered shoes' elegance is crucial, as it suggests continuity with a previously described character. Students initially used general terms like "shoes" or "footwear", but were encouraged to employ complex or color-based adjectives, leading to alternatives such as "elegantly-tailored" or "classic-brown". Additionally, they must strike a balance, avoiding overly technical details about camera movements while ensuring the audience understands how certain elements are emphasised through zooming techniques (Fryer 2016; Taylor, Perego 2022; Perego 2018b).

*Three minutes of a clip containing extensive dialogue*

A typical excerpt used for this type of description is taken from the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* (Bryan Singer 2018), where four characters are depicted engaged in an intense conversation. Freddie Mercury, having just attended the concert of the other three characters, joins them backstage to congratulate them and propose himself as the new singer of the band. The three characters, who are unfamiliar with him, appear surprised by his boldness and begin teasing him about his physical attributes. However, when Freddie starts singing, they are visibly impressed. In this type of activity, the time available for description is very limited, requiring students to identify very specific words to describe the characters' emotions and facial expressions.

*Three minutes of a clip featuring continuous changes of characters and settings*

This clip is chosen for the complexity of describing different versions of the same characters in different time periods. One of the extracts used is taken from the TV show *This Is Us* (Glen Ficarra, John Requa 2016, season 1 episode 1) which unfolds by narrating the stories of three siblings, continuously alternating between their present lives and their past. The complex narrative structure of alternating timelines and versions of characters makes this type of clip particularly demanding for students. Paying close attention to contextual details, character continuity, and emotional resonance is critical, so students are introduced to this AD type later in the course.

*Three minutes of a clip very peculiar for its cultural aspect*

In this type of activity, a clip from a film strongly characterised by its cultural aspects is presented. One of the films used is *Parasite* (Bong Joon-ho 2019), a Korean film that blends social commentary with dark humor and suspense. Here, the challenges for students involve describing the nuances of Korean culture, class dynamics, and symbolic meanings. Therefore, in addition to identifying the most suitable linguistic patterns for description, students are also required to conduct some guided research to avoid misrepresentation or oversimplification. To facilitate this process, some classroom activities were implemented. These included discussions on cultural contexts such as Korean society, social hierarchy, urban living conditions, and cultural symbols. For instance, when describing a family eating in a cramped apartment, students recognised the importance of mentioning that the table is low, a specific cultural reference to traditional Korean dining. This detail was deemed crucial for providing a comprehensive understanding of what is being portrayed on the screen.

Students' work mainly takes place during classes, with constant feedback provided. At the end of each class, the official audio description for the analysed extract is presented and discussed with them. It is not uncommon

for us to disagree with specific choices made by the audio describer, both in terms of language choice and content. For example, in a three-minute clip of linear action, a candle's flame starts swinging while the two protagonists are watching TV, but the audio describer did not mention this. Both the students and the course professor believed this was an important element to describe, as it marks a significant change in the plot. The swirling motion occurs again later in the scene, creating narrative cohesion just as a killer appears. By omitting these details, the blind audience loses an essential element for understanding the narrative development.

Overall, students showed great interest in the proposed activities, as they found they were gaining different types of expertise simultaneously while enjoying themselves. On one hand, they were improving their language competence; on the other, they were acquiring practical skills that could be useful in their future occupations. Additionally, they were aware that audio description is an activity that enhances accessibility, which they seemed to greatly appreciate. In the next section, the final part of the course will be introduced, where students are required to make texts even more accessible through techniques for language simplification.

### *5.2 Art audio description: simplification*

The language simplification module focuses on another type of audio description, i.e. audio description for the arts. Art AD is an accessibility service designed for visually impaired audiences enabling access to artworks by translating their salient visual elements into audible words (Perego 2024, p. 44). As students soon realise, the two text-types (screen AD and Art AD) differ considerably, as screen AD is necessarily more concise, with short and simple paratactic sentences that have to be synchronised with the characters' dialogues, while Art AD tends to use longer sentences and higher lexical density (Giansante 2015; cf. also the training materials of the ADLAB PRO and the EASIT projects).

The module begins by introducing students to the main features of the painting corpus. The course professor uses the Lancsbox software on his computer to project analyses for everyone, guided by the students' acquired skills from the introductory part of the course. The investigation focuses on the most frequent lexical words in the corpus, key term collocations, and the most frequent N-Grams.[15]

[15] In corpus linguistics, the expression "N-Grams" refers to a sequence of words (bigram = 2 words, trigram = 3 words, etc.). Generating a list of the most frequent n-grams will help identify linguistic phenomena that might go unnoticed when using other tools.

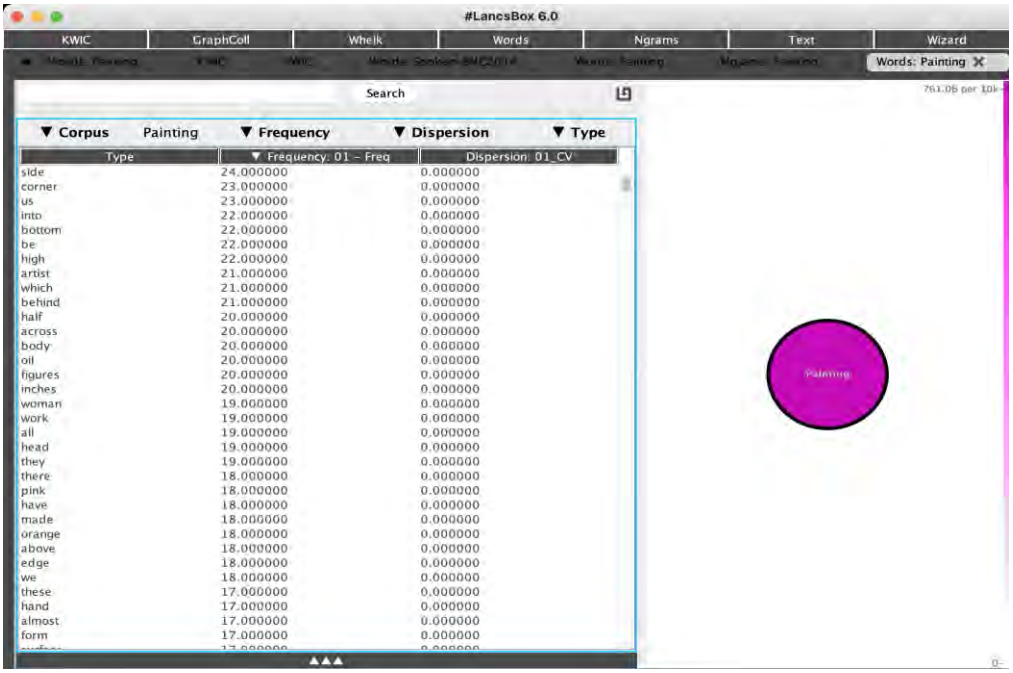



Figure 14
Most frequent content words in the painting corpus.

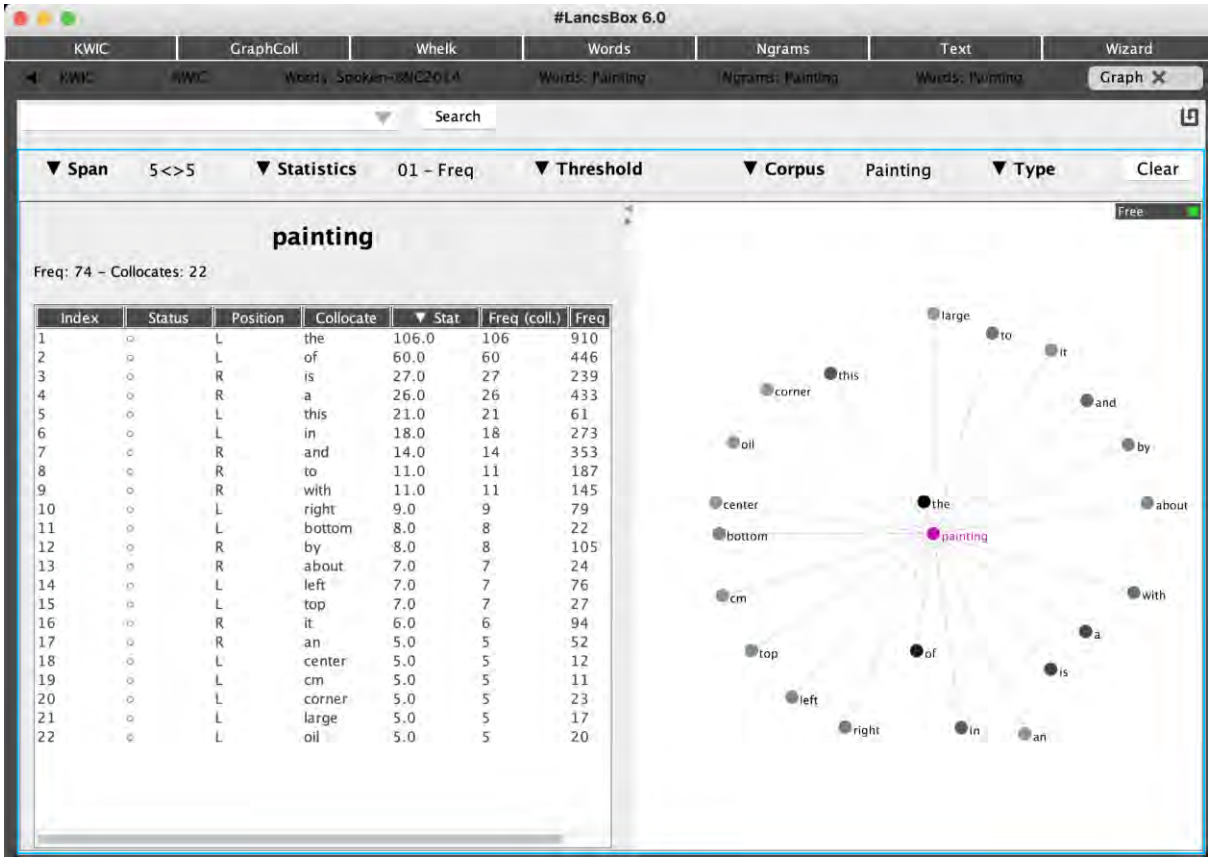



Figure 15
Strongest collocations of the word ‘Painting’.

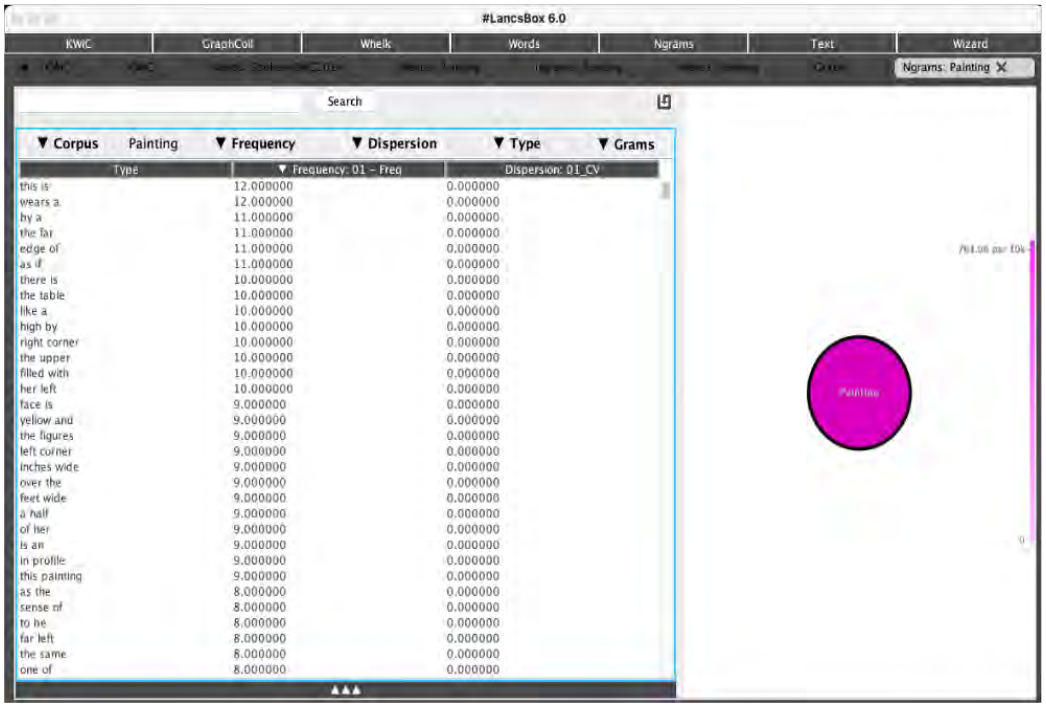



Figure 16
Most frequent N-Grams in the Painting corpus.

Once students have become familiar with some art audio descriptions and have identified recurrent language patterns, they are introduced to the online software *Analyze My Writing* (https://www.analyzemywriting.com/). The software is an online text content and readability analyzer based on the surface structure of texts which is used in the context of the course with purely didactic purposes. Among the readability indexes it offers, the following are the most important for the English language:

- **Gunning Fog Index**, which compares the complexity of a text with the years of formal schooling required to understand it.
- **Flesch-Kincaid Index**, which analyzes a text's readability based on the proportion of sentence length and word length to syllables.
- **SMOG Index**, which focuses on the impact of words and sentence length, especially counting polysyllabic words.
- **Automated Readability Index (ARI)**, which analyzes text complexity by observing the proportions of characters per word.

The online software is used in class by the instructor to analyse and show the readability indexes of some descriptions from the painting corpus previously studied using the corpus tool Lancsbox. Additionally, other measures such as word count, sentence count, character count, use of passives and lexical density are examined through the same software. Students are therefore asked to

analyse the main linguistic measures of the official AD of paintings found online (see note 6), such as for example the AD of the painting *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* by John Constable (1831), which can also be retrieved from the official website of the Tate Gallery in London. Among other things, they will find that the official AD has 459 words, structured into 28 sentences, with about 40% of verbs in the passive voice and a readability score of 10.91 (Gunning Fog Index) (see Blunden 2017).

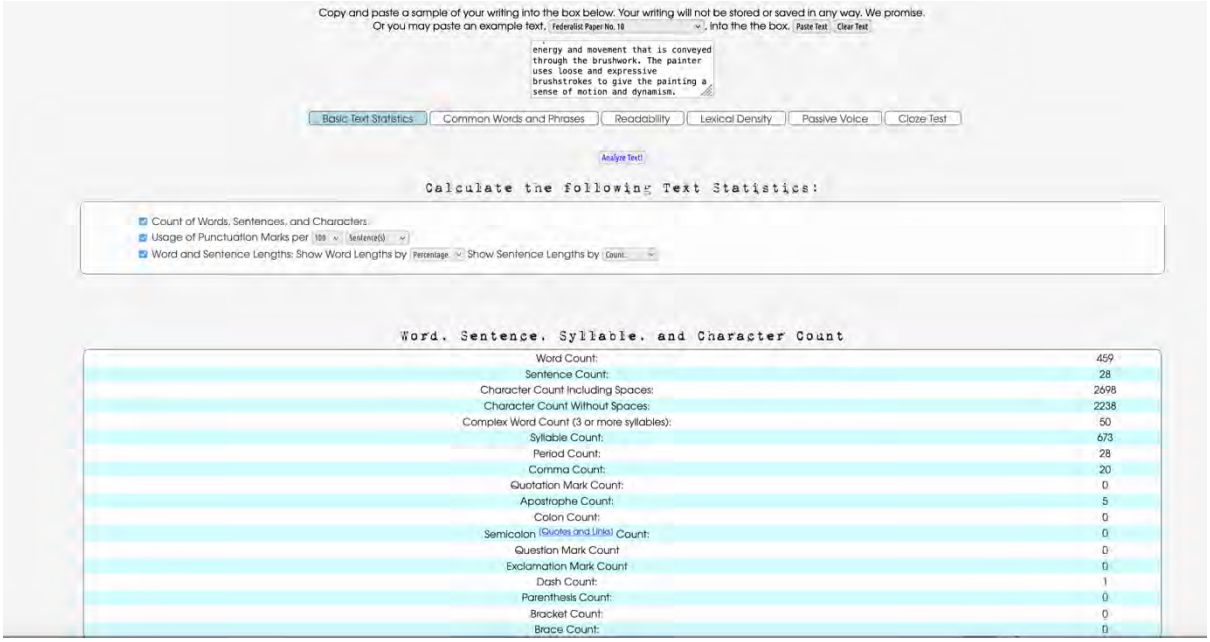



Figure 17
Interface of the online software Analyze my Writing.

At this point in the course, the basic tenets of Easy Language are introduced. First, the *Inclusion Europe guidelines* (2009) are presented and discussed. Then, some existing examples of translations into Easy English are reviewed, and students' doubts are addressed. When the students feel ready to engage in this new type of translation work, one of the paintings in the corpus is selected, and the principles of language simplification are applied. The main task they are required to pursue in this phase is the production of texts with a lower type/token ratio (indicative of reduced lexical density), and a lower readability index (indicative of the fact that the text is generally easier to be understood). The software is central to this task, as it helps them determine whether their intervention has indeed simplified the original text or not.[16]

As an example of what they should aim at, they are provided with the measures discussed by Perego (2020, p. 67), in which the author analyses the simplification of the *Nelson's Chamber* AD:

[16] Even though audio descriptions (ADs) are consumed orally, they are initially produced as written texts. Therefore, the software is very useful for this task.

| | Original AD | Easy English AD |
|---|---|---|
| **Tokens (running words)** | 129 | 123 |
| **Types (distinct words)** | 92 | 67 |
| **Type/Token Ratio** | 71.32% | 54.47% |
| **Mean word length** | 4.62 (SD=2.47) | 4.26 (SD=2.53) |
| **Sentences** | 8 | 15 |
| **Mean in words** | 16.13 | 8.20 |
| **Lexical density** | 55.81 | 49.19% |
| **Gunning fog index** | 10.48 | 7.18 |
| **Passive voice** | 50% | 26.67% |

Figure 18
Nelson's Chamber ADs: Quantitative data (from Perego 2020).

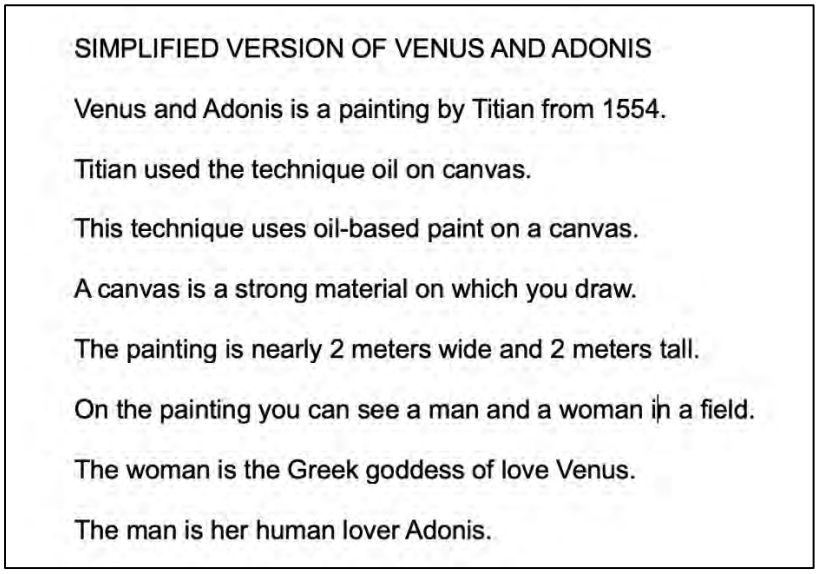
The students therefore produce a simplified version of the same painting they had previously analysed, and use the software to investigate the same linguistic measures in their new version. When the main linguistic measures for simplification are met, the texts are projected and discussed together until a final agreement is reached (see e.g. Figures 19 and 20). All these steps are carried out in class with students divided into groups and supervised by the course professor.

Due to time constraints, the simplification module is presented as an introduction to the great potential of language simplification for accessibility purposes. Students are made well aware that to gain the necessary skills, much more time and practice are needed, yet this initial exposure seems to instill a solid foundation. On the one hand, it ignites their interest for linguistic aspects they had never considered before, on the other hand, it raises awareness about the importance of creating accessible content for diverse audiences, which is a crucial step for creating a more equitable society.

*Venus and Adonis*

*Venus and Adonis*, 1554, oil on canvas, 186 cm wide and 207 cm tall, by Italian Renaissance painter Tiziano Vecellio (or Titian in English). The painting depicts two nearly life-sized Greco-Roman mythological characters, the beautiful goddess of love Venus and her beloved Adonis, who are on what seems to be a path on a field.

Figure 19
Extract from the first part of a student's description of *Venus and Adonis* (1554).


SIMPLIFIED VERSION OF VENUS AND ADONIS

Venus and Adonis is a painting by Titian from 1554.

Titian used the technique oil on canvas.

This technique uses oil-based paint on a canvas.

A canvas is a strong material on which you draw.

The painting is nearly 2 meters wide and 2 meters tall.

On the painting you can see a man and a woman in a field.

The woman is the Greek goddess of love Venus.

The man is her human lover Adonis.

Figure 20
Extract from the first part of a student's simplified description of *Venus and Adonis* (1554).

## 6. Conclusions

The analysis and discussion presented in this chapter highlight the multifaceted nature of AD as both an accessibility service and translation form, and a powerful tool for English language learning and teaching. By examining a selection of typifying linguistic features of professional art ADs and exploring approaches to simplification, we have endeavored to show how AD - both in its authentic and more complex, and in its simplified and more accessible forms - can be leveraged in innovative ways in the English language classroom, adapting each task to the language proficiency of the learners.

Specifically, the analysis of the painting corpus of ADs revealed the lexical richness and syntactic complexity that characterise art AD, featuring vivid descriptive language, varied adjectival patterns, and intricate sentence structures that learners can be exposed to and focus on. While these qualities make art AD engaging and evocative, they can also present comprehension challenges for certain audiences, or be too difficult to exploit with very low competence English learners. This realisation led us to explore simplification strategies, i.e. strategies aimed at enhancing accessibility without sacrificing the essence of the artwork being described, as a further and motivating resource to use in class, actively or receptively. The course design we have presented thus tackles both screen and art AD, and combines traditional AD techniques with language simplification approaches, offering a novel framework for developing students' linguistic competence while simultaneously fostering awareness of accessibility issues and instilling practical skills that can be

further developed to transform into a profession. By engaging in practical AD creation and simplification tasks, students not only enhance their English language skills but also gain valuable insights into the needs of diverse audiences, including those with visual or cognitive impairments.

Furthermore, our exploration of corpus analysis tools and readability metrics provides students and instructors with concrete methods for easily evaluating and improving the accessibility of their AD texts, and offers an engaging and user-friendly tool to analyse language quantitatively. This data-driven approach encourages critical reflection on language use and fosters the development of more inclusive communication practices.

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates the potential of audio description as a versatile educational tool that extends beyond its primary function as an accessibility service. By incorporating AD and simplification techniques into language curricula, students can be equipped with valuable applied skills while cultivating a deeper understanding of linguistic accessibility and inclusive communication practices.

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Figures 4, 5, 6: Bronze figure of a running girl, 520-500 BC, by Caeciliusinhorto, 2019, Wikimedia Commons, (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spartan_running_girl_%28cropped%29.jpg), Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Figure 7: *The Coronation of the Virgin* (G. da Fabriano, 1420), by Sailko, 2010, Wikimedia Commons, (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gentile_da_fabriano,_incoronazione_della_vergine,_1420_ca,_02.JPG), Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported (CC BY-SA 3.0).

Figure 8: *Street, Dresden* (E. L. Kirchner, 1908) (reworked 1919; dated on painting 1907), by JR P, 2019, Flickr (https://www.flickr.com/photos/ugardener/49152283581), Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Figure 9. *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (P. Mondrian, 1942-1943), by rawpixel, Flickr, (https://www.flickr.com/photos/vintage_illustration/51913391180) Digitally enhanced by rawpixl, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial
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# EXPLORING MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE 'GO GREEN' WEBSITE

PIETRO MANZELLA

**Abstract** – This chapter explores the use of multimodal resources and the promotion of extended reality (XR) technologies in the GO GREEN project, a sustainable tourism initiative, centred on the Gorizia province in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia (FVG) region of Italy, promoted by *Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Gorizia* (CARIGO, for short). The analysis investigates how various meaning-making resources are employed on the GO GREEN website to engage the viewer through compelling sustainability narratives. By promoting on-site access to XR tools, the website illustrates nine distinct "narrative itineraries", or projects, within the region's natural and cultural heritage, encouraging both locals and tourists to undertake immersive experiences. Using Baldry and Thibault's (2006, Ch. 3) framework for multimodal website analysis, this chapter examines the synergic interplay between visuals and text to enhance persuasiveness in one of these itineraries – viz. the one in the Collio region – drawing on key themes and master narratives emphasising the integration of past and present and the role of young people as active participants in digital experiences. The findings reveal how the website shapes viewer experiences and encourages young people to engage in sustainable practices, ultimately raising questions about the potential of XR technologies as tools for environmental education.

**Keywords**: multimodal analysis; sustainability narratives; XR technologies; master narratives; sustainable tourism practices.

## 1. Introduction

This chapter explores the semiotic resources employed in the website for the GO GREEN project i.e., "the program for the valorisation of the cultural, historical and landscape heritage of the province of Gorizia" (see Figure 1) promoted by CARIGO, short for *Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Gorizia*, a non-profit foundation based in the Italian province of Gorizia (Friuli-Venezia Giulia region).

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DOI Code: 10.1285/i27241688n2p165

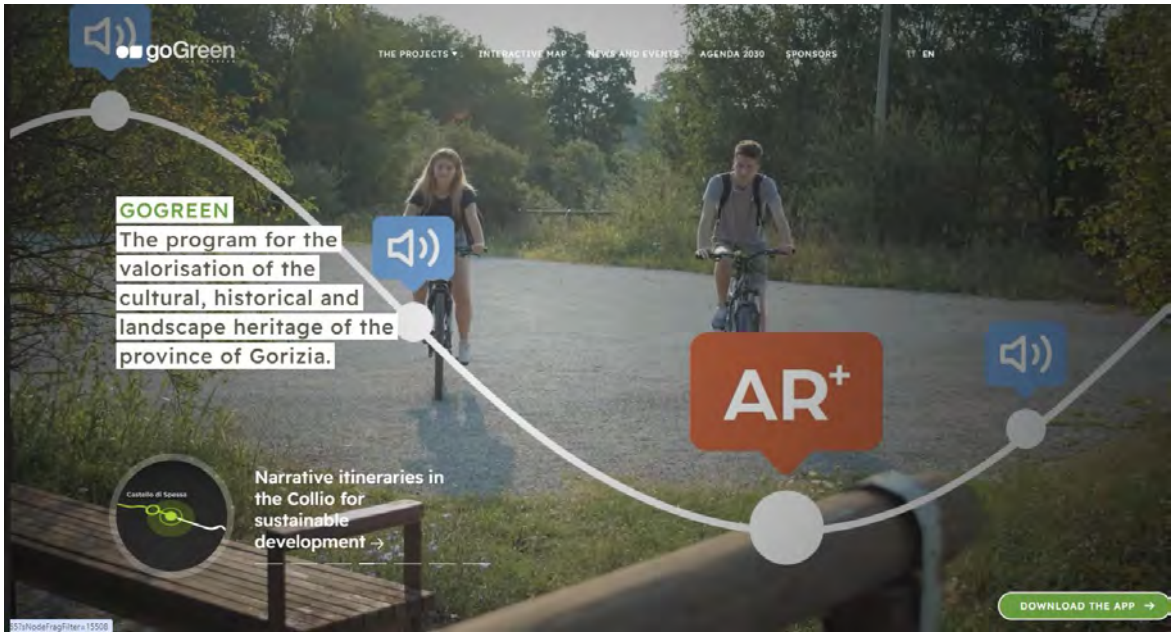



Figure 1
The GO GREEN programme cover page, https://www.carigogreen.com [retrieved October 10, 2024].

Originating from the *Cassa di Risparmio* (a savings bank) and transitioned into a foundation as part of banking reforms in the 1990s, CARIGO now focuses on philanthropic activities aimed at fostering social, cultural, and economic development in the region. Besides education and research and sustainable development, CARIGO's activities include cultural heritage and promotion. CARIGO's primary goal is thus to reinvest financial resources in projects that benefit the local community, in line with the broader mission of Italian foundations that started life as savings banks.

GO GREEN uses extended reality (XR) technologies to enrich storytelling in guiding the tourist along nine "narrative itineraries"[1], or "projects" (see Figure 2).

[1] The nine projects, or narrative itineraries, are: 1) *Narrative Itineraries: Gorizia*, "a series of routes in Gorizia to discover the city"; 2) *Narrative Itineraries: Collio*, "an unforgettable journey through time that allows you to see what the Collio's landscapes were like"; 3) *Narrative Itineraries: Isonzo*, "to understand the territory along the course of the Isonzo"; 4) *Smart Space*, "a digital exhibition space to narrate art, culture, and landscape"; 5) *Museo del Monte San Michele,* "an entirely redesigned museum offering a truly unique immersive experience of WWI"; 6) *Narrative Itineraries: Karst*, "three routes to be travelled on foot, to discover how nature and history intertwine on the border"; 7) *Spazzapan Gallery*, "a virtual experience of the works of the painter Luigi Spazzapan from Gradisca"; 8) *Giardino Viatori*, "one of the most beautiful gardens in Italy"; 9) *Digital Museum of Reclamation*, "an innovative digital setup that tells the story of how man transformed the landscape of the lower Isonzo plain over the past two centuries". Significantly, while the full list of narrative itineraries is provided at https://www.carigogreen.com/projects [retrieved October 11, 2024], the carousels on the cover page (https://www.carigogreen.com/projects, [retrieved October 20, 2024]) only refer to itineraries 4), 8), 5), 2), 3), 6), and 1) (in this order).

The present study focuses on the introductory video to one of these nine projects called *Narrative Itineraries: Collio* – an area in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, in northeastern Italy, nestled between the Julian Alps and the Adriatic Sea, which offers a blend of rolling hills, vineyards, and charming medieval villages. The *Narrative Itineraries: Collio* project itself contains "8 stories between fantasy and reportage, science fiction and the historical or biographical genre including the thriller and the war story to visit the Collio and discover the different cultural aspects of the area: history, food and wine excellence, legends and local traditions" (https://www.carigogreen.com/en/15470/narrative-itineraries-collio [retrieved October 13, 2024]). More specifically, the introductory video presenting the eight stories is analysed below with a view to investigating whether the meaning-making environment represented by the website, in its articulation into cover page[2] and a start page, is coherently instantiated. With this objective in mind, specific attention is paid to the co-patterning and synergic interplay, in the video, of different semiotic resources in the construction and construal of the overall message (Thibault 2000, p. 312; Vasta 2010, p. 183). These resources can be seen as affordances that specify and help to set up possibilities for action in a human ecology[3] that integrates social practices with artefacts, texts, technologies, and the material world (Thibault 2021a, p. 96).

In the digital age, the intersection of technology and communication has led to the emergence of new paradigms in the way information is presented. XR – which can be seen as a further development of the ways in which humans have always navigated virtual environments, and thus as a distinctive hallmark of the human ecology – has gained significant momentum in recent years, marking its relevance across a number of industries, particularly in digital marketing and sustainability, as a potential tool to inform and engage the public with current and future environmental issues (Cosio *et al*. 2023, p. 1). The function of simulating XR features on the webpages is to make the content more engaging and entice prospective tourists, while raising their awareness of sustainability issues.[4] In this perspective, the representation of these features

[2] Landing pages – which in the context of this chapter has been defined as a cover page – are standalone web pages, created specifically for a marketing or advertising campaign, implementing and prioritising a specific call to action. They are designed to constrain a user's reading pathway by appearing before or over the homepage and by imposing a single comply-or-dismiss decision (see www.apexure.com/blog/landing-page-vs-homepage-key-differences-explained, and https://landingi.com/blog/splash-page-vs-landing-page-whats-the-difference/ [retrieved October 20, 2024], quoted in Vasta 2024, p. 24).

[3] Human ecology is understood to be "the continual praxis of societies of selves in determining the concrete forms and practices of their individual and community life" (Thibault 2021, p, 16).

[4] In passing, mention should also be made of the ideological, political, and economic implications of the role of banks such as CARIGO in the context of the neoliberal marketing of the environment, as evidenced in the videos discussed. Engaging tourists involves strategies of persuasion and affective affiliation that may, particularly within the context of marketing and promotional

requires careful analysis, particularly in terms of how they contribute to the overall viewer experience and message delivery. XR is operationalised as an umbrella term that encompasses virtual reality (VR), mixed reality (MR), and augmented reality (AR) (Newton, and Annetta 2024, p. 2), which together create immersive environments that blend physical and digital elements. The growing importance of XR in communicative terms is reflected in its increasing usage in digital platforms – especially those aiming to enhance viewer engagement[5] and interaction – and raises important questions about the efficacy of XR as a tool for environmental education and its potential to steer viewer behaviour towards more sustainable choices.

To analyse the simulation of XR on the GO GREEN website in a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective, this chapter draws on existing models of website analysis, particularly the one developed by Baldry and Thibault (2006, Ch. 3) in their study of multimodal discourse. This model, which *inter alia* emphasises the significance of visual trajectories and pathways in understanding how viewers interact with digital texts, provides a useful starting point for exploring the GO GREEN website, which, as described below, attempts to incorporate Lemke's (2002, 2005, 2014) notion of viewer-trajectory[6] in explicit and immersive ways.

discourses, also entail the unethical manipulation of environmental concerns. In this respect, mainstream 'green' discourses are often ambivalent discourses; while these discourses have a positive aim of dealing with some of the ecological problems caused by destructive discourses, they arise from the same society as the destructive discourses and may be influenced by political or commercial interests (Stibbe 2020, p. 25). These discourses might aim to persuade individuals to engage in often unsustainable practices, such as consumerism, which ultimately serve to generate profit. A potential contradiction thus arises between the notions of "sustainability" and "tourism" – which is exemplified by the recent protests by residents in various parts of the world against tourism and its environmental and economic impacts on local communities and ecosystems. While not falling directly within the scope of this chapter, nominalisations – i.e. resources for generalising, for abstracting from particular events (Fairclough 2003, p. 144) – such as "sustainability" and the thematic systems and social practices to which the term contributes could provide valuable areas for further inquiry and investigation.

[5] User engagement is defined as "a form of user experience which includes both a psychological state where the user appraises the quality of media and becomes absorbed in media content and a behavioral experience in which the user physically interacts with the interface and also socially distributes and manages the content" (Oh, Bellur and Sundar 2018, p. 742).

[6] "The notion of a user-trajectory [...] comes from the theory of hypertext, in which there are alternate possible reading pathways through the 'pages' (lexias) produced by an author (Landow, 1997)" (Lemke 2014, p. 169). In Lemke's definition, a traversal or trajectory "in a reading of a hypertext [...] is only loosely constrained. There are many branching points, possibilities of returns and closed loops, and the option of following more than one line of development in parallel" (Lemke 2005, p. 48). In other words, "There are many possible trajectories, or traversals, through the web of a hypertext. Meaning on a time- and text-scale long compared to the typical scale of linked units (e.g., a paragraph or page) becomes a creation of the user/reader that is far less predictable to the designer than in the case of a printed book whose narrative or argument has a single conventional sequence" (Lemke 2002, p. 300). In a similar vein, and drawing on the work

One of the aims of the GO GREEN website is to promote sustainable tourism through compelling visual narratives – or to engage in transduction, to use Kress and van Leeuwen's terminology, which is concerned with moving between a range of semiotic modes (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 39) – that make sustainable practices more tangible for prospective tourists, confirming the persuasive force of tourist material (Francesconi 2014, p. 62). The multimodal perspective can thus be viewed as crucial for understanding the complexity of contemporary communication, such as that instantiated by the GO GREEN website, especially if one considers that, in today's information society, most of our communicative exchanges and productions are mediated by digital technologies (Petroni 2011, p. 15).

In this sense, tourist websites are a dynamic source of information through which tourists can experience the holiday instead of simply having a brief description of the destination (Maci 2007, p. 42).

This chapter aims to establish whether the GO GREEN website succeeds in effectively integrating different semiotic modalities, while designing – and making perceptually salient – specific viewer trajectories simulating the XR features that *promise* to create immersive and interactive experiences: in marketing (or, more generally, promotional) terms, all of this amounts to a "self-fulfilling prophecy,"[7] fuelling the act of *fides* to be necessarily performed by the addressee/prospective tourist if s/he is to undertake the XR experience. In this connection, the notion of "trajectories" – as outlined by Baldry and Thibault – refers to the pathways that guide viewers through a website, shaping their interaction and engagement with the content. Specifically, meaning-making trajectories are understood as "the progressive integration over time of the semiotic resources that are encountered as the website viewer progresses from one linked object, one text, one web page, one website, to another" (Baldry, Thibault 2006, p. 116). By examining how these specific XR elements are integrated into the website's design, this analysis explores how they contribute to viewer experience and how viewer engagement enhances understanding of sustainability: the website promotes experiencing XR to create an interactive and immersive environment that encourages viewers to explore different aspects of sustainability, but raises the question of whether XR integration simply serves as a technological gimmick, or whether it adds

of Bush (1945), Thibault (2012, p. 11) argues that "the creation of a hypertextual trajectory leads to the building up of systems of meaning relationships from text to text, verbal text to visual image, from web page to web page, and so on, as one navigates through a website or across websites. Hypertext is a set of meaning-making practices which allows us to construct such relationships, in the process creating multimodal systems of meanings".

[7] Originally coined by Boorstin (1962), the expression 'self-fulfilling prophecy' was appropriated by Bourdieu (1991, p. 191), who used it to underscore its potential to "[do] what it says in so far as the addressees recognize themselves in it, conferring on it the symbolic and also material power which enables the words to come true".

substantive value to the viewer's experience and understanding of the content. After a brief overview of the site (Section II), an analysis of some webpages in terms of meaning-making processes is given (Section III and IV), followed by some concluding remarks and suggestions for future research (Section V).

## 2. The Go Green Website

The research questions this chapter seeks to address are as follows: What themes and master narratives[8] emerge when examining the GO GREEN webpages? Are any recurrent strategies used to connect the visual and graphological cues so as to give salience to specific aspects?

The GO GREEN programme is sponsored by CARIGO and is being carried out specifically to promote the Italian province of Gorizia (Friuli-Venezia Giulia region) and its unique landscape, historical, and cultural features. Yet, it does so in a special way, one that clearly validates the area's features in the eyes of young people, which almost certainly includes those who live in this area and who will thus take pride in seeing their remote corner of Italy promoted in this way. The site may thus be seen – from one standpoint – as an example of an "edutainment website" (Baldry, Thibault 2006, p. 104): information is provided about sustainable tourism while the viewer is entertained by the videos supplied for the nine different GO GREEN projects (see Figure 2), that make engaging and innovative use of next-generation technologies. Somewhat unusually, from a purely textual and compositional standpoint, the site features what might be considered to be two interlinked home pages – the first referred to below as the *cover* page – and the second a *story pathways start,* or *start* page for short, as it is the starting point for what the menu bar names as *The Projects*. As with any website, both pages can be accessed from within the website – by clicking on the options in the menu bar (Figure 3) – but also via links in the pages themselves.

Significantly, these two pages share most of the site's visual entertainment, especially the video presentation of young people visiting the countryside on their bicycles gaining experience of places not just through their own eyes but also by using VR headsets as well as their smartphones.[9]

[8] According to Bamberg, "master narratives are [culturally accepted frames] setting up sequences of actions and events as routines and as such have a tendency to 'normalize' and 'naturalize'" (Bamberg 2004, p. 360).

[9] Emphasising visual perception, this aspect also points to a larger issue concerning the nature of what Thibault refers to as "first-order embodied experience", i.e., a first "layer" of meaning that can catalyse flows of non-perceptual awareness and virtual action-perception (Thibault 2021b, p. 102).

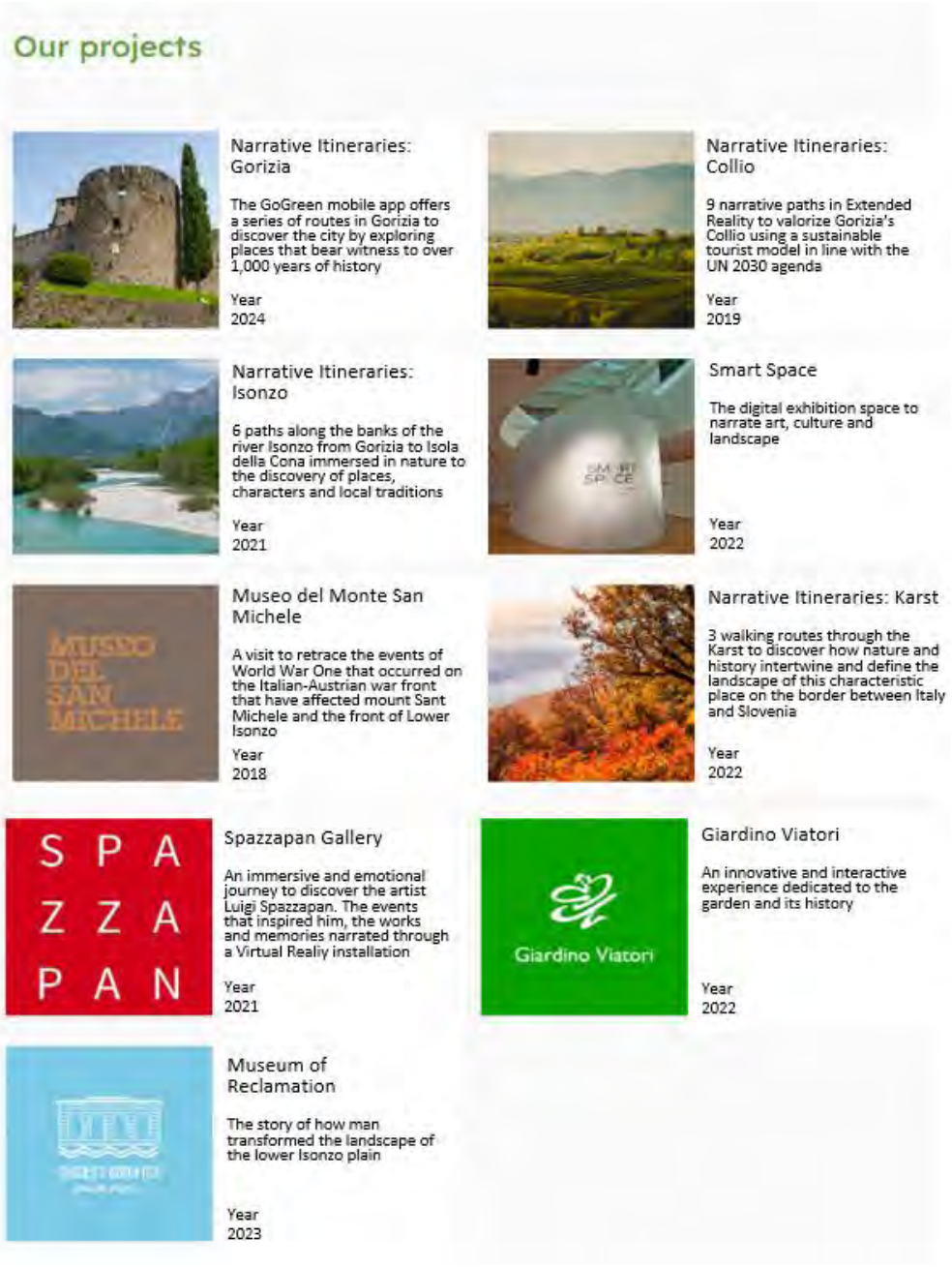



Figure 2
The nine narrative itineraries, https://www.carigogreen.com, [retrieved October 16, 2024].[10]


Figure 3
CARIGO GREEN menu bar.

[10] The dimensions of the captions have been amended to enhance readability, while retaining the original wording.

As Figure 3 shows, the masthead is in the traditional position for the website genre (i.e., top left). The menu bar is superimposed in the *cover* page's top frame on a looped video, i.e., one which, when finished, goes back to the start. This video tells a story about three young people on bicycles (an old technology) who explore the countryside with the technologies mentioned above that allow them to discover the past identified in the videos. The cover page is thus the starting point for this journey of discovery – a challenging and entertaining way of interpreting sustainable tourism.

Revealingly, the menu bar does not include a HOME option, further pointing to the integrated nature of the GO GREEN *cover* page with the *start* page. The cover page also features a carousel, a time-based structure that allows a set of multimodal frames to be shown in a continuous, self-repeating sequence: while often found on home pages, in some websites the frames, as in this case, can be individually selected by the viewer, thereby turning them into decision-making waypoints (Vasta 2024, p. 25). Specifically, the carousel self-identifies as such through a series of seven dashes below the caption describing the nature of the journey that would-be tourists can undertake. Organised as a dynamic visual-verbal cluster (Baldry, Thibault 2006, p. 31), Figure 1 shows how the journey travels from one point on the map to another. This also explains that the main reason for examining the cover page first – i.e. it deictically indicates the point of departure and potentialities for action – needs to be squared with its direct links to the storytelling pathways on the start page. While the menu bar separates, the carousel links.

## 3. The *Narrative Itineraries: Collio* project: Analysis of the Promotional Video

The *Narrative Itineraries: Collio* page is similar to the cover page of the GO GREEN programme in its positioning of an embedded cluster, which, when compared, begins to explain the differences between the two pages. Although both contain a looped video, some of the scenes[11] shown differ, despite presenting the same participants – people, places, bicycles, and digital instruments such as smartphones and VR goggles. This page features a looped video briefly presenting the eight narrative paths, or "stories". Drawing on Baldry and Thibault (2006), a transcription of the video is provided below in order to point out the semiotic resources employed and how they contribute to overall meaning-making. The aim is to distinguish in analytically relevant ways the different resources co-deployed in a given text at the same time (Thibault 2000, p. 312).

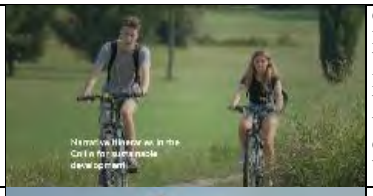
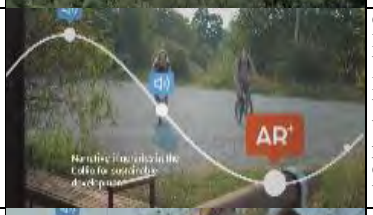
[11] https://www.carigogreen.com/en/15470/narrative-itineraries-collio [retrieved October 13, 2024].

In terms of visual layout, the table presented below comprises 5 columns, each of which is referred to with a linguistic item; following Thibault (2000, p. 314), Column 1 specifies the number of phases[12] and subphases– i.e. text-analytical units in terms of which the text as a whole can be segmented and analysed (Baldry, Thibault 2006, p. 47). The metafunctional interpretation of phases and subphases, which are seen as a set of co-patterned semiotic selections that are co-deployed in a consistent character (Thibault 2000, p. 325), will be described in Section IV; Column 2 is concerned with the time in seconds of the video (as the video is embedded in the website, a recording was made of the screen while the video was playing, and subsequently captured through VLC, a multimedia player); Column 3, i.e., "Visual Frame", is concerned with the frame captured at the time indicated in Column 2; Column 4 refers to the visual image and comprises some notational glosses, which were compiled following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006); Column 5 refers to kinesic actions, whereby kinesics is understood as an umbrella term to refer to body movement.[13]

| C1<br>Macrophase (MP)/Subphase (SP)/Microphase (MrP) | | C2<br>TIME | C3<br>VISUAL FRAME | C4<br>VISUAL IMAGE | C5<br>Kinesic Action |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.INTRO MACROPHASE (MP1) | SP1.1<br>Attention getter | 1" |  | CP: panning left to right<br>HP: oblique<br>VP: high<br>D: VLS<br>VC: mountains in the background<br>VS: the ground<br>CO: naturalistic | |

[12] As pointed out by Gregory (1975, p. 71) "phasal description distinguishes, at varying degrees of delicacy, stretches of discourse (continuously or discontinuously manifested) that share ideational, interpersonal, and textual consistency and congruity". Drawing on Baldry and Thibault (2020, p. 171), the expression 'phase' and 'subphase' are used in a general sense, as a further distinction is made in this chapter between "the analytical categories of macrophase (MP), subphase (SP), and microphase (MrP). Typically, a text can be analysed into a number of distinct macrophases. A given macrophase may, potentially, be further analysable into more delicate selections at the level 'below', which we now call subphase. In turn, subphases have the potential to be analysed into still more delicate selections of resources at the level we call microphase". Specifically, a microphase is "intended as a construct which: a) captures the process of branching a given subphase into subordinate, yet independent structural extensions of the subphase itself or which: b) together with other related microphases (at times discontinuously manifested in discourse), makes up a structurally and functionally cohesive rhetorical step" (Vasta 2023, p. 73).

[13] In relation to Column 4 and 5, the following notational conventions were adopted, drawing on Thibault (2000, pp. 328-348): in C4, CP = Camera Position; HP = Horizontal Perspective; VP = Vertical Perfective; D = Distance; VC = Visual Collocation; VS = Visual Salience; CO = Coding Orientation; VF = Visual Focus. In C5: [ …] – e.g. square brackets – indicate that a series of action take place simultaneously, with each movement which is distinguished from the other one with a semi-colon; square brackets are not used when no simultaneous kinesic act is present; ( ) – round brackets – designates a sequence of movement in time.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **SP1.2 Orientation** | **MrP1.2.1** | **3”** |  | CP: stationary<br>HP: direct<br>VP: median<br>D: LS<br>VC: trees in the background<br>VS: boy and girl pedalling<br>CO: naturalistic<br>VF: medium; disengaged | [Boy and girl pedalling] |
| | | **MrP1.2.2** | **6”** |  | CP: tilting<br>HP: oblique<br>VP: median<br>D: MLS<br>VC: trees in the background<br>VS: boy/girl looking at phone<br>CO: naturalistic<br>VF: close; engaged | [Boy and girl look at the phone] |
| **2 BODY MACROPHASE (MP2)** | **SP2.1** | **MrP2.1.1** | **11”** |  | CP: stationary<br>HP: oblique<br>VP: high<br>D: MCS<br>VC: backpack; dark background<br>VS: Boy watching Casanova through XR<br>CO: sensory<br>VF: close; engaged | [Boy looks at the phone; Casanova appears] |
| | | **MrP2.1.2** | **11”** |  | CP: stationary<br>HP: direct<br>VP: high<br>D:VCS<br>VC: blurred grass<br>VS: phone displaying Casanova<br>CO: sensory<br>VF: close; engaged | [Boy presses the phone display] |
| | **SP2.2** | **MrP2.2.1** | **16”** |  | CP: dolly right to left<br>HP: oblique<br>VP: high<br>D: VLS<br>VC: tree-and-field background<br>VS: couple following the AR animated narrative pathway<br>CO: sensory<br>VF: far; engaged | [Couple rides a bike; the AR narrative pathway unfolds]; |
| | | **MrP2.2.2** | **21”** |  | CP: stationary<br>HP: direct<br>VP: median<br>D: MLS<br>VC: nature in the background<br>VS: AR animated narrative pathway; boy and girl cycling<br>CO: sensory<br>VF: medium; engaged | [boy and girl ride a bike; the AR narrative pathway unfolds];<br><br>overlay of the AR narrative pathway |
| | | **MrP2.2.3** | **24”** |  | CP: stationary<br>HP: oblique<br>VP: median<br>D: MCS<br>VC: sky-and-tree background<br>VS: AR animated narrative pathway; boy/girl get off bike<br>CO: sensory | [boy and girl get off the bike; the AR narrative pathway unfolds];<br><br>overlay of the AR narrative path |
| | **SP2.3** | | **30”** |  | CP: stationary<br>HP: direct<br>VP: median<br>D: CS<br>VC: nature in the background<br>VS: Casanova<br>CO: naturalistic<br>VF: far; disengaged | Casanova looks ahead |
| | **SP2.4** | | **32”** |  | CP: dolly<br>HP: direct<br>VP: median<br>D: LS<br>VC: nature and trees in the background<br>VS: boy and girl pedalling<br>CO: naturalistic<br>VF: medium; engaged | [boy and girl pedal] |

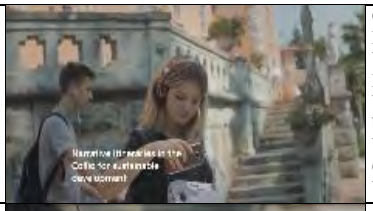
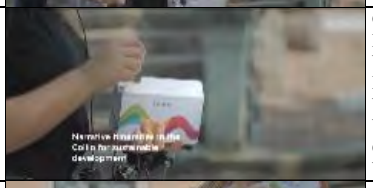
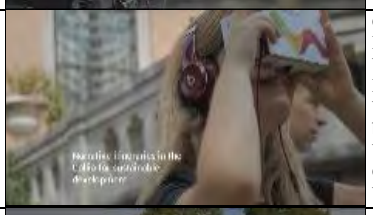
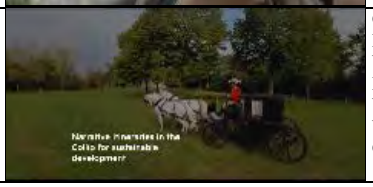
| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SP2.5 | MrP2.5.1 | 33” |  | CP: stationary<br>HP: direct<br>VP: median<br>D: MCS<br>VC: slightly blurred background<br>VS: girl handling goggles<br>CO: naturalistic<br>VF: close; engaged | [girl handles the goggles; boy listens to some audio content] |
| | | MrP2.5.2 | 36” |  | CP: stationary<br>HP: direct<br>VP: median<br>D: CS<br>VC: blurred background<br>VS: girl activating goggles<br>CO: naturalistic<br>VF: close; engaged | (girl activates the goggles; girl uses goggles) |
| | | MrP2.5.3 | 38” |  | CP: panning right to left<br>HP: oblique<br>VP: median<br>D: CS<br>VC: slightly blurred background<br>VS: girl using goggles<br>CO: naturalistic<br>VF: close; engaged | |
| 3. OUTRO MACROPHASE (MP3) | SP3.1 (Coda) | | 41” |  | CP: dolly<br>HP: oblique<br>VP: high<br>D: VLS<br>VC: nature in the background<br>VS: Casanova’s carriage<br>CO: naturalistic | [Casanova’s carriage] |

Table 1
Multimodal Transcription of the *Narrative Itineraries: Collio* project.[14]

## 4. Discussion

In order to investigate the main findings of the *Narrative Itineraries: Collio* project, this section focuses on two master narratives, which emerge more clearly than others from their metafunctional analysis: the juxtaposition of past and present and representation of young people in their interactions with XR technologies. They are crucial to understanding how the project uses multimodal communication to convey complex themes, particularly around sustainability and digital engagement. Below, an account is given detailing how visual-graphical elements typically contribute to ideational-presentational meaning, interpersonal-orientational-attitudinal meaning, and organisational textural-structural meaning (Lemke 2005, p. 47).

[14] The caption, consistent across all frames, reads: “Narrative itineraries in the Collio for sustainable development”.

### 4.1. The Intersection of Past and Present

The intersection of past and present is best exemplified in SP2.1 in Table 1. Central to this sequence is the boy, the Actor (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 50) who plays the most crucial role in the meaning-making process; he is involved in the transactional material process (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, pp. 61-64) of accessing and interacting with historical and cultural content through his smartphone. This transactional dimension is critical because it emphasises that the past is no longer static or distant; rather, it becomes something dynamic, continuously reinterpreted through interaction with the phone, recalling Lemke's arguments that meanings are made across time, across space, in and through matter (Lemke 2014, p. 168). It is through the XR headset that the boy and Casanova are initially depicted in a simulated state of physical proximity, creating the illusion that they occupy the same space, thereby merging two distinct temporal frameworks. In the subsequent frame, however, the boy is shown interacting with Casanova via his smartphone screen, positioning them in separate locations, which contrasts with the previous depiction. This shift suggests a partial withdrawal from the immersive XR experience, thereby emphasising the distinction between the simulated environment and the "real" world. The boy's engagement with the "real" world now implies a sense of agency, as he appears to exercise control over the prior simulation. More to the point, when historical events are associated with a particular place – the presence of Casanova in this case – technologies might enable the re-imagining of space in ways that can foster emotional engagement – an important component of history learning (Sakr *et al.* 2016, p. 53) thus reinforcing the website's "edutaining" purpose. This aspect also justifies the focus on multimodality, as twenty-first century literacy requires the ability to critically analyse the multimodal meaning-making practices we encounter every day in contemporary culture (Vasta, Baldry 2020, p. 7). In this sense, the broad use of stories in various modalities – such as oral or written words, pictures, photos, clothes from yesteryear, dance routines, visual arts, and many other artefacts – entails the complex interaction between different modes of impression and expression (Furu *et al.* 2021, p. 19). The combination of visuals and text, including graphology (van Leeuwen 2005, p. 45; Thibault 2007, p. 111) is essential to exploit the meaning-making potential of multimodal discourse; in the case of GO GREEN, the visuals are designed to create a sense of immersion and connection with the landscape, yet the challenge lies in ensuring that the two modes of communication – visuals and text – work together harmoniously, as otherwise the overall impact of the website's sustainability message could well be undermined.

A distinct mental process is at work in the participant's interaction; the smartphone, in this case, becomes a device for cognitive engagement. The boy

is not merely handling the phone, but is involved in interpreting the content displayed on its screen, such as historical names or narratives that connect the present setting to its cultural heritage. Looking at the screen and reading the historical data engages the participant in both a transactional and a mental process, serving an educational function and pointing to the fact that multimodal configurations are increasingly understood as a key to how people learn (Jewitt 2008, p. 257).

As the video proceeds, the smartphone starts to dominate the storytelling while the Actor – the boy – disappears (MrP2.1.2). Here, the action becomes non-transactional, as there is no evident interaction between the boy and his smartphone. This reconfiguration from transactional to non-transactional processes points to the smartphone's dual function in mediating cultural heritage: it is both a tool for active interaction and for passive reception of historical content. The positioning of the smartphone and the Actor establishes a relationship that emphasises accessibility. One of the key features of this sequence is the close-up framing of the smartphone's screen (MrP2.1.2). By giving salience to the screen, the image draws the viewer into a direct relationship with the historical content being accessed, so they are more likely to feel involved (O'Halloran *et al.* 2018, p. 567). In other words, this gradual close-up shot positions the viewer as if s/he were in the participant's position, directly engaging with the phone and the cultural information presented in the website. This creates a sense of involvement, as the proximity of the camera to the screen simulates the experience of holding and interacting with the device. The vertical perspective is slightly higher than might be expected, meaning that the viewer gradually gains power (Baldry, Thibault 2006, p. 195) until the Actor is no longer present in the image, so that the viewer engages autonomously in the shift from past to present.

Relatedly, the boy holding the phone is located on the left, which is the domain of the Given, whereas the figure of Casanova is positioned on the right, the domain of the New (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 57). This is designed to suggest that much knowledge about the past is still unknown and needs to be discovered through technology. The text and images displayed on the smartphone's screen, such as names of places or historical events, are given salience through the close-up shots and central framing. The visual flow of the sequence further reinforces this complex relationship between past and present; Casanova's gaze vector is directed towards an indeterminate point outside the visual field to the right, i.e., the New, appears to suggest a sense of readiness to learn (Baldry, Thibault 2006, p. 221), reasserting the need for further investigation into unknown past events. The participant moves from interacting with physical artefacts and their surroundings to focusing entirely on the smartphone, which aligns with Lemke's concept of semiotic trajectory, where meaning unfolds over time through a sequence of actions and

engagements (Lemke 2005, p. 49). In this case, the past is not simply presented as a static entity; rather, it is continuously reinterpreted and re-experienced through the participant's engagement with and through the smartphone.

This sequence visually illustrates the process by which viewers navigate between the material present and the historical past, using the smartphone as the conduit for their journey. The smartphone is consistently highlighted as the dominant item in the storytelling, with the historical content it displays occupying the most visually salient position. This hierarchical structure mirrors the conceptual relationship between present-day technology and historical narratives. The smartphone is not just a tool for accessing the past; it is also framed as the essential mediator through which historical knowledge is experienced and understood in the present. The textual organisation of the image, therefore, underscores the transformative role of technology in shaping our relationship with history, where the past is accessed, interpreted, and recontextualised through digital media.

The past-present relationship is also evident in SP2.2: two people are riding their bikes (a traditional means of transportation) while following an AR animated narrative pathway that overlays their real-world surroundings. The AR+, sound, and the volume icons-cum-buttons in the three overlay(s) visualised in the animated AR pathway in MrP2.2.1, MrP2.2.2 and MrP2.2.3 are given prominence, and the dolly movement creates a dynamic shift, visually transporting the characters through space while blending the present with the past. The animated AR pathways, superimposed on the natural landscape, serve as a digital artefact linking the characters to the past narrative they are following. The combined AR/natural landscape emphasises how viewers experience the past, making it part of their real-world experience. In MrP2.2.1, the very long shot of the characters following the AR pathway visually integrates them into both the physical environment and the unfolding digital past. This creates a sense of physical presence in the modern world while engaging with a historical narrative. The medium shot in MrP2.2.2, showing the boy and girl getting off their bikes as the AR narrative continues to unfold, visually reinforces their active participation in the story about the past.

Furthermore, the sequence of oblique horizontal and high vertical perspectives allows viewers to see both the contemporary action of cycling and the historical narrative presented through the AR overlay, highlighting the contrast and connection between these two temporal dimensions.

## *4.2. Young People and their Interaction with Technology*

The second master narrative in the *Narrative Itineraries: Collio* project video relates to the representation of young people and their interaction with

technology. Throughout the project, young participants are depicted as digital natives, seamlessly integrating advanced technologies into their experiences.

This representation aligns with societal narratives that position young people as drivers of technological innovation and digital engagement. In other words, the website suggests that we must not simply view young people as legitimate social and political actors; instead, we must also recognise them as potential innovators and catalysts for change in new media (Ito *et al.* 2008, p. IX). Depictions of young people and their digital media practices often result in a multimodal fulfillment, with images encoding various media and socio-cultural ideologies (Thurlow, Aiello, and Portmann 2020, p. 531). In an attempt to create persuasive texts, the tourism industry has exploited multisemiotic interrelations in which verbal and iconic elements are interwoven (Maci 2007, p. 43), i.e., what in multimodality has been termed "multimodal orchestration", that is "the process of assembling/organizing/designing a plurality of signs into a particular configuration to form a coherent arrangement" (Kress 2010, p. 162; see also Vasta 2024, p. 18).

From a representational perspective, the boy and girl in the video are generally portrayed as active participants, with their everyday activity of riding bicycles integrated into their engagement with technological devices, particularly through actions such as using a smartphone and interacting with AR and XR. The natural landscape surrounding them serves as a contrasting backdrop, reinforcing the idea that technology, rather than distancing them from their environment (as has been the case in the past), is now woven into their lived experiences.

This convergence of the natural and the digital world is illustrated in MrP2.1.2; this visual frame further emphasises the proximity between young people and their devices, using close-up shots to draw attention to the personal nature of their technological interactions and encouraging viewers to engage similarly. The close-up distance positions the mobile phone – appearing as though the viewer is using it – as a personal tool (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 127), reinforcing the notion that language, in its multimodal affordances, is a system that reconciles and makes sense of the many complexities of human communication in the digital arena (Sindoni 2013, p. 42).

From an interactive perspective, camera movements and angles play a crucial role in how the audience is invited to align with this narrative. The use of oblique angles, along with shifts between high and median vertical perspectives, reflects how technology mediates the relationship between the viewer and the subject. In MrP2.1.2, the camera angle and close distance afford the viewers equal social power and a personal, even intimate, social distance, despite our lack of direct involvement (Blunden 2020, p. 39).

Interestingly, unlike media representations that often depict young people's use of digital media in a narrow, negative light – with their practices

visualised pessimistically and unfairly (Thurlow *et al.* 2020, p. 530) – here, their interaction with digital tools serves a clear educational purpose. For instance, in examining MrP2.1.2, MrP2.5.2, and MrP2.5.3, the close-up shots of participants' hands interacting with these devices highlight their control over the learning process, reinforcing the idea that they are active learners. Their representation as masters of the learning process is further enhanced in MrP2.2.3, where the boy and girl get off their bikes to continue interacting with the AR path. Here, the technology – the animated AR narrative path – unfolds before them, yet their actions and control signal that they are actively supervising this learning process. In their role as Actors (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 50), the boy and girl engage in various material processes, clearly indicating control (e.g., handling devices, pushing buttons, wearing goggles) and their agency over the learning experience.

The prominence given to young people, more generally as masters of both AR technology and the related learning process, makes them genuine brand ambassadors – i.e., individuals who act in support of and on behalf of a particular brand (Fisher-Buttinger. Vallaster 2008, p. 132) – in the *Narrative Itineraries: Collio* project and the GO GREEN programme.

Furthermore, their involvement illustrates how immersive technologies enable potential tourists to explore and experience destinations in ways that were previously impossible, enhancing one's ability to imagine themselves in the destination and, thereby, increasing confidence in travel decisions (Bretos *et al.* 2024, p. 289). Their portrayal as active participants in both natural and digital environments positions them as forward-thinking and environmentally conscious individuals. By cycling through nature and utilising technology – specifically AR – they embody a progressive balance between sustainability and innovation, reinforcing the project's core values.

In examining the relationship between young people and technology, it is also worth exploring the role of women and how they are portrayed in the video presenting the Collio project. To do so, a comparison can be made with the previous version of the video used to introduce this project[15]. Revealingly, the former version of the video clearly highlighted the role of women as technological leaders. Evidence of this is provided in Table 2, which brings together some visual frames clearly illustrating this aspect. The depiction of women's prominent status in the digital arena is particularly evident in Sequence 1. The young woman – one of the three "represented" participants, understood as the people, places, events, and things depicted in an image (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 47) – appears to direct the two boys through a technologically mediated experience. This representation is significant, as it

[15] Available at https://www.collioxr.com/index-en.html [retrieved October 12, 2024]: This video, which was originally used to introduce the Collio project (previously referred to as *Collio XR*), has since been replaced by the one currently displayed on the start page.

actively challenges traditional gender roles that often frame technology as a male-dominated field and contribute to social relationships infused with assumed differences between the sexes (Machin *et al.* 2016, p. 306). In this context, the woman assumes the role of the primary expert, guiding her male counterparts in navigating the XR environment. She engages in a number of material processes – such as turning around and beginning to walk in a leading position, followed by the two male counterparts – which highlight her authority.

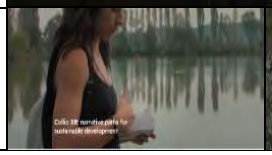
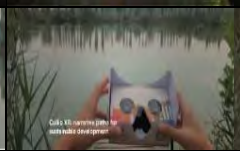
| Sequence | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |

Table 2
The Woman as a Technological Leader in the *Collio XR* project.[16]

The public mediation of leadership discourse online transforms such narratives into texts for study, enabling critique and appraisal of leadership communication (Tan *et al.* 2015, p. 560). However, a closer analysis of Sequence 1 reveals that the contested aspect may not be the woman's status as a technological leader; she is positioned on the left, the Given, indicating that this information is already established. Rather, it appears that the issue lies in the men's acceptance of her role, as the image portrays the male participants on the right, the New; possibly indicating that acknowledging her role as a leader may still be in progress. Her authority seems to be consolidated in Sequence 2, where the male participants are notably absent; as has been argued, a representation cannot encompass all aspects of a social practice, making it important to consider what has been excluded (Machin 2013, p. 352). While it is true that some participants could be omitted without affecting the basic premise established by the narrative pattern, their exclusion would still entail a loss of information (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, p. 76).

In this instance, the absence of the two male participants appears to reinforce the girl's role as the one in charge of technology. This is particularly

[16] The caption, consistent across all frames, reads: "Collio XR: narrative paths for sustainable development".

evident as she is positioned centre-stage, with her eyes closed, possibly engaged in a mental process signifying self-reflection. The boys' absence visually eliminates any competing claims to technological authority, leaving her role as the technological leader uncontested. Gaze is an important aspect through which the girl's leadership is established. Examining Sequence 1, the eye contact between the three participants initially signals an affective bond, but may also illustrate sharing, exchanging ideas, or observing participants' stances after a proposal (Bavelas *et al.* 2002, pp. 577-588). Soon afterwards, the girl turns around, with her gaze directed off-screen, which might indicate a monitoring function (Thibault 2000, p. 336). This off-screen gaze reflects her cognitive engagement with the XR environment and her ability to direct attention towards a future, unseen technological objective.

The boys, however, remain focused on her, with their gaze vectors clearly directed towards her as a leader and central figure. This moment is pivotal because it not just reinforces her role; it also underscores the boys' reliance on her as a technological guide. Significantly, these sequences outlined were omitted in the new version of the video, which considerably reduces the reference to the potential role of women as technological leaders, somewhat replicating Sequence 3 from the previous version (see Table 3):

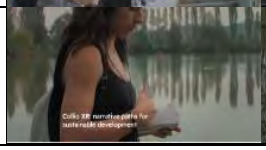
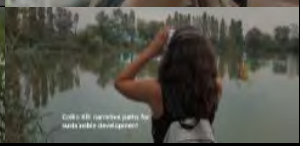
| Sequence | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 |  |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |  |

Table 3
The Woman as a Technological Leader in the *Narrative Itineraries: Collio* (Sequence 4) and the *Collio XR* project (Sequence 5).[17]

Overall, the new introductory video still presents the young woman as involved in technology but fails to depict her as assuming a leadership role or driving technological innovation. The representation of women here leans more towards participation rather than leadership, which limits the portrayal of women as technological leaders within this narrative.

[17] The captions in Sequence 4 read: "Narrative Itineraries in the Collio for sustainable development"; the captions in Sequence 5 read: "Collio XR: narrative paths for sustainable development".

## 5. Concluding Remarks

This chapter has investigated how master narratives can reshape young people's engagement with sustainability, transforming themes often associated with science fiction into tangible, real-world experiences. XR technologies were embedded within the GO GREEN project, a sustainable tourism initiative, that blends historical and futuristic storytelling, positioning young viewers not merely as participants but as active agents, part of a wider narrative of sustainable tourism. Through AR overlays, VR headsets, and other immersive tools, the website presents participants with master narratives that bring together historical context and present-day experiences. This convergence of past and future encourages young people's exploration and reflection on sustainability, enabling them to connect envisioned futures with current ecological engagement, thus rendering the abstract principles of sustainability more immediate and accessible. Sequences involving interactions with historical figures, such as Casanova, are imagined through AR animations, exemplifying this narrative by layering real-world settings with visionary storytelling. In these cases, XR can be said to have transformed natural and historical landscapes into dynamic, immersive digital spaces, making historical narratives feel relevant and immediate. XR technology thus operates as a mediator across temporal dimensions, collapsing conventional boundaries between past and present. This digital transformation resonates with the imaginative appeal of science fiction, yet firmly situates the narrative within a framework aligned with concrete, educational objectives. By facilitating interactive, time-traversing experiences, XR enables viewers to inhabit, re-experience, and reinterpret historical sites through a digital lens.

Another master narrative positions young participants as digital pioneers and agents within a futuristic vision of sustainability. The project frames youth engagement as an essential step in fostering environmental innovation, using digital tools to cultivate a sense of empowerment and agency. By using AR paths, smartphones, and VR headsets, young participants navigate traditional landscapes from a distinctly modern, technology-enhanced perspective. This reconfiguration of viewer agency, which presents young people as active explorers rather than passive observers, underscores the notion that XR technology can be seamlessly integrated into daily experiences to deepen understanding and interaction with sustainable practices. By engaging actively with these technologies, young people bridge the gap between natural landscapes and digital innovation in ways that highlight their role as empowered actors in the broader sustainability narrative.

The visual and interactive nature of these experiences amplifies the project's immersive impact, establishing XR as a tool that fosters personal involvement in sustainability. In contrast to traditional, educational

approaches, the GO GREEN project's integration of XR has allowed participants to experience sustainability first-hand, rather than merely as an abstract educational concept. As viewers navigate the digital pathways whose visual overlays guide the exploration of combined physical and historical 'landscapes', the experience underscores that sustainability is not just a subject for study; it is also a narrative to be personally experienced and interpreted. The narrative embedded within the project's design thereby succeeds in creating an environment where XR-enabled interaction, engagement, and sensory immersion make the educational design more resonant and memorable.

The educational potential of these master narratives, particularly the transformation of science fiction into perceived reality, suggests numerous directions for future research. First, further studies could examine how science-fiction-inspired master narratives within XR-driven educational contexts may deepen or enhance viewers' engagement with environmental issues. Given that XR encourages viewers to explore sustainability narratives through both futuristic and immersive experiences, future research could focus on expanding these models to incorporate new types of storytelling that blend fictional and factual elements. Specifically, studies could investigate how interactive digital narratives – such as those involving imagined scenarios of environmental degradation or restoration – might amplify the effectiveness of sustainability education.

Moreover, examining the responses of various demographic groups to XR-based sustainable tourism experiences would yield valuable insights into the broader applicability and scalability of these technologies in environmental education. While this study has focused on young participants, future research could explore how different age groups or backgrounds might engage with XR's science-fiction narrative elements and whether these experiences have differential effects on their perceptions and commitment to sustainable practices. Such research could reveal ways in which XR can be tailored to reach more diverse audiences, potentially expanding its role as a versatile educational tool.

Furthermore, exploring the long-term impact of these XR experiences could provide critical data on whether the science-fiction master narratives embedded in XR technologies lead to sustained behavioural changes. Specifically, research could examine whether XR-driven immersive experiences foster ongoing interest in sustainability or tangible changes in viewer behaviour towards more sustainable practices. Understanding the lasting influence of these digital experiences would provide valuable insights into the potential of XR as a transformative tool for environmental education, with the capacity to reinforce long-term commitments to sustainability.

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