

Events

eXploRA

virtual journeys to discover inaccessible heritages

Sofia Menconero

“Space melts like sand running through one’s fingers. Time bears it away and leaves me only shapeless shreds” [Perec 1999, p. 91 translation by the author]. Architectures that have remained marks on paper stored in archives or surviving in the form of projects after their material life; monumental heritages that have disappeared due to anthropic or natural causes; spaces that are impractical or completely closed to public use; intangible heritage; altered constructions for which the original meaning has been lost. Many occasions make cultural heritage inaccessible in the broadest sense of the term, which includes physical, sensory, cognitive, geographical, and cultural aspects.

The eXploRA Study Day was conceived with the aim of enabling the (re)discovery of these heritages. The means proposed for this exploratory journey under the sign of accessibility, as the event’s title suggests, are the digital tools of extended reality (XR) with various variations such as virtual (VR), augmented (AR), and mixed (MR) reality.

The international Study Day eXploRA. *Virtual journeys to discover inaccessible heritages* (fig. 1) took place on March 15, 2024, at the Aula Magna of the Department of History, Representation,

and Restoration of Architecture of the Sapienza University of Rome, with the participation of 95 attendees in person and about 50 connections on the streaming platform.

The promoting and organizing committee of the event includes many PhD students and research fellows from various Italian universities: Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna, Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, Sapienza University of Rome, Polytechnic University of Turin, University of Sassari. The group, coordinated by Francesco Stilo, consists of Vittoria Castiglione, Irene Cazzaro, Michela Ceracchi, Fabrizio Natta, Marta Pileri, Lorella Pizzonia, Andrea Tomalini, Noemi Tomasella, and Maria Belén Trivi. They were awarded the *Premio UID Giovani Vito Cardone*, which annually funds an innovative cultural activity proposed by the young members of the *Unione Italiana per il Disegno* (UID) which awarded the eXploRA project in the 2023 edition.

Welcoming the audience and speakers of the study day was the set-up in the vestibule of the Aula Magna: an exhibition space dedicated to ten posters and five physical models made in 3D printing (fig. 2), collected following the ‘call for drawings and models’, which were other ways to participate in the

initiative in addition to the more usual call for papers. The exploratory 3D models will be available in the event website repository [1] once the review process has been completed.

The scheduled speeches were preceded by institutional greetings from Daniela Esposito, Director of the hosting Department, Graziano Mario Valenti (Coordinator of the Drawing curriculum of the PhD in History, Representation, and Restoration of Architecture), Orazio Carpenzano (Dean of the Faculty of Architecture of Sapienza), and Francesca Fatta, (President of the UID), who unanimously expressed their appreciation for the activity proposed and managed in all its aspects by the young group. The interventions –twenty-six in total– were moderated by members of the organizing committee and divided according to the three thematic sessions already indicated in the call for papers: *Drawing, Modelling, Exploring*. A dense but dynamic program consisting of ten-minute presentations and additional time for questions and comments from the audience and moderators.

The publication of the proceedings in open access mode, involving all 47 accepted contributions following the review process, is scheduled for June 2024 on the editorial platform

PUBLICA Sharing Knowledge, which has endorsed the initiative together with the UID. Meanwhile, four contributions were awarded as best papers at the event based on evaluations received during the anonymous refereeing process.

Both the morning and afternoon sessions were opened by two invited speakers. Edoardo Dotto (University of Catania) and Enrico Cicalò (University of Sassari) were the earliest two guests to present their critical interventions. The first speaker proposed a reflection derived from the dual nature of architectural form –the material, physical, and spatial nature of built works, and that of thought elaborations– namely how the representation of architecture *in absentia* still plays a significant role today in the relationship between the graphic representation and architecture, also emphasizing the sedimentary value of knowledge, techniques, and methodologies in the

field of drawing which stratify over time without replacing each other. The second guest spoke about graphic-digital intelligence in the era of digital positivism and digital transition, and its implications for the representation and communication of cultural heritage. The statistical evidence on the (poor) digital literacy –informative and functional– of the population necessitate a reflection on cultural proposals in the ICT field capable of stimulating and including different types of audiences. The afternoon saw two international guests, the Spanish Pedro Manuel Cabezas Bernal (Universitat Politècnica de València) and the Argentine Lucas Fabian Olivero (Universidade Aberta, Lisbon), with two talks linked by the guiding thread of immersive visualization. The first addressed the theme of panoramic photography, emphasizing its importance for documentation, particularly with the gigapixel technique, and

the dissemination of cultural assets. The latter guest illustrated the topic of immersive 360° drawing, from the geometric-projective foundations on which to base the construction to its application through interesting examples in architecture.

A comment by UID Secretary Elena Ippoliti closed the study day, expressing the high level of interest reached by the cultural activity winner of the *Premio UID Giovani Vito Cardone*. The name of Vito Cardone was mentioned several times during the event, starting from the two international guests from those foreign academic realities that professor Cardone contributed to connect with the research activities of UID members.

The *eXploRA* study day has thus repeatedly touched on the theme of memory, from that dedicated to the previous UID President to that linked to cultural heritage and its protection. The memory of inaccessible heritage



Fig. 1. Event banner.



Fig. 2. Exhibition space with posters and 3D printed physical models.

is particularly important to ensure its more problematic transmission to future generations. This is achieved by reinforcing or relocating certain pieces of what is the very tall tower of our

history and cultural identity. The organizers of *eXploRA* and the authors of the interventions of the international Study Day have shown how drawing and its digital and virtual applications

always prove to be excellent means for the delicate task of reshaping the shreds of space that time merges, thus preserving the memory of cultural heritage.

Note

[1] Link to the event website: <http://www.explorauid.com> (accessed 27 May 2024).

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