

Museums and Web 2.0: Ethical issues and challenges

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Abstract

Over the last few years museums have started exploring the possibilities of Web 2.0 in order to communicate in new ways with their visitors, attract new audiences and remain relevant in a rapidly changing world. The multitude of social networking tools that the umbrella of Web 2.0 encompasses (e.g. blogs, wikis, podcasts, RSS Feeds, Flickr, YouTube, social bookmarking) offer new possibilities for museums to interact with their visitors, but raise also a number of challenges and important issues which this paper will examine.

Several museums have been experimenting with Web 2.0 as part of their effort for great democratisation, opening up to diverse communities and inviting different viewpoints and interpretations of their collections and exhibitions. Web 2.0 is being used to excite users about the museum collections and gather their views and reactions to their programmes, allowing different types of links between cultural institutions and various online communities.

But what are the main characteristics of this new way of communication? What is the profile of these virtual visitors, their motivations and the way they interact with museum content? Should these communications be controlled and moderated and if so, by whom? Should museum curators intervene in this free and democratic exchange of information? Where should the boundaries be drawn between respecting privacy and opening up the exchange of views about the collections? Is the trust and tolerance necessary for the successful running of these application being respected and how can the cultural organisation ensure that this is the case?

Short CV

Dr Maria Economou is assistant professor in "Museology and New Technologies" at the Department of Cultural Technology and Communication of the University of the Aegean, where she is responsible for the Museology Research Laboratory. She also teaches cultural management postgraduate courses at the Hellenic Open University. She studied Archaeology and History of Art at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, carried out an MA in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester and completed her doctorate at the University of Oxford (with a scholarship from the Lambrakis Research Foundation). She worked at the universities of Manchester and Glasgow and at the Pitt Rivers Museum of the University of Oxford. She has published extensively on museological issues, particularly on the application of new technologies in museums, evaluation and visitor studies, and the digitisation of collections. Her monograph entitled "Museum: Warehouse or Live Organisation? Museological Issues and Questions" was published (in Greek) in 2003 by Kritike publisher.

