Future Heritage and Heritage futures.
An exploration about meanings of digital Cultural Heritage

Impact Case Study

Margherita TUFARELLI

University of Florence
*DIDA – Department of Architecture*

Abstract

The research aims to investigate the role digital archives of cultural heritage can play for design, and to understand the reverse relationship: how design culture can foster the activation of archives to stimulate the production processes of new cultural expressions by other creative industries. The study was conducted with the help of a specific case study: the Europeana platform, the multi-thematic aggregator of European cultural heritage.

Heritage is a term with an extended meaning, whose value is mainly rooted in its use and in the capacity it can have to generate new culture: protection is no longer identifiable in the protection of the object itself, but of the process that allows its creation. We are therefore faced with an endiad in which consumption and production of culture are part of the same process that is historically fluid.

The advent of the digital has brought about intense changes in archival science, which has been faced with a substantial mutation of functions and purpose: archives are no longer places of passive preservation, but on the contrary, they become containers of information ready to be activated to support the creation of new cultural productions.

Macro aree della ricerca
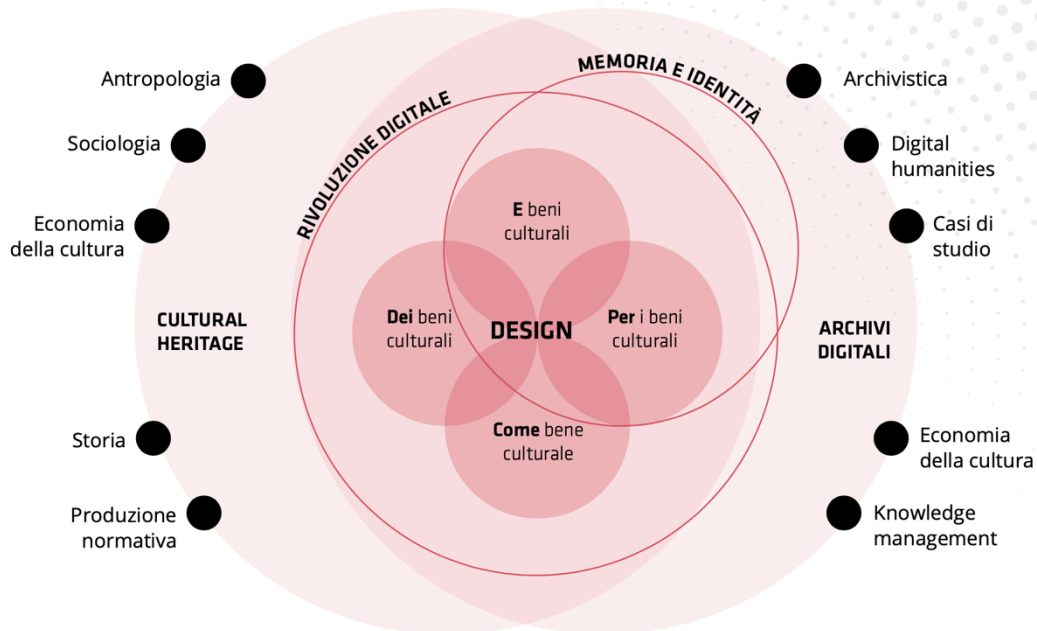
This research investigates the relationship and contamination that has always existed between the culture of the past and contemporary creativity, to explore the 'future of heritage' and the 'heritage of the future'.

Summary of impact beyond academia

The aim of the research was to investigate whether and how digitized Heritage contained in archives can become a resource for design, and whether design culture can help activate digital material to encourage creative contamination and the creation of new Heritage.

The results lead to interesting insights that constitute new challenges subject to new avenues of research. A substantial change of purpose emerges for an archive in the digital world: it ceases to be solely a custodian and takes on the role of facilitator of the selective and interpretative processes through which a culture produces its heritage, making the search for new ways in which the vast work of digitizing, indexing, and organizing data can have an impact beyond experts crucial.

The combinatory and systematic thinking of design also proves useful in integrating the results of research paths in the sphere of specific knowledge, recomposing in a broader framework the interpretations put forward by individual fields, thus succeeding in providing an overview indispensable to an effective understanding of the context of investigation.

In This sense, the primary impact of this research is in the generation of connections with education activities and the sharing of research results with professionals. Activities aimed at building a network, specifically, can be divided into three macro areas that can be defined with as many key words: collaboration, research and sharing.

Moreover, the formal agreement with the content provider led to a long-term partnership aimed at building new project, activate educational path with archives and expand the research impact beyond Academia.

The results achieved through this research have enabled the numerous new R&D projects in partnership with both cultural institutions and private companies, enabling the transfer of results to other contexts and fostering contamination between the products of the past and contemporary creativity.

Underpinning research, context and summary of methodology

The theme of transformation enters the academic and social debate in the most diverse contexts, strengthened by the need to explore the new design of change.

The impact of digital technologies seems to have produced a world in which real and digital merge into a sort of new materiality with unprecedented - and yet to be discovered - physical characteristics that give rise to new experimental terrains characterized by availability, pervasiveness, and accessibility. The new materiality that is gradually taking shape appears to be the product of continuous interactions between new media and new tools that trigger a complex cultural maneuver, affecting the dynamics of cultural content production as well as its transmission.

The development and diffusion of digital technologies have contributed to radically change the contemporary scenario of Cultural Heritage, introducing new dynamics in which the range of material, immaterial and digital manifestations fluidly straddle different domains, linked, and displayed in collections of many different types of objects, which are mobile and combinable (Latour, 1987; Bennett et al., 2017).

This is an intense and disruptive transformation that is affecting all aspects of human productions, "we are in the middle of a new media revolution - the shift of all

culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication" (Manovich, 2001). The digitization of all cultural forms is thus having profound impacts on the production, organization and transmission of both subjective and collective memories and identities, which in turn become digital, but above all recorded.

The exponential increase in the number of available tools and types of media with which human expressions can be created and transmitted brings with it new cultural paradigms that feed creative productions and vice versa, triggering a continuous cycle of identity and expression of contemporary cultures, but above all giving rise to new questions about how heritage 'works', what it 'does' (Harrison et al., 2016) and what it 'serves' in the digital transformation.

It is within this general framework that the research path is grafted, and in the convergence that has emerged over time between technologies, cultural heritage, and design, which today seem to enact a triangulation in which each vertex fosters the relationship between the other two, opening new and interesting research perspectives to explore.

Technologies.

To which the role of agent of change is historically attributed. New digital tools are being introduced that favour the emergence of "new lifestyles and new visions of the world" (Irace, 2013) to such an extent as to arouse the interest of research - but also of practice - in design to the dynamics of Cultural Heritage and, indeed, to enable their relationship.

Design.

Also, an agent of change (Brown & Katz, 2011), which has gradually extended its fields of application towards increasingly immaterial territories, in which it plays the role of mediator between technological innovation and people, focusing on the creation of new cultural meanings, experiences and ways of inhabiting the world.

Cultural Heritage.

Which by mixing with the digital has produced a scenario in which it changes its very modes of production, organization, and transmission, bringing out a significant role for design culture.

References produced by researcher from/during doctoral research

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Details of impact

• Best Paper Award (2018) at SGEM International Conference on Social Science and Arts

• Scientific coordination for UNIFI of the EFHA (European Fashion Heritage Association) Annual International Conference entitled "Crafting Heritage. Restoring, Reactivating, Resisting" 9 and 10 December 2021.

• Responsible for and coordinator of the research activities envisaged by the project A.vo - Archivio Vivo. Nuove modalità di diffusione e riuso del patrimonio culturale della moda (New ways of disseminating and reusing the cultural heritage of fashion) financed by the Region of Tuscany within the framework of the POR FSE 2014-2020 Axis A.

• Scientific Coordination for UNIFI DIDA Department of Architecture of the project Prato Phigital: creative synergies for competitiveness, financed by the MISE Ministry of Economic Development in the framework of the funding call for competitive ideas for 5g and audiovisual. In partnership with Fondazione Sistema Toscana - Manifatture Digitali Cinema, Prato Textile Museum, Comune di Prato, PIN Polo Universitario Città di Prato, Indiana Production, PRISMA Casa delleTecnologie Emergenti, Immerxive s.r.l., Marini s.r.l., Wind Tre.

• Responsible for UNIFI and REI Design Lab of the project E-Tex The Haptic Library, in partnership with Ethine s.r.l. financed by the European Commission within the WORTH Partnership Project II edition. The project aims at the realisation through experimentation of effective ways of using archive textile materials on digital support through haptic visuality techniques.

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