

Getting a multimedia message across in Palermo Information technology and Artistic Heritage in an area with a low rate of development

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ABSTRACT

For the cultural development an effective communication energy. Palermo's image abroad can be promoted by taking advantage of its exceptional cultural heritage. Giacomo Serpotta, Palermo's great sculptor, could be promoted on an international level.

KEYWORDS: an area with a low rate of economic development, communication, cultural heritage, technology, preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural activities all over the world and the public's interest in them have increased enormously over the last few years while on the other hand one of the most prevalent social activities in a globalized world will be tourism. As such, introducing profiles of our artistic heritage, places of interest and beauty spots into the worldwide information arena could offer a contribution to economic growth in an area with a low rate of development. It is clear that to enable this to happen, an effective communication strategy is indispensable.

COMMUNICATING INFORMATION IN PALERMO

Today the Mediterranean Basin is the one area in Europe which really calls for this type of approach. Palermo, for example, has a rich artistic heritage, but lacks a plan to use of means communication to make it accessible to potential visitors.



Figure 1: Two different logos

An image promotion plan for this city (and for others in the same area) would allow it to emerge from its economic and cultural isolation with initiatives designed to: 1) reinforce awareness in the community of the value of our artistic heritage as a main factor in the make-up of the local identity and as a bridge-builder with other cultures; 2) underline the importance of restoring and preserving our artistic heritage which has been neglected for too long;

3) give incentives to the development of social and economic activities deriving from tourism and related industries and to the increase of the production of locally-produced saleable items, usually arts and crafts and this includes paying close attention to the quality of packaging and other selling aspects of the high quality traditional food and wine products from the area.



Figure 2: Cover of a calendar

One of the institutions from this area which has taken into consideration these factors is the Institute of Industrial Design of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Palermo. This Institute has been very active in promoting both Sicily's cultural heritage and local products. It has been doing this by means of tools like product design, visual design and image promotion. These are all things which can help to promote the socio-economic development of the island. Recently its attention has been drawn to one of Palermo's most highly appreciated artists. The 17th century sculptor Giacomo Serpotta's works of art are to be found in 12 churches, 6 oratories and 2 museums, in the very heart of the city of Palermo. Unfortunately, not much attention is paid to them by the administrative bodies responsible for the preservation of the city's artistic wealth, even though this artist has been defined

as the most important Italian sculptor of his age. During the academic year of 1999-2000, the Institute of Industrial Design organized a project in image promotion on the subject of "Giacomo Serpotta in Palermo". A workshop was set up and students from both the degree course and the School for Professional Qualifications from the Institute were involved. Qualified professionals and tutors were brought in to run the course, namely Prof. V. Pasca (Course Director), F. Achilli (Graphics Supervisor), the architects V. Trapani, M. Ferrara, S. Giacomarra (course tutors) and M. A. Malleo and S. Scalia (multimedia communication experts). The course was divided into three stages. During the first stage visits were made to the sites of the artworks and photographs were taken. The aim here was to get to know the history behind the works and plan areas of research which might follow the outlines of an image promotion strategy.



Figure 3: A poster

During the second phase, practical decisions like poster design, choice of logo and so on were taken. During the third phase, an analysis was made of the local budget available for financing the use of information technology. The overall aim of the project is to bring Giacomo Serpotta's works of art to a wider audience and allow the city to better define its own identity by retrieving an otherwise forgotten patrimony. An initial attempt was made to get the Artistic Heritage Department,

the Town Council and Diocese involved but, as often happens here in Southern Italy, while showing interest, they only offered moral support. Steaming ahead regardless, the project will promote a celebratory year dedicated to "Serpotta in Palermo" in 2001, the 270th anniversary of the artist.



Figure 4: A folder

The idea is to get the whole city involved at every level. An introductory conference on Serpotta where scholars of international repute take part would pave the way for a week long celebration dedicated to visiting the sites of the artworks and other cultural activities. As a preliminary, much effort would be put into the graphic design project and into publicising the event by all available means. In order to give the event drawing-power, package tours would be arranged through travel agents. As well as the necessary arrangements for the reception of the incoming flux of tourists, all sorts of information would be made available to them through maps and "Serpotta Itineraries", specific street signs and infopoints. At the same time a web site would be launched and continually updated with information about main events and related activities, including realtime images of the venues. A year-long calendar of events would be compiled to include concerts of music from the period and shows involving

other forms of related artistic expression, aswell as guided tours and further conferences. Furthermore a merchandising activity would also be set up. The challenge will be to bring the works of Giacomo Serpotta out into the forefront, give them national and international resonance and brush off the layers of cultural dust under which they have lain for so long. The example of what Glasgow has done for C. R. Mackintosh and how the city has taken advantage of its illustrious son to renew its own cultural identity comes to mind here. The whole operation has a dual intent: to set the ball rolling for Serpotta and prod the local institutions into greater awareness of his value. As Cesare Brandi puts it: "I hope a careful review [of his work] gets the authorities on their feet...Serpotta's oratories, their altars deconsecrated, are probably being used as storehouses and are going to rack and ruin...what a wonderful sight the supreme jewel of Serpotta's stuccoes might otherwise be for the visitor to Palermo".

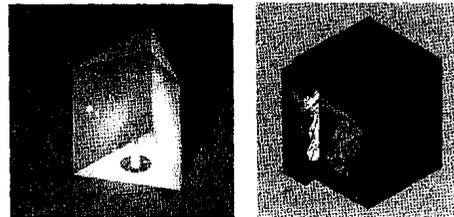


Figure 5: Some products

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