

Geospatial Technologies in Support of Civic Engagement and Cultural Heritage: Lessons Learned from Three Participatory Planning Workshops for Involving Local Communities in the Development of Sustainable Tourism Practices in Latiano, Brindisi

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Abstract : The fruitful relationship between cultural heritage and digital technology is evident. Due to the development of user-friendly software, an increasing amount of heritage scholars use ict for their research activities. As a result, the implementation of information technology for heritage planning has become a research objective in itself. During the last decades, we have witnessed a growing debate and literature about the importance of computer technologies for the field of cultural heritage and ecotourism. Indeed, implementing digital technology in support of these domains can be very fruitful for one's research practice. However, due to the rapid development of new software scholars may find it challenging to use these innovations in an appropriate way. As such, this contribution seeks to explore the interplay between geospatial technologies (geo-ict), civic engagement and cultural heritage and tourism. In this article, we discuss our findings on the use of geo-ict in support of civic participation, cultural heritage and sustainable tourism development in the southern Italian district of Brindisi. In the city of Latiano, three workshops were organized that involved local members of the community to distinguish and discuss interesting points of interests (POI's) which represent the cultural significance and identity of the area. During the first workshop, a so called mappa della comunità was created on a touch table with collaborative mapping software, that allowed the participators to highlight potential destinations for tourist purposes. Furthermore, two heritage-based itineraries along a selection of identified POI's was created to make the region attractive for recreants and tourists. These heritage-based itineraries reflect the communities' ideas about the cultural identity of the region. Both trails were subsequently implemented in a dedicated mobile application (app) and was evaluated using a mixed-method approach with the members of the community during the second workshop. In the final workshop, the findings of the collaboration, the heritage trails and the app was evaluated with all participants. Based on our conclusions, we argue that geospatial technologies have a significant potential for involving local communities in heritage planning and tourism development. The participants of the workshops found it increasingly engaging to share their ideas and knowledge using the digital map of the touch table. Secondly, the use of a mobile application as instrument to test the heritage-based itineraries in the field was broadly considered as fun and beneficial for enhancing community awareness and participation in local heritage. The app furthermore stimulated the communities' awareness of the added value of geospatial technologies for sustainable tourism development in the area. We conclude this article with a number of recommendations in order to provide a best practice for organizing heritage workshops with similar objectives.

Keywords : civic engagement, geospatial technologies, tourism development, cultural heritage

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