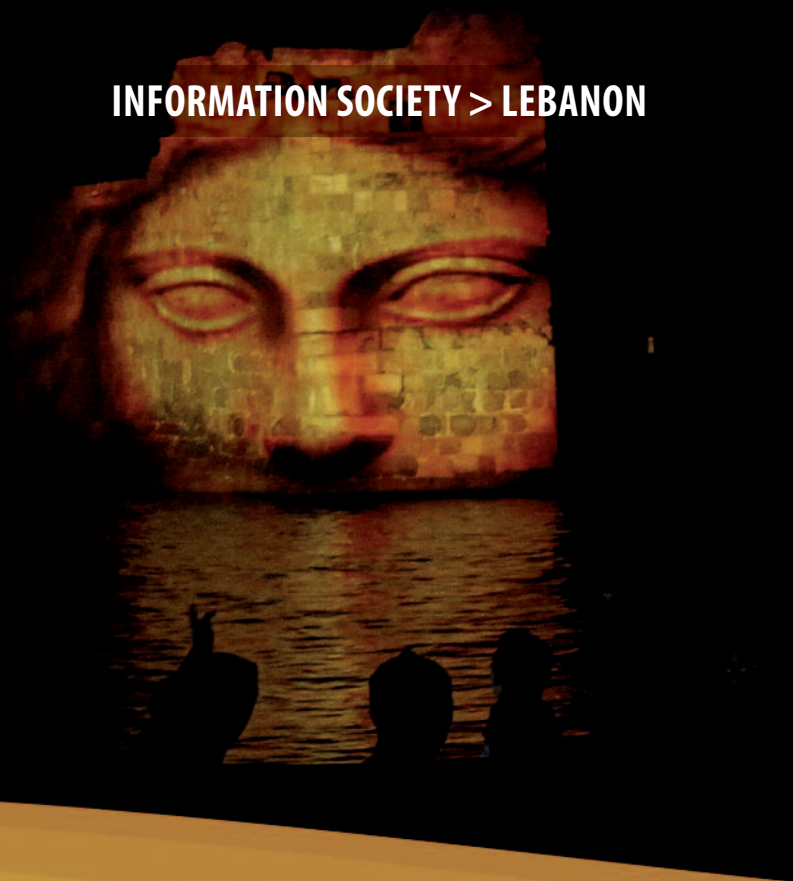


Technology to take a stroll through history



www.enpi-info.eu

Is it possible to visit a Roman amphitheatre as if you were right there hundreds of years ago? Not for the moment, but you will be able to soon. A European project financed by the CBC MED programme aims at using innovative multimedia technologies in the management of the cultural and natural heritage of the Mediterranean Basin. A journalist from the European Neighbourhood Centre was at the port of Byblos when the first video mapping on the history of the town was projected onto the old fortress of the port. He sends us this report.

Text by: Antoine Ajoury

Pictures by: AFP © EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre

BYBLOS – “At least the European taxpayer’s money is spent here on useful and noteworthy projects!” We are at the port of Byblos, in Lebanon, and this is the opinion expressed by a couple of Dutch tourists on the subject of a video mapping on the history of the town. What we are talking about here, is three-dimensional multimedia technology projecting videos onto large surfaces, thereby recreating big images on the old fortress of the port.

The technique literally brings hundred-year-old stones back to life. Combining grandiose music with colours and light, this is a breathtaking show. Stunned, the spectators fall under the spell of a projection that only lasts ten minutes or so. But it’s worth the wait. Noah is a ten-year-old Canadian. His eyes light up: “It’s a magic show!”. “It’s a way that allows you to quickly understand the history of the town and to memorise it,” says an old resident. “The impact of the 3D projection allows you to absorb information that you don’t get by reading a book or a brochure.”

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The maritime fortress as a pilot site

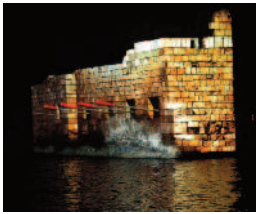
“We have archaeological sites, the port, the souk,” says Ayoub Bark, the vice-president of the municipality of Jbeil. “But we still needed an extraordinary event to promote tourism, create new opportunities and generate work.” That is how the maritime fortress, which is on the outskirts of the port, was chosen as a pilot site. We then had to choose a subject for the projection. “As the project has been spread out over three years,” adds Mr. Bark, “we opted this year for the thousand year history of the town of Byblos, from the Phoenicians to today via the Hellenic, Roman and Arab periods, the period of the Crusades and the Ottoman period...”

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■ A 3D projection is shown on the walls of Byblos maritime citadel



The video mapping is part of the International Augmented Med (IAM) project, whose aim is to apply innovative multimedia technologies to the management of cultural and natural heritage. "The project includes 14 partners from seven different countries. It is part of the CBC Med programme, a cross-border programme funded by the European Union between the EU member countries and the third countries of the Mediterranean Basin," explains Daniel Asmar, professor at the American University of Beirut, one of the partners in Lebanon, along with the municipality of Jbeil (Byblos). The main interest of the project is the cultural heritage of the countries of the Mediterranean. Other than the fortress of Byblos, visitors will have the chance to rediscover a variety of sites and monuments – such as the Alexandria Library (Egypt) or the archaeological museum of Dar-es-Saraya in Jordan – from a new perspective.

"The project saw the light of day thanks to the initiative of two experts in IT/multimedia, Enzo Gentile and Paolo Servi, who initially saw the potential of the technology in showing cultural sites in Sardinia at their best, before expanding it to the Mediterranean Basin," explains Alma Cardì, a member of the municipal council of Alghero in Italy. "The aim of these little projects is also to strengthen friendship and good neighbourliness around the Mediterranean Basin," adds Enzo Gentile. What is interesting is that each country can develop ideas according to the means and capacities that it has. "The aim being," stresses Paolo Servi, "to enrich local skills with the help of other project partners, and also to create cross-cutting relations between countries."



"The impact of the 3D projection allows you to absorb information that you don't get by reading a book or a brochure."

"We have archaeological sites, the port, the souks, but we still needed an extraordinary event to promote tourism, create new opportunities and generate work."

■ People watch a 3D projection show on the walls of the Byblos maritime citadel

Special glasses through which to look back at the past

There are lots of technological means used to reach the desired result. The first innovation is 'architectural mapping', and also International Augmented Mapping (IAM), relating to the reconstruction in 3D. Nor should the interactive systems be forgotten. But what is the impact of the multimedia technologies for tourism then? Daniel Asmar explains: a tourist visits the archaeological site of Byblos. If they are not accompanied by a guide and if they do not have specific knowledge about the subject, they are not going to fully appreciate the remains that are there. In order to do this, the visitor could visualise the site as it was before its destruction with special glasses or, by using their electronic tablet, they could reconstitute the site in question via a virtual image.

Thanks to technology, the past and what it was like no longer hold any secrets. At the AUB, the specialist IT team started with a prototype: a broken antique vase that was found in the sea. Of course its 'augmented part' is not awe-inspiring, but already one can get an idea of the interest of the project and how it works. The second stage will be to rebuild the Roman amphitheatre, which is near the fortress of Byblos, in three dimensions. A historical study will ensue. The aim is to create a play with characters from that era that tourist could watch as if they were there on the spot hundreds of years ago.



■ Here is the "augmented" part of a vase: it's a 3D archaeological reconstruction made possible by special software

"The aim of these projects is to enrich local skills, with the help of other project partners, and also to create cross-cutting relations between countries."

Cross-border cooperation in the Mediterranean

<http://www.enpicbmed.eu/>

The Mediterranean Maritime Basin multilateral cross-border cooperation programme is part of the new European Neighbourhood Policy and its financial instrument (ENPI) for the period 2007 - 2013. It includes the regions of the EU and those of partner countries located along the coasts of the Mediterranean sea.

International Augmented Med (I AM)

http://www.enpicbmed.eu/sites/default/files/i_am_final_0.pdf

The project aims to apply innovative multimedia technologies in the management of cultural and natural heritage.

Period:
October 2012 – October 2015

Budget:
€3,060,000

Participating countries:
Italy, Spain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia
To find out more:

Example of video mapping:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjWJHEmFfPA>
EU Neighbourhood Info Centre project file on Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC):
http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=171&id_type=10&lang_id=450
Thematic portal: INFORMATION SOCIETY
<http://www.enpi-info.eu/thememed.php?subject=7>

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