Designing a Digital Interface for Museum-Interpretation

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The project investigates on the design process of a digital interface for museum-interpretation, specifically the design of a digital interface for the most important Pre-Hispanic pieces in the collection of the Xalapa Museum of Anthropology (max). As of this writing, the project is going through its concept and design phase. The development of the design is updated on a regular basis and can be accessed at: http://mlab.taik.fi/~bacuna/max_Project2008/, (Figure1).

The Xalapa Museum of Anthropology is situated in Veracruz State, in Eastern Mexico, and holds a collection of about 29,000 archaeological pieces, from which about 2,500 pieces are exhibited in its halls. The MAX displays a collection of the Pre-Hispanic legacy containing jade masks, obsidian and flint arrowheads, clay and stone sculptures, fresco paintings and codex, to name but a few. The exhibited pieces were created by the main cultures that developed in the state of Veracruz before the arrival of the Spaniards in Mexico: the *Olmeca*, the *Huasteca*, and the *Central Veracruz*.

The concept phase of the project is framed by a set of disciplines tightly connected in the design of digital interfaces: interface design, interaction design, and information design. Additional concepts that highly influence the design of the digital interface are information design and navigation. An analysis conducted previously about digital interfaces that are used within the digital heritage field, for example, museums and cultural institutions, have also complemented the concept design of the digital interface.

The research project aims to design a digital interface available to the museum visitors as an interpretation device. It focuses on exploring the design of alternative solutions of digital interfaces and pathways of access to the collection and its context. Therefore, the project is directed at three different audience groups: (a) researchers, scholars and higher education students with a

professional interest in the three Pre-Hispanic cultures; (b) visitors, young and adult, interested in visiting the museum and becoming informed about these cultures; (c) students, mainly at primary and secondary level that are studying the history of the Pre-Hispanic cultures in their schools. Given that these groups have diverse interests in the museum and that they thus expect to gain different information about the exhibited artefacts, it is feasible to design alternative interfaces to fulfil their expectations.

Figure 1: Project website

In consequence, the investigation aims to exemplify how to design a digital interface that could be used as a research tool, as a device of information and learning, as well as an educational resource. This triple-interpretation feature will work as layers interfacing the collection; additionally, the design also expects to connect other layers interfacing the topic such as the cultures' timelines, narratives and cosmology.

The design of the digital interface also searches for ways to integrate social media tools as a strategy for encouraging participation and augmenting the communication between the museum and its community of visitors. The final vision is to design a digital interface to support research, to provide information and to enable access to learning resources about the collection of the MAX.