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Transferring Historical Iconography into a Contemporary Visual Perspective. Case Study: Adamclisi Monument

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Abstract: It's known that any form of communication uses signs. Communication through signs, the imagistic dimension of artistic creation, has been the basis of all periods of cultural development of humanity. Understanding these periods in human history has been a constant concern for historians, art historians and archaeologists. For example, the translation (the decoding) of the hieroglyphs (i.e. visual narratives) allowed the understanding of the complexity of the Egyptian culture.
Another example comes from the time of ancient Rome, where visual narratives contain complex infographic messages. The war periods followed by peace were an opportunity for cultural affirmation and development in which infographics played an important role. The power of the prominent figures of the Roman Empire was also due to the use of infographics on the emblematic monuments.
This paper aims to bring a new perspective on the cultural history of humanity through the presence of infographics as a political tool for transmitting complex messages. The study presented in the paper is a decoding of the Adamclisi Monument, a Roman triumphal piece of architecture located in southern Romania, used to show a strong cultural and political message about war and peace. By transferring the symbols, shapes and human images from the metopes of this monument into contemporary visual form, one can lead to new ways of rendering historical and cultural events in a contemporary artistic interpretation.

Keywords: *infographics; signs; decoding; Adamclisi monument; art history; visual narratives; contemporary art; augmented reality.*

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1. The Research Problem

For the first humans, survival depended on knowledge of the surrounding world. The development of primitive social groups and the need to provide food or shelter led to the ability to decipher sources of information from nature with the help of non-verbal systems: visual, auditory and sensory. As we well know, sight is the most important sense of man, it allows us to identify shapes, reliefs, distances and colours, in other words, it is a source of reception of external messages. Rudolf Arnheim said in *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* the following:

> "Far from being a mechanical recording of sensory elements, vision proved to be a truly creative apprehension of reality-imaginative, inventive, shrewd, and beautiful." (Arnheim, 1974, p. 5)

Thus, we can say that it is sight, with the help of the mind, that builds the reality in which we live.

Nowadays, the thirst for knowledge of the surrounding world has now transferred to the virtual environment. This exchange of information between Nature and Man is now being carried out by new technology. Technology has allowed space and time to compress, so any information, from any space or time, can be accessed from a single place, virtual space. People spend time, more and more, communicating and looking for new information through the internet. The information is so much and so easy to access in the virtual space, that the environment has become for them, unattractive.

2. Research Motivation

Starting from the idea that people are no longer attracted to discover what is around them, and for children, the external environment is no longer the main source of experimentation and learning, the motivation for the development of this project appeared, intending to bring together the two *natural* and *virtual* spaces, creating a memorable sensory experience for adults and children alike.

The research project is also considered an informative-educational contribution, identifying and recognizing the Romanian cultural heritage, especially the historical monuments. The lack of information about the story of these monuments and their sign to identify and locate them was another objective to achieve in this project.

The search for a solution to revitalize historical monuments using visual communication led to a new, contemporary method, through which the visitor actively participates in the discovery of information, living a unique experience through the infographic method.

3. The Infographic Method

Visual communication through various media for transmitting the message is not a new subject. The imminent need to understand the surrounding world has made humans permanently look for ways of transmitting, through visual messages, all their discoveries through a simplified, minimalist, symbolistic representation, which can be compared with what we call today *infographic*. A significant quote explaining the essence of the *infographic* comes from Albert Einstein: "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." (internet source), or another view of biologist John Medina: "Vision trumps all other senses. We learn and remember best through pictures, not through written or spoken words." (Medina, 2014, p. 197).

Infographics can be defined as a visualization of data, an idea or a concept, which transmits complex information to an audience, in a manner that can be quickly and easily understood (Smiciklas, 2012, p. 3). It combines words and images to effectively communicate a particular message. It can also be used to achieve multiple goals. For example, it can be used to inform, persuade, learn, or urge people to action. The British graphic designer, author and theorist in informational design, Smiciklas said that *infographics* it was "explanatory graphics" (Smiciklas, 2012, p. 5).

Infographics used in contemporary design both online and in the media are a tool that employs visual representations in the form of graphic indices. It transforms a subject with complex information into a captivating experience. *Information + Graphic design = Visual learning.*

In education, the infographic method is used in the learning process. A picture, or a sign, is much easier to remember than a sentence. If a word is accompanied by an image, it becomes easier to memorize. As one publicist said: "A good infographic is worth more than a thousand words" (author unknown)

Regarding the way of visual exposure of an *infographic* we can say that there is no single formula by which information has a greater impact since it depends on the content, purpose and graphic representation. Writer and designer David McCandless said, in a discussion at TED Conferences, *The beauty of data visualization* that: "[...] infographics provide a sense of relief in a

landscape filled with a mind-numbing amount of information." (see www.ted.com), a quote published in the book *The Power of Infographics: Using Pictures to Communicate and Connect With Your Audiences* (McCandless, 2010, 2012; 2014; Smiciklas, 2012, p. 7).

The purpose of those *infographics* is to create for the viewer a mixture of call, understanding and restraint. In this case, we can say that the visual representation of information, regardless of the manner, transforms the *infographic* into the most powerful communication tool.

Depending on how we want to arrange the information, we choose the visual representation. A few types of approaches best serve the purpose of the *infographics* created. The form of information design can be achieved through static, interactive or moving graphics. We can mention some types of infographics that are still used, their list being constantly growing: *mixt-charts, informational/list, timeline, how-to, process, comparison, location, photo-graphic, hierarchical, single chart, anatomical, visualized numbers, visual resume etc.* All these types of *infographics* serve the method of information and learning.

In the learning process one, two or all three stimuli can be activated: the visual, the acoustic and the tactile. The share of information content being today more based on visual communication, the one on the internet, turns the eye into a "device" that offers a channel with the highest bandwidth to the Centre of the human cognitive system (Lankow et al., 2012, p. 41).

The most widespread format for the use of information design is *static infographics*. This uses three types of content: internal reports and presentations, editorial content for social distribution and product-centric content, the benefit of the latter being the ease and speed with which a static image is created, generally used for information or breaking news (Lankow, et al., 2012, pp. 56-69).

Infographics motion refers to the combination of moving graphic content with the help of sound or a voice, which informs the viewer through a message of a particular product, in a powerful, visual and auditory way. Usually, they generally use video platforms, *YouTube* and *Vimeo*. A difference between *static* infographics and what *in motion* concerns time, the latter has a narrative function, with a limited and passive interaction of the viewer. His only action is to press the play/pause button and scroll the video (Lankow, et al., 2012, p. 70).

And the last type of *infographic* is *the interactive infographic*. It is used for large amounts of information with interactive content, which allows and encourages the user to explore the information space, guiding it through a specific narrative, directed, in a linear manner, to understand the specified

story. This is where the desire for discovery is activated in an interesting or fun way, exploring information relevant to it by accessing images or graphic symbols to visualize the next step of the story (Lankow et al., 2012, pp. 83-85).

Visual Communication and Monuments

The historical events that contributed to the development of today's society were marked by monuments. The presence of signs and symbols on monuments was the most used way of communication in all periods of cultural development of humanity. The first sources of information were considered visual narratives. The visual narratives present especially on monuments contain complex messages that can be understood with the help of decoding signs and symbols.

This project aimed to develop a new method of accessing the visual narratives present in the ancient monuments, using a combination of graphic design and new digital technologies, the method and infographic, to make the monuments more attractive and understandable for visitors.

The story of the *Adamclisi* Monument - *War and Peace*

The *Adamclisi* triumphal monument is part of an urban complex built between 106-109 AD., for the soldiers fallen in the battles between the Romans led by Emperor Trajan against the Dacians led by Decebalus. The archaeological complex has the shape of an isosceles triangle. The base is marked by the monument and a funerary mound, and at the top of the triangle is the altar. The central part preserves through the metopes, sequences from the history of events of that period. This monument, due to the importance of its significance, is considered today an important touristic place.

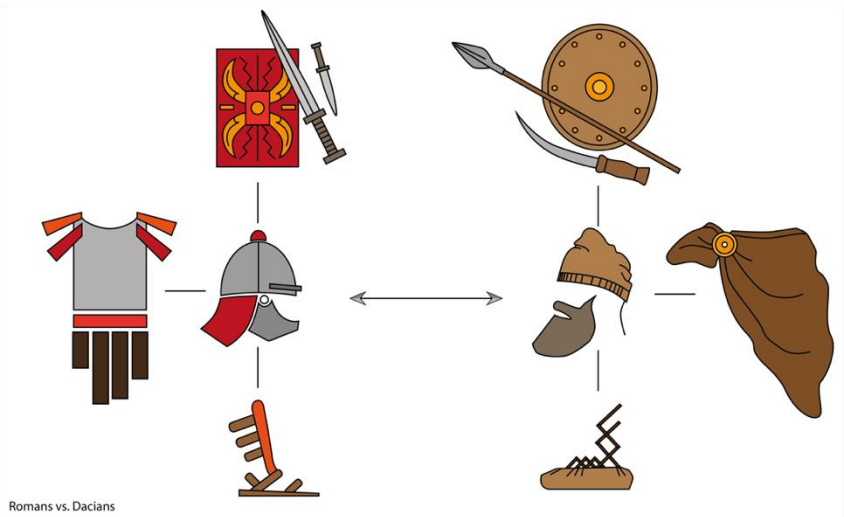


Figure 1. The infographic of the conflict
Pictograms: © Cornelia Moţăianu

This case study, the *Adamclisi* Monument, is a great example of historical identification due to the visual narratives present on the monument. The metopes depicting the events of the *War and Peace* of Emperor Trajan, arranged in a circle at the base of the monument, create a dynamic visual message, which is perceived as a film. But the logic of the metope narratives is not clear to the audience.

For the fluency of the narrative, it was proposed to achieve an animated *infographic*. Significant details of the visual narratives present on the monument, considered representative of the identity of this monument, were taken into account to reinterpret the historical message. The collected photographic details were translated into narrative visual signs, with the help of the *infographic*, so that then, the *infographic* can be observed and understood by the viewer with the help of a digital *Augmented Reality* application, which uses the method of recognition. The recognition and collection of their specific images (signs, drawings or symbols) describe the identity of this monument by deciphering the conflict, represented by the short moving picture 30" *War and Peace*.

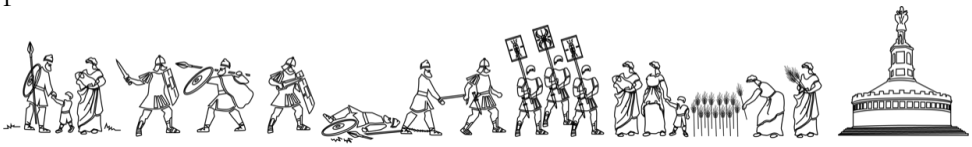


Figure 2. The storyboard of the moving picture *Adamclisi War and Peace 30"*
Pictograms: © Cornelia Moţăianu

This impressive and new technology, *Augmented Reality*, allows the overlapping of information content over directly perceived information. *Augmented Reality*, in the playback of different messages, uses digital visual elements, sounds or various other sensory stimuli provided by technology (Hayes, 2020).

Augmented Reality has several types of applications, based on a projection that uses digital objects projected over the physical space; applications based on the recognition that detects and recognize a particular object, which can be replaced by another, more appropriate object; applications based on location detection, using GPS, to provide location information; applications based on highlight elements used in architecture and engineering; overlapping applications that use object recognition to replace some or all of them with an augmented variant (see www.igreet.co).

4. An Original Approach

Visualizing the entire narrative of the metopes around the monument is a long process. That is why a synthesis of the message of the metopes using the *infographic* was proposed. The original signs containing the antique message are presented successively in a modern graphic form, in a 30" movie, using the digital application *Artivive* (see www.artivive.com).

The introduction of the sound in the scrolling of the *infographic* can be considered a plus to the deciphering of the message. For a memorable experience, in addition to intelligible drawings, the addition of these sounds allows the viewer a complex experience when viewing scenes inspired by metopes.

How to access the infographic Adamclisi War and Peace?

This short moving picture can be accessed using the *Artivive* application, by scanning a graphic symbol representing the monument.



Figure 3. Scanning a graphic symbol with an *Artivive* application
Pictograms: © Cornelia Moţăianu; Photo credit: Cornelia Moţăianu
Artivive application – www.artivive.com

To involve the visitors in the process of discovering the historical information of the monument, with the help of the advertising billboard located on its perimeter, they are invited to access the historical and technical information about the monument and the viewing of the story *Adamclisi. War and Peace* through the digital applications.

These digital applications have different destinations; the *Artivive* is used for running the 30" moving picture *Adamclisi. War and Peace,* and the other application the *QR Scanner* is for accessing more additional information that is provided by the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanta (see www.minac.ro).

Both applications can also be used on any digital mobile device (mobile phone or tablet). These applications can be downloaded from *Google Play* and the *App Store* using an internet connection.

The panel also contains information about the use of these applications and how informational data can be accessed.

For the implementation of the project, various digital and printed materials will be developed: the panel located next to the monument; posters that will be present in the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanta and the Adamclisi Archaeological Museum "Tropaeum Traiani"; flyers containing micro maps of this archaeological complex with information about the *Adamclisi* monument and signboards for the monument.

5. The Educational value

This project can also have an educational valence. How students can learn about historical monuments, using the *infographic*, meant to access the memory of monuments through a unique, educational experience is one of perspective. Technology offers the possibility for any adult or child who has a mobile device to access information through another, more attractive way right from the place where the monument is located.

Thus, the experience of movement and discovery in the external, natural environment, is being reconsidered. Children can easily and intuitively use these *Artivive* and *QR Scanner* applications, and immediately understand the meaning of the message.

6. Conclusions

The existing trends of visual design applied in contemporary culture are in a continuous cultural and technological development that allow us new methods of graphic development, to improve the communication of historical and cultural data and events of certain places and monuments. *Infographics* allow access to a large source of information that includes not only a story of a historical-cultural space, or a monument, but an entire network of interconnected information aimed at promoting and preserving the material and intangible heritage.

This method that uses *infographics*, through logical visual narratives conceived in a contemporary manner, could be an effective tool for communication and learning.

Regarding visual perception as representing a form of education, one can believe that through the constant use of messages in the form of graphic signs, one can tend towards an improvement in the way of communication and implicitly towards the efficiency of the message in society.

This project can bring an improvement not only in the way cultural information reaches people but also from a moral and educational point of

view, possible development of a culture of literacy and learning of knowledge useful to our society, using the outer, natural space.

To communicate we need interaction with others, but what we see goes beyond the framework of a simple exchange of information. In other words, what we see is not just a simple act of looking at it, but a gateway to knowledge.

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