The Acropolis Restoration News

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View of the Parthenon cella from the East. Photo R. Christodoulopoulou, 2018
“A Greek Temple”: A new web application on the architecture of ancient Greek temples

Preface
In October 2018 the YSMA’s Department of Information and Education completed the creation of a new educational web application named “A Greek Temple” (ancienttemple.ysma.gr). The application draws elements from the Department’s museum kit, of the same name. Similar applications have already been developed and had been used, such as the museum kit “The Parthenon Frieze” and the teacher’s pack “Acrropolis and Restoration”, whereas the Acropolis Museum family backpacks developed by YSMA have had their printed material similarly enriched with web games.

The subject of the new application is the architecture of the ancient Greek temples. It targets children older than 9 years, teachers interested in using it within the classroom environment and also parents who wish to use the educational games of the application together with their children.

The use of new technologies in the field of culture has the potential to attract greater public interest, in particular the young, offering multicultural educational experiences. It also contributes to increasing people’s awareness and the cognitive, aesthetic and emotional familiarity of the public with the monuments. Finally it enables public understanding of the importance attached to the protection of cultural heritage. YSMA’s Department of Information and Education has extensive experience in designing digital activities, commencing the development of educational web applications as far back as 2008. “A Greek Temple” is the sixth successive digital application and has been an effort to encompass the conclusions drawn from the evaluations of earlier applications.

The application is designed in Greek and English and was funded through the National Strategic Reference Framework “ESPA 2014-2020”. Its design, development and artistic editing was carried out by DIADRASIS.

The design of the application
Exploiting the full potential of new information and communication technologies in the area of museum education has enabled us to engage the visitor in the learning experience. For this reason, in addition to the prime objective, of acquainting the users with the architecture of the classical temples of the antiquity, the following goals were set to:

• promote the gamification of learning
• enrich the school lesson
• expand the experience of visiting the monuments
• encourage further learning
• help children develop various skills (imagination, observation, language skills, critical thinking, collaboration).

It was also imperative that the necessary principles used for the design of the application should be defined and based on contemporary theoretical approaches of museum education.

Thus, a balance between educational games and entertainment had to be initially established and maintained. That is, besides providing knowledge of the particular subject matter the application needed to include games that could contribute to recreation, inspiration and pleasure, but retain their educational dimension. Users should not need to have specialized knowledge to navigate the application, the content would be arranged and structured in levels of thorough knowledge and finally there should be a separate unit for teachers.

Consequently, there are visitors in a web page who would be able to choose to participate in an activity based on their available time or their level of familiarity with the subject. Moreover, the development of the application drew on the principles of Discovery Learning, according to which, digital activities function as entry point to the content and not as a monitoring role, strengthening as such, the user’s propensity for interaction and exploration. Discovery Learning also accords with contemporary theories of Constructivism where learning is considered as a continuous and dynamic communication process, both personal and social, which presupposes active receivers who process the messages according to past experience, beliefs and interests. Likewise, the users are given the possibility to creatively exploit the content by encouraging self-expression. Other important parameters that influenced the design of the application arose from the desire to motivate the visitors to replay the games, and also to provide feedback from their answers. Finally, priority was also given to matters concerning the clarity of the rules of each game, an attractive layout, the visual coherence of the screens and the usability of the navigation.

Technical characteristics of the application
As it can be seen from the technical specifications of the project the application complies with the accepted standards that correspond to the demands for designing a website and is compatible with the most widely used operating systems and web browsers. In addition, all the necessary processes-interventions have been carried out in its structure and content in order to allow and search engine optimization. Contemporary techniques for the promotion and presentation of cultural content on the Internet have also been used to ensure the application’s best possible presentation and its integration into different environments. Finally, the application also facilitates the production of reports and statistical data analysis based on multiple criteria (Google analytics) and supports an interactive access to all its content.

The content of the application
The application is exclusively focused on the architecture of monuments found in Greece that belong mainly to the Archaic and Classical periods. Its emphasis is on the monuments of the Athenian Acropolis as they epitomize the fullest and most beautiful expression of Ancient Greek temples during the Classical period. Moreover, the procedures of planning and construction of these monuments are better known from Athens, where the democratic regime had elaborated institutions for all public matters.

The educational storyline of the application combines characters, challenges and rewards for children. The core mission of the user is to become an architect who will design a new temple for a small town in Attica during the Classical period. The user is introduced to the application by a short video that explains the goal of the game in a pleasant, brief and easy to understand manner.

Then the user can access the main part of the application by creating a user name that enables the players to return to the game as many times as they wish to complete the challenges or better their score. The next step for the player involves creating an avatar. Users can customize the appearance of their avatar by choosing names and characteristics, so they can identify with the specific hero each time they log in to play the game or even create multiple avatars.

Similar opportunities are available for identification with the six characters that appear in the next screen of the application and correspond to its six thematic units. Every character through his/her role that is relevant to an ancient Greek temple presents a corresponding theme.

Thus, the Priestess presents the unit that concerns the functions and uses of a temple and its surrounding space, the
Presenting a character of the game

Game: "A sacred Space"

Unit "Did you know that..."

The educational web application "A Greek Temple" attempts to offer to its users a comprehensive multifaceted and visual representation of the past, shifting the educational focus from passive information to activity. The users have a central role in structuring their own knowledge as they learn through their own actions in the world of play.

The narrative is completed with the unit that refers to neoclassicism and how ancient architecture influenced modern times. The user has already completed their mission, he/she has become an architect who is asked to help another architect of the 19th century to draw a Neoclassical building, which subsequently appears on the screen with the total score and the player’s ranking. This reward encourages the children to play again and spend longer time on the games.

The application is supported with additional features, such as a term explanation mechanism (active data glossary), and the design of 2D/3D animation, where the content is shown in a flexible and attractive way motivating as such the students to learn. In addition, printing and email options are available so the players are facilitated and the communication with other users is enhanced.

Finally a separate webpage entitled “Learn more” supplements the game and adds more specialised content knowledge on the subject. The application follows the structure of a game, as there are corresponding subject units where the user can find more information to enrich their lesson. The webpage also offers the possibility to incorporate other applications (video, ppt, pdf), allowing constant updates of information and content enrichment.

Epilogue

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Among the future plans of the Department are the systematic evaluation of the application after a period of time and the collection of evaluative information that can be used in the development of similar activities. A pilot evaluation has already been conducted with teachers and students completing questionnaires during the final stage of the applications development in order to assess its usability; yet, the whole experience of application also requires evaluation.

Information and Education Department