

TOWARDS A DIGITAL KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEM: BOTTOM-UP EDUCATION IN THE NATIONAL PORTAL OF CESARE ZAVATTINI'S WORKS

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Abstract

Never before has the growing integration between media, history and digital practices profoundly transformed the ways in which historical and cultural knowledge is processed. Within the field of Digital Humanities, digital archives function as environments in which memory is renewed through innovative narrative models and flexible consultation systems capable of engaging diverse audiences and fostering active participation. In this framework, cinema, both an aesthetic and documentary medium, plays a central role in preserving and interpreting collective memory. A good model of digital film archive should therefore be conceived as a dynamic platform integrating metadata practices, multimedia resources, and exploratory pathways.

This research focuses on the National Portal of Cesare Zavattini's Works, funded by the Italian Ministry of Culture, a case study for examining the potential of digital film archives in processes of knowledge production and dissemination. Zavattini, a key figure of Italian Neorealism, based his poetics on cinema's capacity to convey an effect of reality and to reinforce social identity through practices of memory and narrative construction, shaped by the experience of the post-war period. Consequently, the portal project aims to offer a model of Public History geared to make a substantial documentary corpus accessible, particularly to digital natives, through the reinterpretation of traditional texts and the development of collaborative narratives grounded in bottom-up approaches.

The method adopted involved extensive archival analysis, cataloguing and filing of cinema documents preserved at the Panizzi Library in Reggio Emilia. Both produced and unproduced film subjects have been digitised, mapped and reorganised in a database with standard details, enriched with philological and historical-critical notes. Moreover, ongoing developments include the design of text-reconfiguration tools such as exploratory pathways based on thematic tags, Data Visualization models, integrations with new media sources, and film workshops for schools supported by Artificial Intelligence techniques.

In this perspective, digitisation and reorganisation of the materials not only broaden accessibility but also open new interpretative possibilities, fostering Data and Digital Storytelling practices that transform archival items into shared narratives and stimulate critical knowledge processes. The portal thus emerges as a dual instrument: a resource for historical-critical research and an educational device capable of enhancing the cinematic heritage, preserving its memory, and encouraging active user participation.

The study suggests that such a digital archive can serve as a powerful means of democratising historical knowledge; no longer a simple repository, but a dynamic system that generates meaning and supports critical awareness among younger generations, in an age marked by rapid change and by the need to rebuild connections between memory, place, and identity.

In conclusion, the public return of cinema papers not only restores centrality to the creative process and to cinema's social purpose, but also offers a replicable model for future projects, in which the synergy between narrative, data, and digital media becomes a key interpretative tool for understanding contemporary reality. Keywords: Digital archives, cinema, Public History, collective memory, Digital Humanities, collaborative narratives, Artificial Intelligence, accessibility.

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