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### **Mobile gateways: Museums, mobile phones and the documentation of everyday life**

#### **Summary**

Museum documentation is usually understood as a systematic way of obtaining, creating and organising information and knowledge about objects and collections. However, this traditional perception of museum documentation may not provide the appropriate means to collect information and knowledge regarding everyday life and its cultural heritage, such as archaeological monuments in cityscapes. By being 'exposed' to daily life, archaeological monuments acquire dynamic, personal and everyday meanings, often too familiar and ephemeral to be grasped. To what extent can, then, museums access and document this everyday knowledge that shows the way people understand monuments in their daily life?

Using as a context archaeological monuments in the city of Thessaloniki (Greece), this paper suggests that documenting 'everyday meanings' cannot be interpreted as the making of a complete record of them. It should be, rather, approached as the development of a 'mobile gateway', through which everyday knowledge can enter museums.

The paper goes on to explore the potential of mobile phones, used by their owners, to capture and communicate everyday meanings of archaeological monuments. Mobile phones are considered 'everyday technology' and they are, already, used in disseminating museum knowledge to users. Drawing on fieldwork and qualitative investigation in Greece, the paper suggests that mobile phones could, also, be used as a means for museums to access and reveal everyday knowledge. In this case, museum documentation is seen not as an exhaustive systematisation of everyday knowledge, but an open communication channel, a 'mobile gateway', between people and museums through the use of mobile technology in everyday life.

‘No one, wise Kublai, knows better than you that the city must never be confused with the words that describe it. And yet between the one and the other there is a connection’.

Italo Calvino (1997:61)

## 1. Introduction: Documentation as collection

Museum documentation is as a systematic, organised and meaningful way of applying information to objects and collections. This acquisition of information has been a parallel process to objects’ collection and, often, separated from the rest of the museum work. The view of documentation as collection suggests that museum information is objectified<sup>1</sup>, that is it becomes another ‘object’ of the museum that has to be collected, preserved and communicated. Especially today, it does not cause surprise (as it used to) to encounter ideas such as that ‘museums collect information, not objects’ (Washburn, 1984), or that ‘information is the primary resource of the museum business’ (MacDonald and Alford, 1991), or that ‘museums are information centres’ (Will, 1994).

This, then, suggests a qualitative transformation of documentation in museums: when Anne Fahy implies that information in museums becomes a commodity (1995:82) points to what the previous paragraph suggests: that information about objects and its management tends to replace objects as the raw material of museums, assuming a role that resembles of the role that Manuel Castells gives to information in the informational society. For Castells, information generation, processing, and transmission are the fundamental sources of productivity in today’s informational society (1996:21). Equally, it seems that, the ability of museums to gather, manage and communicate information come to be not just their product (as George F. MacDonald and Stephen Alford argue, 1991:306), but, also, their generating power. Consequently, documentation in museums has been promoted from a logistical method of collection management to a component of the museum collection, the interpretation process and the exhibition practice.

Documentation as collection has been fully perceived through the systematization of automated documentation processes, such as the collection management software. The computerized management systems have accommodated the inherent qualities of collecting practices, such as classification and categorization. It is no more enough to collect and make sense of objects; instead it is necessary to create appropriate fields of information that has to be acquired, researched or produced in order for a documentation record to be complete. The more fully an object is documented, the better the object is appreciated. From this point of view, for

<sup>1</sup> Objectification here is seen according to what Richard Handler calls ‘cultural objectification’, that is, the ‘construction of culture as a thing: a natural object or entity made up of objects and entities, which gains its own reality and can be gazed at, learned from and fought for’ (quoted in Macdonald, 1996:7).

example, decisions of museums not to register objects of which they do not have appropriate information is better understood. It is not just the ethical concerns that a registration of an undocumented object has. The lack of accompanying information does not respond well to the museum documentation system that demands its fields of object information to be completed as detailed as possible.

Furthermore, documentation in museums has traditionally been a behind-the-scenes work, assigned to curators or museum documentation officers. Accordingly, it has been and still is, largely, part of the museum's authority, identity and acknowledgment, often related to scholar and academic research (Fahy, 1995:84). As Charles Saumarez Smith reminds us, 'the essential feature of museums was, first, that the meaning which were attributed to the artefacts were held to be not arbitrary' (1989:p. 6).<sup>2</sup>

If then, documentation is about collecting and systematizing authoritative information that in turn, tends to become the essence of the whole museum function both behind and in front of the scenes, how, then, can museums cope with anything that resists systematization or collection? To be clearer, if museum documentation acquires qualities of museum collecting, such as classification and categorization, to what extent can museums collect the unclassifiable and uncategorized knowledge of the everyday, in order to present the daily life of objects or people?

This paper examines the potential of museums to document the knowledge of the everyday. After a brief account of the efforts of museums to reach into and document everyday life, the paper focuses on archaeological monuments 'exposed' in the everyday life of the city of Thessaloniki, Greece and the meanings they acquire in the route of the everyday. Drawing on fieldwork and qualitative investigation in Greece, the paper concludes with an exploration of the potential of camera phones, used by their owners, to capture and communicate everyday meanings of archaeological monuments for the museum.

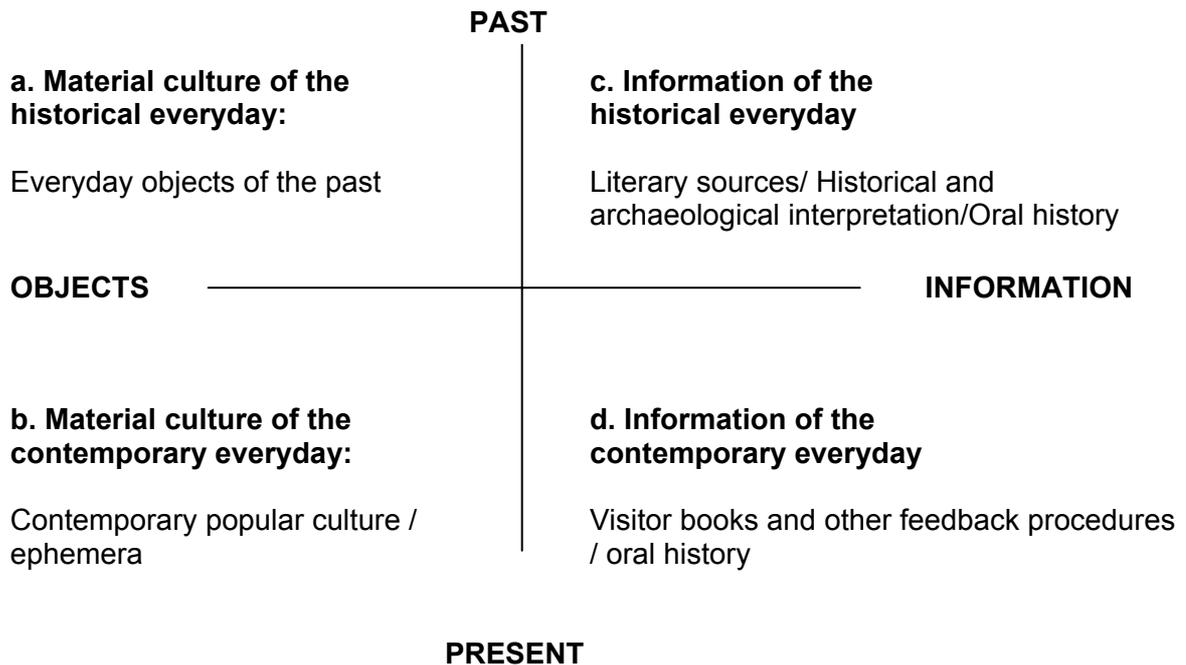
## **2. Documentation of the past everyday: the everyday as history**

### **2.1. Documenting the everyday: the practice**

Museums have tried to collect, interpret and exhibit everyday life through objects and information about it. The following diagram suggests how museums have seen the documentation of the everyday life.

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<sup>2</sup> Although the importance of museum research and scholarship as such has been questioned in recent years, it has found alternative routes to be re-introduced in the museum scene, for example, by being 'a new dimension to accessibility' for the public (MacGregor, 1995:220).



**Diagram 1:** Collection and documentation of everyday life in museums

Everyday life is both a time and space concept. However, it is its temporal qualities that reveal best the way museums – as time capsules – have seen the documentation of everyday life. At the same time, we cannot conceive documentation apart from the objects and collections that museums hold. At least in principle, any documented information targets the increasing of knowledge about the museum objects the people who owned or used them. Therefore, any attempt to understand the way museums have dealt with the documentation of everyday life needs to see primarily everyday life as a concept of time (past and present) and examine two basic ingredients of museum documentation, that is objects and information.

From this perspective we can identify four aspects of the documentation of everyday life in museums (see also diagram 1):

a. Material culture of the historical everyday

Excavated, preserved or collected objects of the household, the work, the customs and the traditions of the daily lives of people in the past have been part of museum displays and exhibitions. Even appropriate types of museums, such as ecomuseums, living history museums and reconstructed sites, have been established in the effort to reproduce the past everyday life and provide a more contextualised environment for the collections. Also, the rise of social history as a discipline has led to the growth of museums that present aspects of the everyday life of ordinary people. (Moore, 1997:vii; Ross, 1998:125; Fleming, 1998:11). Such museums are for example the numerous social history museums in the UK or the Edo-Tokyo Museum in Japan. Its planners

began with the idea of a museum that would preserve the 'culture of daily life'. Through acquisitions and donations of objects belonging to past everyday life and by architectural models and dioramas tried to reconstruct the daily life or an imagined past (Sand, 2001:372).

#### b. Material culture of the contemporary everyday

As museums have moved from being exclusively about the past and started to embrace today's culture, more and more contemporary material culture has found its way into museums. Being either the result of corresponding movements, such as 'popular culture' (Moore, 1997) or just part of the museum's effort to engage with its public, objects of the contemporary everyday have taken their place on the museum's shelves, documentation and research. Although Paul Martin points out that contemporary objects are difficult to enter museums because 'they do not have the kudos of historical distance and the patina of time, or because their utilitarian nature still defines them as functional rather than aesthetic' (1999:11) there are numerous cases that such objects have been introduced into museums. The 'People's shows' in the UK, from the 1990s on, is one of the most known examples, where collections of local people were displayed in public places (Lovatt, 1997:196).

#### c. Information of the historical everyday

The documentation of the material culture of the past everyday life has involved mainly the research of literary sources, the accommodation of relevant historical and archaeological interpretation theories and, for the more recent past, the practice of oral history. It is clear today that to produce histories in museums we need to see documentation beyond an attribution of information to objects and into the people's experiences. As Peter Jenkinson points out, 'it is people's experience, revealed in oral history and reminiscence, in film, video and photography, in writing, in performance, in painting and so on, that is the essential feature of an effective, relevant and responsive social history in museums' (1989:145). This emphasis on synchronous to the objects information has assumed increasing value over the years and has resulted in the realisation of the 'intangible heritage': the heritage that consists of oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, or social practices, rituals and festive events (UNESCO, 2005). The case of the intangible heritage is a good example of the, previously discussed, 'objectification' of information: What in the past was considered supportive to objects information, it is today another 'object' for collection, preservation, research, documentation and exhibition.

#### d. Information of the contemporary everyday

The fourth way that museums have attempted to collect and document the everyday life is, also, the least developed one. This is, because it deals with the production of information about the contemporary everyday. Again, oral history and archival research have been used to document today's popular

culture and collections of ephemera that end up in museums (Moore, 1997). Also, visitor books and other methods of inviting people's comments may reveal aspects of the everyday knowledge and the way people understand their contemporary surroundings, but it is not something that museums have seen as part of a documentation process.

Sometimes it is, also, equated with the inclusion of diversified interpretations of the museum objects: the widely accepted, nowadays, emphasis on the museum visitors and their meaning-making process (Silverman, 1995; Falk and Dierking, 2000); the acceptance that objects have a social life (Appadurai, 1986); the recognition that not only museum people have 'a say' in the objects' storytelling and the corresponding development of museological concepts, such as the New Museology (Vergo, 1989) or the 'post-museum' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000); as well as the shift of museums from object-centred to experience-oriented institutions (Hein, 2000), have exposed the increasing need to gather, manage and use diverse information both behind and in front of the museum scenes. However, this information is not necessarily an account of contemporary everyday life, even if it happens today. It usually takes again a historical form, such as memories, diaries and other reminiscence material.

## **2.2. Documenting the everyday: the limits**

As already said, everyday life is primarily a time concept. It is what happens in a day or every day, and emphasizes the ordinariness of the daily life. As such, it is temporary and familiar. It is actually so familiar that goes unnoticed; it escapes acknowledgment and understanding. Therefore, everyday life is inconsistent, ephemeral, a-historical, unauthoritative and therefore impossible to classify, organise, systematise and, in fact, collect.

From this perspective then what museums document is not the everyday life as it happened, or happens. It is rather the documentation of a historical everyday; the everyday that reaches us through material traces of the past or historical (and therefore fragmented) accounts of it, such as documents and objects. It is, consequently, a conventional construction of an imagined everyday life, based on documentation methods that are themselves a narrow account of the daily life.

It could be argued that this is the only way that museums can deal with the concept of the everyday life. By being about systematic classification, categorization, scholarship and collection of information, museums find it difficult to cope with the concept of the everyday life either of the past or the present. And, therefore, they have to subordinate it into a cultural heritage seen from a historical distance in order to be able to make categories of it, collect it and make sense of it.

If this practice can, nevertheless, find some justification for past objects and past everyday life, yet it is merely a compromise when it comes to today's everyday life. Museums have shown some interest in documenting the

contemporary everyday information as shown in the diagram above. However, their traditional way of doing documentation cancels largely the qualities of the everyday life.

It is the documentation of this contemporary everyday knowledge that the paper will turn next. Leaving aside the material culture used to reconstruct and represent everyday life (past and present), the paper will examine how museums can document the objects' information that is produced in the everyday life.

### **3. Documentation of the contemporary everyday: the everyday as process**

#### **3.1. Everyday meanings of archaeological monuments**

In order to contextualise the discussion, the paper will refer to a particular example of everyday knowledge's documentation. This is the meanings that archaeological monuments acquire when they are part of the people's daily life. Such case is the archaeological monuments in Greek cities, like Thessaloniki. These monuments are mainly architectural ruins of antiquity that lie where they were originally built: nowadays, this means that they lie in houses' basements, or they are part of the urban infrastructure, standing on streets, parks and pavements (see figures 1-2).



**Figure 1:** Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki, Greece (ca 304 AC).



**Figure 2:** Ruins of Galerius' Complex on Dimitrios Gounaris St., Thessaloniki, Greece (ca 304 AC).



**Figure 3:** Ruins of the city walls on Melenikou street, Thessaloniki, Greece

By being part of the daily environment of people, these archaeological monuments are exposed to the rules of the everyday life, the dominance of which many theorists have emphatically stressed. Thus, like everyday life, they are not unique and particular, but common and familiar. They are part of the repetitive structure of the daily life, as Henri Lefebvre would argue (1987:11). They are 'what we never see for a first time, but only see again' (Blanchot and Hanson, 1987: 14). In other words, they are taken for granted and because of that they are difficult to be noticed as something out of the ordinary (Highmore, 2002:8, Attfield, 2000:50,173). It occurs, then, what John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking describe for the people that work in museums: 'for people who work at the museum every day, there will appear to be less to be curious about; the environment is no longer novel, and much is already known' (2000:115).

People may go beyond any 'official' view of the monuments and construct alternative meanings, defined by the day-by-day interaction with the monuments. To paraphrase Michel de Certeau,

'these [monuments]<sup>3</sup> make themselves available to diverse meanings given them by passers-by; they detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define and serve as imaginary meeting-points on itineraries which, as metaphors, they determine for reasons that are foreign to their original value but may be recognized or not by passers-by' (De Certeau, 1988:104)

Consequently, the monuments continue their sociocultural history as all objects do (Appadurai, 1986) stimulating a range of interpretations, meanings and uses, which may be more related to the way everyday life operates, rather to the archaeological nature of the monuments. As Brian S. Osborne points out, referring to national monuments, people's reaction to monuments often discloses more about the present than the past (2001:8). These meanings are influenced by the mixture of predictable and unpredictable situations and actions that take place in the daily life. So, they are dynamic, constant and highly conditioned by the fragile and ephemeral everyday.

### **3.2. Documentation of everyday meanings: from record to process**

Accordingly, this example of contemporary everyday knowledge provides a good account of the inadequacy of usual documentation processes to cope with it. The meanings that this build cultural heritage acquires in the everyday life of people are, indeed, part of what today's museums would be interested in.

Russell Belk argues that in regard to consumption, the museum's role is to 'make the familiar strange, so that we may see it freshly and critically' (quoted in Martin, 1999:7). In the everyday life not only the popular or mass-produced

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<sup>3</sup> Instead of the original: 'these names' (which refers to names of streets).

object, but also the culturally valued one (i.e. archaeological monuments) can become familiar. In that occasion, museums can play their role in the de-familiarisation of that object 'so that we may see it freshly and critically'. Furthermore, Manuel Castells stresses, that museums, as reminders of temporality must try to articulate living culture, 'the practice of the present', with cultural heritage, not only as far as art is concerned but also as regards human experience. (2001:6). Thomas J. Schlereth, also, stresses the importance of the meanings of cultural heritage of the everyday. He points out that these objects that make cities a living museum continue to be overlooked by the scholars. However, he admits that this is changing, as a wide assortment of scholars – neighbourhood historians, public historians, backyard historians, preservation historians – are gathering around 'in what may be the largest, uncatalogued, unclassified, unedited, and still largely uninterpreted collections of historical data that lies all around us, ever accessible, ever inexhaustible, ever changing' (Schlereth: 1992:186, 316).

In short, motivated either by research purposes, or just alternative and inclusive perceptions of their material culture, museums have started to pay attention to the diverse interpretations that objects cause.

But it is clear now, after going through the particularities and qualities of everyday life, that any attempt to document the ephemeral knowledge cannot be seen through the systematic organisation of categorized and authoritative information. The meanings that people make of the archaeological monuments cannot be pinned down and crystallized in order to follow the typical documentation system of museums. Also, they cannot be exhausted. The moment that we decide to document, that is to make a record of the everyday interpretations, the same moment we cancel their everydayness and we move to a historical account of them. Furthermore, there is nobody who can claim authority regarding everyday meanings. The everyday, by belonging to itself and to each one of us that produces it, resist any definite or authoritative descriptions. As a result, every effort of museums to systematize, and organise in order to document the everyday knowledge would, by definition, fail. The documentation record is not, then, the appropriate means to document everyday knowledge.

One way around it would be the concept of the archive. The 'archive fever' as Mike Featherstone calls it, would be to attempt to look at the everyday experience, which is the source of our imperfect and distorted memories (Derrida, quoted in Featherstone, 2000:170) and by extend the invisible ingredient of museum interpretations. This would mean to archive the everyday life as it is lived (which reminds the what Surrealists were trying to do (Hamilton, 2002:118)), without selection and without leaving anything outside. Indeed, such a solution would be closer to the documentation of everyday life, since it would potentially cancel any authoritative selection of it.

However, even the archive solution would not be appropriate, because it is still a collecting approach that presupposes the existence of records and

categorization. It would, also, serve, again, future historical accounts of the everyday, rather than try to acknowledge the everyday. The everyday can exist and be understood only when it happens. It cannot be remembered and interpreted afterwards. Therefore, the documentation of the everyday presupposes an intentional confrontation to it. By consciously confronting the everyday, we make the unseen visible, we de-naturalise, or de-familiarise it (Highmore, 8). When we recognize and acknowledge the numerous small routinized and habitual experiences then, we actually enter the everyday (Jordan, 248). Therefore, archiving everything that might be part of the everyday life postpones this acknowledgment in the future, condemning it into a distanced interpretation of it.

In order to document everyday life, and in this paper's case, the everyday meanings of archaeological monuments, museums have to abandon their traditional view of documentation, as making records or even archives of them. Documentation as collection cannot be applied in this case. Instead, museums need to adapt the qualities of the everyday life and instead of appropriating them through their collection management systems to try to follow them. This would mean that documentation would be no more a collection of information to be completed, but an open process of receiving unedited information. Even in this case, the received information does not stand for all everyday meanings. It is just a glimpse of the museum into the everyday and the way people make meanings of their surrounding cultural heritage. This suggests that it is not the actual meanings that matter here. By deciding the infinity and inability to archive the everyday meanings, the important point is at least to provide a more appropriate method of acquiring them. It is about the process, not about the record. What would bring museums closer to the everyday is not an exhaustive account of it, but the development of a gateway between the mobile everyday and the static museum: a 'mobile gateway' that follows and opens on the everyday as, when and where it is happened and realized by those who attend to it: the people.

#### **4. Mobile media and the documentation of the everyday**

##### **4.1. Mobile media as everyday media**

This then creates a considerable challenge for museums. The challenge is not just to overlook their traditional way of doing documentation; it is, also, to find a way to comply with the documentation of everyday life, as it was already described.

The use of mobile media compatible to the everyday life could potentially provide a working platform for museums to access the everyday knowledge of people. Museums, indeed, increasingly familiarise themselves with the opportunities that mobile media may offer. Mobile context-aware technology and GPS (Global Positioning System) has already been used in experimental level in cultural tourism to enable personalized learning (Cheverest, 2000) and co-visiting among users in different locations (Brown, 2005). However, museums have treated mobile media mainly as vehicles to enter the

everyday, bring the museum information and expertise out of the museum walls and into the everyday life of people, rather than access people's everyday meanings. There have been, nevertheless, some experimental efforts to access the everyday knowledge: for example, Urban Tapestries (<http://urbantapestries.net/>) is a project that has developed an interactive location-based wireless application, in order to allow users to both access and publish multimedia content related to specific locations in cities (such as local historical information, personal memories, pictures, short movies and sounds). Through this application, people share experience and knowledge, and leave ephemeral traces of their presence in the geography of the city. In a similar way, the model of Annotate Space ([www.annotatespace.com](http://www.annotatespace.com)) could allow future users to download museum information in their PDAs (Personal Digital Assistant) and build on it through annotation and participation. However, those projects approach the everyday with custom-made mobile devices, not yet widely available. This means that they test novel, mobile applications in everyday environments, rather than deal with the everyday, as it is involved in the activities that mobile technologies may support.

It is, indeed, the everydayness of the mobile media that mostly connects them to the everyday life. Mobile media, such as common mobile phones, can be considered technology close to the characteristics of the everyday life. Mobile phones follow their users in their everyday lives, being there whenever people encounter the cultural heritage of the everyday. They are, also, personal (Okabe, 2004) (and nowadays also personalized),<sup>4</sup> therefore, usable by and familiar to their users. Moreover, by being a popular technology, they do not need to be modified or adjusted in order to be used. Furthermore, mobile phones allow almost instant communication. A text message is, usually, an instant response to the user's need or wish to communicate.

In particular, camera phones are used to capture aspects of the ordinary or the extraordinary everyday life. The very recent death of Pope John Paul II has been a case that showed very well this use of the mobile phones: People passing in front of the Pope's bier in St. Peter in Rome would use their camera phones to get a picture of his lying body (Rosenthal, 2005; Galloway, 2005). One young Italian, indeed, managed to get eight pictures in the thirty seconds it took to walk by the body, as newspaper La Stampa reports. (quoted in Rosenthal, 2005). These pictures then, may very well have been sent to friends' and family members' camera phones. In this occasion, the use of camera phones and any following MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) messages allowed the instant capture and expression of the moment and the users feelings. In order 'to remember the moment', one person justified the action. In fact, that photograph and its dissemination through a phone message is not just a future remembrance of a today's event. It is the intentional capture and share of a feeling or image as it happens and this

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to the variety of designs, ringtones, cases that users can select from to personalise their phones (see Ito, 2004).

makes it a document of the everyday life.<sup>5</sup> It is not the actual pictures or the messages that consist of the documentation of the moment. It is the process through which they were created, that intentional and personal action that makes them a document of the everyday life.

#### **4.2. Camera phones and the documentation of everyday life**

In the line of the above example, a qualitative investigation involving camera phones was undertaken in the city of Thessaloniki, Greece in summer 2004. The aim of the fieldwork was to investigate to what extent camera phones can be used to access, reveal and collect the meanings that people make about archaeological monuments that stand in the cityscape.<sup>6</sup>

Ten young students, residents in Thessaloniki, who own camera phones were asked in a period of 15 days to use the image and text options of the mobile phones to document situations, activities, acts, events, traces related to three archaeological monuments of the city and their related thoughts on those instances.<sup>7</sup> The participants would, then, send the MMS messages to the researcher's mobile phone.<sup>8</sup>

The investigation, although acknowledging the situational and conditional nature of any effort like this, did not aim to create an explicitly artificial environment. In other words, it did not seek to 'force' the participants to send any particular number of messages in specific days. Instead, they were encouraged to send MMS messages only when their everyday routes were bringing them close to the monuments. Furthermore, this case study did not aspire to claim afterwards that the received MMS messages represented fully or partly the variety of everyday meanings of archaeological monuments. Taking into consideration the limitations that any account of everyday life has, this research does not suggest a method for collecting, categorising, and systematising the everyday knowledge. It is, instead, an investigation on the specific use of the particular technology to create an open channel of communication between the everyday life of people (or, indeed, of archaeological monuments) and the museum.

From the ongoing analysis of the collected data, it seems that the MMS messages were used both to document an everyday behaviour or action and to express more repetitive understandings of the monuments. The MMS

<sup>5</sup> In this case, it is the documentation of an extraordinary event of the everyday. Everyday life includes, indeed, both ordinary and extraordinary situations (Lefebvre, 1991)

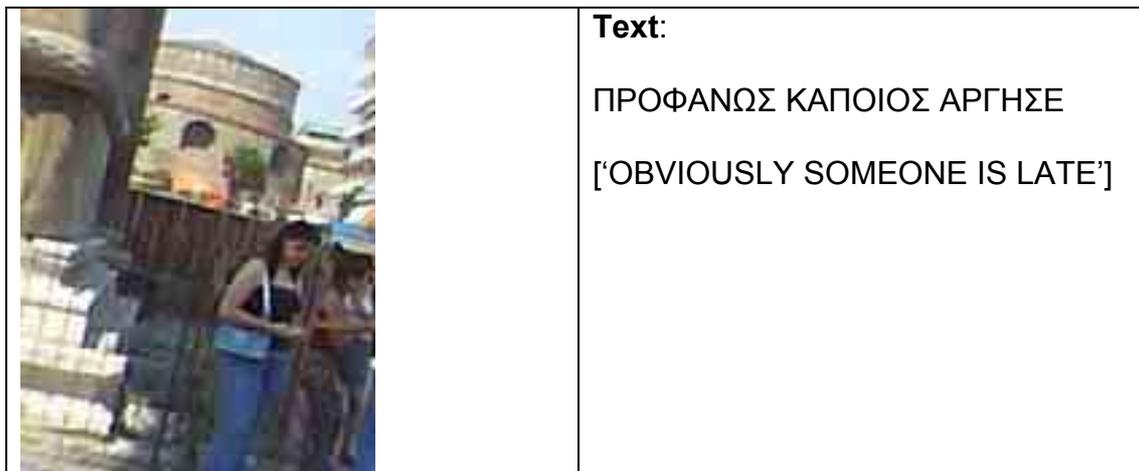
<sup>6</sup> The fieldwork research included, also, observation, informal ethnographic interviews of residents, focus groups and in-depth interviews regarding everyday meanings of archaeological monuments in Thessaloniki.

<sup>7</sup> The three ancient monuments of the research were: the arch of Galerius, the ruins of the Galerius' complex on Dimitrios Gounaris street and the ruins of the city walls on Melenikou street (see figures 1-3).

<sup>8</sup> Participants were encouraged but not restricted to send messages regarding the particular three archaeological monuments of the research. The MMS included both image and text, but no sound.

messages have revealed daily events, actions, behaviours or traces of the everyday in relation to the archaeological monuments, as perceived by the participants.

The following MMS messages, for example, (see figures 4-5) express an everyday use that happens around or in conjunction with two of the research's monuments.



**Figure 4:** MMS message (image and text) by participant (Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki)

The image on the first MMS (figure 4) shows a young female person standing next to the arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki using a mobile phone. On the eye of the sender of the MMS, this is a familiar image of someone waiting for her appointment next to the particular monument that is a popular meeting place for young people. The sender, also, interprets the use of the phone in relation to this situation. By writing ‘obviously someone is late’, the sender assumes that the person on the photograph tries to communicate with the person she is waiting and has been late. Or, it could, also, refer to the common use of mobile phones to communicate with others while waiting.



**Text:**

ΜΕΛΕΝΙΚΟΥ: ΟΤΑΝ  
ΒΡΙΣΚΟΜΑΙ ΕΚΕΙ ΤΟΝ  
ΠΕΡΙΣΣΟΤΕΡΟ ΧΡΟΝΟ ΤΟΝ  
ΠΕΡΝΑΩΣ'ΕΝΑ  
ΦΩΤΟΤΥΠΑΔΙΚΟ ΓΙΑ  
ΣΗΜΕΙΩΣΕΙΣ

['MELENIKOU: WHEN I AM  
THERE I SPEND MOST OF  
THE TIME IN A PHOTOCOPY  
SHOP FOR NOTES']

**Figure 5:** MMS message (image and text) by participant  
(Ruins of ancient walls, Thessaloniki)

The image on the second MMS (figure 5) has a glimpse of part of the city walls on Melenikou Street in Thessaloniki (on the left of the image). At the centre of the photograph there is a photocopy shop. The particular street is close to the university and, thus, mainly students use both this shop and the others next to it. The sender of the MMS relates these ruins to her use of the shop to make photocopies. Actually, by texting 'Melenikou: When I am there I spend most of the time in a photocopy shop for notes', she identifies the ruins with the street itself and the photocopy shops that the street is known for. Then, an everyday meaning of the city walls on that spot seems to be related closely to the particular reason that the sender finds herself in this area in her everyday life, which is to make photocopies in the nearby shop.

The analysis of the data is still ongoing. However, some initial remarks, related to the issue of documentation of the everyday knowledge could be made.

Participants seem not to have any particular problem in acknowledging or 'speaking' about an everyday situation. However, restrictions of the particular technology, such as the limited accompanied text that the phones allow (no more than seventy characters) and the poor quality of the images seem to have affected the way the rest of the participants understood the MMS

messages in the focus groups interviews that followed: when the above and other MMS messages were presented to all members of the group,<sup>9</sup> the senders every time were taking the chance to further explain the reasons and the stimulus behind the messages. Nevertheless, this further explanation of the MMS from the senders did not reflect mainly the participants' inability to figure out what the MMS message was about. It was, rather, an inclination of the MMS senders to elaborate more on the messages they sent. Indeed, the rest of the participants were more or less identifying the intended 'message' in the MMS messages and more importantly adding to them. This points to the very personal way that every one of the members of the group understood the subject of those everyday meanings presented through the MMS messages. And, in fact, it reflects the individuality of understanding everyday life, even among people who share the same everyday environment and are expected to have similar everyday lives (the everyday life of a student). As Italo Calvino would say in this occasion, 'in Chloe, a great city, the people at each encounter, they imagine a thousand things about one another; meetings which could take place between them, conversations, surprises, caresses, bites'. (Calvino, 1997:51). Standard documentation procedures suggest that it is not sufficient to use simple terms to describe the subject of an image, but it is necessary to be more specific (Wentz, 1995:204). It may, indeed, be not sufficient for a traditional museum documentation process; however, in this case study, simple and almost abstract terms revealed the familiarity and fluidity of the everyday meanings of built cultural heritage.

The analysis of the data is still ongoing, as already mentioned. However, the above point suggests a potential use of mobile media to access the everyday life of objects and people. Museum documentation cannot be defined just as a complete and detailed record of an object or an event. In the case of the everyday life, documentation is the acknowledgment of the everyday, as, when and where it happens by the ones they experience it, even if this leads the rest of us to 'readings' diverse from the ones aimed by the sender. Although they may be diverse interpretations, they could not be irrelevant: they are the embodiment of the way each one of us, in turn, experience the everyday life of others. This, then, lack of consistency, clarity and standardization, although contrary to museum practice, bring the flavor of the everyday life inside the museum and make possible a documentation of the everyday; a documentation, which is not a complete record, but an open process.

## 5. Conclusion

'Falsehood is never in words; it is things' says Calvino's Marco Polo to Kublai Khan in order to justify his extraordinary and difficult to believe description of the non-existent city Olivia (Calvino, 1997:62). Although such phrase would be immediately rejected by every museum or museum documentation system, it shows what has always been true and is, increasingly, realized nowadays:

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<sup>9</sup> The group consisted of participants in the camera phones investigation

Documentation in museums is an act of expressing our timely look at things. Obtaining, creating and organising information has, always, been part of an effort to make meaning of the museum objects. Instead, it is the objects that prove to be 'false' in this process. Or, to put it better, it is the way we look at objects that changes, putting our previous (known, also, as 'traditional') look out of date. The way we perceive objects and their role in the world is always on the move, making the objects less believable and their information less tangible. However, speaking of objects remains a true act of documenting a temporal and contextualised perception.

This is particularly true in the case of documenting daily life and the way people understand and interact with their surrounding everyday environment. The paper tried to make the case that documenting the everyday knowledge cannot be seen as a collection of systematized authoritative information, done in the back offices of museums. Everyday life resists categorization, systematization and authority. By looking at the particular case of everyday meanings of archaeological monuments in Greece, the paper suggested that to document means to create a channel of communication, a 'mobile gateway', between the people who attend and create everyday life and knowledge and the museums who wish to document it.

Mobile media, and in particular mobile phones, could be the practical means of making this happen. By being compatible to the everyday life and used by their owners, mobile phones can create and sustain this channel between everyday knowledge and museums. In this case, it is clear that to document the everyday is not to exhaust it but to acknowledge it. It is not to fill in a record of a collection management system, but to make visible the ephemerality, the familiarity, the instantaneity and the fluidity of things that go by.

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