

Virtual Tourism

SLIDE 1: *What is virtual tourism?*

The term virtual reality (VR) identifies a simulated reality that allows the user to navigate in photorealistic settings in real time, interacting with the objects present in them. In less technical terms, it is possible to define virtual reality with a three-dimensional environment generated by a computer, in which the subject or subjects interact with each other and with the environment as if they were really inside it.

We would therefore speak of a simulation of reality in which users are able to use one or all of the five senses, tracing more or less immersive experiences which, in turn, can determine different levels of "presence". In other words, the more we are immersed in the virtual universe - through visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory stimulations - the more we feel present in it rather than in the place where our body is actually located.

Each VR system requires an input device which allows the virtual interface to interpret the movements and actions of the user, responding accordingly.

SLIDE 2: *Immersive and semi-immersive reality*

The difference between immersive and non-immersive virtual reality lies in the use of a helmet and therefore in the non-immersion of all the senses in this new reality. In this case, in fact, as mentioned, the helmet is replaced by a normal monitor or screen, through which this three-dimensional world is observed as if looking out the window. Finally, there is the semi-immersive reality, which is nothing more than a high definition of non-immersive reality. Through the use of better screens, with different image depths, we try to make the user more empathetic in this new environment.

SLIDE 3: *How VR can intertwine with tourism?*

Since virtual reality has the ability to make space environments viewable, it is increasingly used in urban, architectural and tourist planning and management. It allows to create navigable spatial configurations that tour operators can analyze, also testing their possible future implications from the point of view of costs, maintenance and impacts on the territory. VR, by facilitating communication through a visual language that stimulates the way people interact in the real world, can also be a useful tool to communicate tourism plans to members of interested social groups. Therefore these groups would have the opportunity to participate in it, facilitating negotiation between the parties.

SLIDE 4: *Uses of VR in tourism*

- *planning and administration of a target.* Virtual reality, as already abundantly described above, allows you to create unique, realistic, navigable virtual environments that tour operators (including government authorities) can exploit for the development of possible tourist plans or projects
- *Marketing.* tourist services, unlike tangible goods, must normally be purchased 'blindly', since it is impossible to test them in advance; but with virtual reality, people can experience different travel experiences before they leave. This could contribute to the free tourism from false expectations and the possibility of meeting a holiday disappointment. There are many facilities and tourist sites that they have already adopted, instead of the classic brochures, forms of VR in order to attract tourists by offering in particular virtual tours.
- *Entertainment.* entertainment functions, used as central attractions in theme parks, nowadays it is increasingly linked to educational purposes. In fact, this technology is able to communicate information effectively by offering interactive, sensory and participatory learning.
- *Preservation of places of interest.* increase in the accessibility of tourist sites, providing the possibility to visit places that are too far away, too expensive, too inhospitable and dangerous, or too fragile, touching objects of historical character that could not be physically handled. In this sense, more sustainable tourism would be encountered, capable of erasing the ecological impact of visitors.
- Break down all those architectural barriers that often prevent disabled people from accessing tourist sites.
- *Protection of material heritage through the creation of 3D models.* The latter could in fact be carriers of accurate and precise data on the goods in question, which are essential when the site is eroded or damaged. The case of Notre-Dame de Paris is very topical, whose reconstruction after the devastating fire will be possible thanks to its virtual clone

SLIDE 5: *ADVANTAGES IN THE USE OF VR IN TOURISM*

- **Economic advantages:** economic Benefits The economic value is linked to the costs incurred and to ascertain whether a product or service is worth the investments made. A product or service that guarantees a joyful and happy tourist experience, guarantees a high satisfaction rate and better word of mouth, attracting new potential markets. Similarly, it could offer something that allows the visitor or tourist to have a better tourist

experience, grants the justification to ask for an entrance ticket (or at least a money to be paid).

- **Experiential advantages:** these refer to how the customer perceives products or services, both through direct use and through indirect observation. Augmented reality could represent, in the coming years, a valid alternative to tour guides, giving the user the opportunity to manage his time in total autonomy, deciding what to see and what to listen to. Often the visit of a city or a place of interest can be very static and flat, again, augmented reality represents a valid opportunity to be able to give life to stories and stories, increasing both the memories and the pleasure of the visit.
- **Social advantages:** for example the gamification is widespread and consists of using augmented reality to turn a tourist experience into a game, such as scavenger hunting or quizzes. The interactive aspect of these games could revolutionize the pleasure of discovery, and through the sharing of the results obtained, a stronger motivation for learning and participation in the museum visit could be obtained. This is particularly true when analysing cases such as school trips for children or visits by children, whose interest in culture is still relatively low.

SLIDE 6: DISADVANTAGES IN THE USE OF VR IN TOURISM

► The making available virtually more and more tourist attractions and sites could have negative impacts on the tourism economy of the real destination, since the income from VR would fall into the pockets of its creators while the local communities involved in tourism would face a significant loss of clients (Guttentag 2010, 647). Such a fate, in areas and countries of the world that manage to support themselves thanks to tourism, would be fatal.

► Every form of virtual reality is a product of the human mind and, like the latter, it is imperfect. Although it can reproduce something real, the way it does it, the messages it transmits, always refer to a specific culture and worldview. If already tourist brochures often find themselves conveying controversial imaginaries, perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices, is there no risk that this logic will also be carried out with virtual reality? Absolutely yes. And there is the possibility that it acts in an even more impactful way, since if an image has persuasive power in

itself, the fact of being able to immerse oneself in a reality, albeit artificial and constructed, can come to shape.