

UNIVERSITY OF CARTAGENA

Implementation of a Visibility Strategy in the Heritage Institution Claustro Nuestra Señora de la Merced

By

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**Cartagena de Indias
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Señora de la Merced**

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Abstract

Virtual tours have become innovative digital strategies in the framework of promoting heritage sites. This technological tool allows visitors to live new immersive experiences in places of heritage value, whilst also making these places digitally accessible to the community. Research on this topic demonstrates that offering multimodal visits has a significant impact for attracting visitors and, hence, increasing the visibility of heritage buildings. In this project, the reader will have an insight into the application of this tool to Cartagena's heritage building "Cloister Nuestra Señora de la Merced" through the development of a visibility strategy, whose aim is to generate appropriation among the local community and increase their interest in visiting this cultural asset. Furthermore, the results of this proposal indicate that this project requires additional work and implementation.

In addition, this degree project also encompasses my personal experience as an intern in this institution, working for the Cultural Heritage Observatory.

Keywords: Virtual tours, visibility, heritage buildings, appropriation, local community.

Introduction

The present document is a compilation of reflections and experiences around my second practicum cycle. The content and structure of this document is as follows:

Initially, the internship site is introduced and briefly described, mentioning details about its specific context and giving a characterisation of the site. In addition, my work and the role of my assigned supervisor during my internship period are emphasized, as well as my expectations prior to starting the internship.

This is followed by presentation of the main problem of the present project, the core issue being the lack of visibility of the Cloister Nuestra Señora de la Merced among the local community. This is supported by a quantitative sampling that evidences its veracity and establishes certain precisions. The problem is approached from a perspective concerning the interaction between the community and heritage sites, highlighting issues such as the preservation of a collective cultural memory. Within this approach, the most relevant general and specific causes of the failures and gaps in this interaction in the context of the city of Cartagena are taken, being the lack of citizen participation and the lack of awareness of the place the most preponderant reason in each case. Subsequently, an exploration of the options for addressing this problem is carried out, where the creation of a virtual tour, in conjunction with a publicity strategy, offers the most appropriate and innovative solution. In order to determine this, a set of specific criteria are taken into account and previous cases of successful virtual tours aimed at enhancing the visibility of heritage buildings are discussed.

Lastly, the results of the strategies implemented are presented and various recommendations are made for future studies or projects in this same case.

Context and Expectations

The Practicum Site

I am currently doing my internship in the Cultural Heritage Observatory, a dependency of the Extension and Social Outreach Office at the Cloister of La Merced, one of the five headquarters that the University of Cartagena has in the city, dedicated to graduate degrees, certain administrative activities and cultural events. It is located in the Historic Center of Cartagena on De La Merced street with Cra. 4 #38-40, next to the Adolfo Mejía Theater. Due to the building's important location, history, status and architecture it receives many visitors throughout the year, both locals and tourists, most of whom approach the Cloister because of its attachment to the life and work of Gabriel García Márquez and for its cultural agenda.

Origins, Mission, Values, and Objectives

The Cloister of La Merced is an institution that has transcended history; its construction began in 1625 under the name of Convent of La Merced, it consisted of a big cloister, whose purpose was to house the nuns that worshiped Nuestra Señora de la Merced Descalza, and a church of regular scale. The Convent was then turned into a prison for the rebels and a strategic place for the executions of the Siege of Morillo in 1815 by the armies of Pablo Murillo. Later, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Cloister was adapted to serve as the Palace of Justice, with this intention, in 1923, the architect Pedro Malabet did a remodeling of the facade and internal structures; and the church served as the foundation to build the Adolfo Mejía Theater. A century later, the Cloister became the headquarters of the University Jorge Tadeo Lozano. And today it is the postgraduate headquarters of the University of Cartagena, and mausoleum of the celebrated Caribbean writer Gabriel García Márquez, since its inauguration in 2016 by the former headmaster of the University of

Cartagena, Edgar Parra, and the vice-rector for research, Alfonso Múnera. For all of the aforementioned, the Cloister of La Merced is an institution with historic value as it is considered a cultural and tangible asset of the city.

As an academic institution, the Cloister of La Merced has a series of principles and a mission created from a pedagogical perspective, where it emphasizes the significance of an innovative and research spirit that, constructed from a high-quality education that shapes the individual capacity of producing judgements of value always from an ethical viewpoint, has the power and duty to contribute to a societal transformation that leads to a social prosperity scenario. I quote its mission:

Our mission is to train leading citizens of our society who understand the transformative power of education and research in the 21st century. It begins in the classroom connected to social, business and political reality, through relevant research and the accompaniment of processes of social transformation and problem solving. At the University of Cartagena, committed to an inclusive and high-quality education, students shape their occupational and personal future, becoming aware of their talents and skills, committing themselves to serve to face local, regional, national and global challenges. (University of Cartagena)

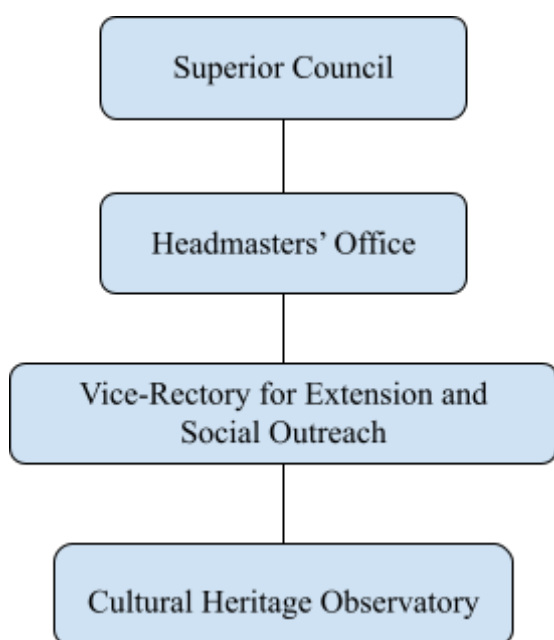
Likewise, its institutional values are grounded in respect, trust and transparency that encompass interpersonal relationships.

Next in order, the objectives of the Cloister of La Merced differ according to each of the academic and administrative bodies that converge in that space. There are classrooms dedicated to graduate studies, the Internship Section, the Center for Job Placement and Social Responsibility, the Vice-Rectorate of International Relations and Cooperation, the Administrative Vice-Rectorate, the Vice-Rectorate for Research, the International Institute for Caribbean Studies, and lastly, the one that manages the cultural space of the Cloister in

collaboration with the Cultural Heritage Observatory, the Extension and Social Outreach Office.

Among the objectives of the Extension and Social Outreach Office and particularly of the Cultural Heritage Observatory, there is such as preserving the historical and cultural heritage of Cartagena, later declared as World Heritage in 1984 by the UNESCO, through a series of strategies and initiatives that are implemented from a pedagogic approach which aims are building, sharing and socializing knowledge in the local, national and international community, within the context of an educational institution. This office explores and conducts those actions by making an appeal to the community, interacting with them, as well as merging their know-how and raising awareness towards the preservation of this tangible and intangible legacy. The Extension and Social Outreach Office has been consistent with their purpose of promoting the Cloister of La Merced as a cultural space with interest in the local development from a framework of identity and heritage.

Organizational Structure



Background, Expectations and Personal Goals

Coming from a practicum with an inadequate and unsatisfactory working environment, my hopes and expectations for my second cycle of practicum were high. My previous practicum experience was challenging. I worked as a tourist informant in one of the regulatory entities of tourism in the city: Corporación Turismo Cartagena de Indias. At first, this seemed such a big and door-opening opportunity for me, however, the excitement did not last much. I had been less than one week there when I noticed the poor management and lack of attentiveness of the high commands towards the office I spent those five months of internship. The place had not been properly cleaned. My immediate superior did not visit my office often; he did not show true involvement in my practicum process. My daily routine became going to work, do what I was assigned and get off work only with the salutations. Nonetheless, that experience shaped me into a more confident and autonomous person since I had to rely on my own feedback to mend my mistakes and develop abilities that helped me to ameliorate my performance to a point of self-approval.

After having experienced such unfulfilling events during my practicum, I was looking for an opportunity to unveil my true potential within a proactive and amicable environment. Fortunately, I received an invitation to be part of a group of interns to begin my second and final practicum cycle at the Cultural Heritage Observatory of the University. In all honesty, I had high hopes and expectations for this new opening possibility of being in a great practicum site, learning about the heritage of Cartagena and meeting new and diverse people with whom I could share ideas and opinions.

As for my personal goals, I hoped to continue developing the set of skills I acquired in my previous practicum site. They can be summarized in these four points.

- Face new challenges and integrate my existent learnings with the ones I will acquire in this new practicum experience.

- Get out of my comfort zone and continue developing good and assertive communication skills.
- Focus on my own mistakes, find smart solutions and create effective habits.
- Continue building my confidence.

The Clients and the Workplace

The Clients

The Extension and Social Outreach Office is open to all audiences and has a variety of clients that can be superficially mentioned as the inner academic community of the University of Cartagena, educational institutions, cultural and tourism organizations, municipality offices and the local working community, among many others. Nonetheless, for a broader understanding, it is important to acknowledge the two lines of work of this Vice-Rectorate: the educational and the cultural. From the internal margin, the Extension and Social Outreach Office works with people from the university, and from the external margin it works with people and organizations that operate in the areas that align with this office's lines of work and those of its dependencies (such as the Cultural Heritage Observatory) and ramifications. These are district and national nonprofit and for-profit entities that could allow this Vice-Rectorate to project itself, create strategic alliances and carry out different projects that are in accordance with the objective of safeguarding the heritage. To mention, local entities in the context of Cartagena with whom this office has closely worked are: IPCC, IDER, IDERBOL, etc. In addition, it is worth highlighting its work with national agents such as the Gabo Foundation, as this office in collaboration with one of its dependencies are constantly working to honor and share the legacy left by our Nobel Prize, Gabriel García Márquez.

As it is aforementioned, the Extension and Social Outreach Office conducts its objectives by interacting with their target audience. Internally, a group of communicators develop digital strategies to reach targeted community members who belong to local and academic contexts. And as for the external targeted organizations, this office has a wide communication network -not different from other big enterprises- that they use to contact

their targeted people and organizations and meet with them for developing certain projects -and viceversa- that also intend to reach a specific audience.

The Workplace

As an intern for the Cultural Heritage Observatory for five months, I could make acquaintance with this place's work ethics and working culture. The standard values that they seek and encourage in workers and interns of this specific area are accountability and adaptability. They are interested in people that are reliable and resourceful wherever and whenever needed and who can adapt to different environments as they are often required to interact with large quantities of people from the outside and from different cultural entities. The work is as challenging as it is enriching. Moreover, it is supported by a friendly, engaging and group-focused working culture. They highlight teamwork as the perfect approach to accomplish and carry out effectively certain tasks, activities, projects and events.

In my personal experience as an intern, I worked with a group of 6 interns on a daily basis. Everyday we had to communicate efficiently and do collaborative work, especially on the days that there were events that we were in charge of. That, I consider, is one of the most enjoyable aspects of working in that dependency for the Vice-Rectorate of Extension and Social Outreach. That friendly and informal behavior happened not only among interns but also with our supervisor in charge. Towards the clients and visitors that we addressed every week, there was also that friendly atmosphere, yet from a more professional approach.

Challenges in the Workplace

In spite of all of the group-focused activities that our group of interns were assigned to do, there was the issue of working in a narrow physical space that would sometimes withhold us from accomplishing them in the most efficient manner. It made us change our

schedules and manage the amount of time each intern was in the office, thereby we had to make the most of that time together.

We worked in a compact office with a lack of computers because our dependency did not own an office. It was not a proper place for larger teams to work together, hence, we often had to work separately in other rooms and offices that were sometimes available in the building, and eventually switched to remote work.

Having a proper place to work altogether, I believe, would have had an impact in our motivation and proactiveness by boosting that collaborative work.

Immediate Supervisor

My supervisor in charge was Laura González, she is an undergraduate communicator and currently makes part of the communication team of the Extension and Social Outreach Office. She is in charge of managing the Cultural Heritage Observatory and is behind the social media and logistics of the cultural agenda related to that dependency and to the vice-rectory. Overall, her qualities would stand strongly in any work setting as she has demonstrated to be very proactive, organized, motivated and has a growth mindset. I admired her productivity and her love for the work she does. Managing large quantities of information and dealing with many tasks on a daily basis is part of a tough job, however, she excels at creating and following structured systems and habits that make her a more efficient worker. Moreover, she is highly attentive to details, so making sure that everything is carefully done is something that never escapes her notice.

As for us interns, Laura was delegating tasks each and every day with steps and suggestions that we had to follow, yet she showed trust in our work, encouraged teamwork and complimented us when something was nicely done. That is what I consider to be her management style. Those actions build up motivation among our group members while also strengthening our autonomy. If there is something that I learned from her and seeked to replicate is to be proactive; to always be one step ahead in the execution and completion of the work she assigned me.

Nonetheless, even though that atmosphere was taken as a healthy and open work environment, her delegations would sometimes appear authoritarian, which created nonconformity not only among our team but among people of service inside the Cloister of La Merced that helped in the logistics of events. There are several ways to avoid conflict that have an effect in improving bonding with other employees, however I consider that

acknowledging coworkers and approaching them in a more assertive way would make all feel valued and, thereby would strengthen a positive work culture.

All in all, I am grateful to my supervisor for guiding me through all of my internship process as part of the Cultural Heritage Observatory. She was involved and gave me constant constructive feedback, adding to my own development as a capable, trustworthy and qualified professional. Thanks to her, I learned how systems can create big outcomes and bring out our own potential.

My Role as an Intern in the Cultural Heritage Observatory

As an intern in the Cultural Heritage Observatory, I did not have a specific role or work focus. Instead, I was responsible for several tasks mainly related to the management of the Cultural Space of the Cloister Nuestra Señora de la Merced. I will list, then, each one of them:

- Preparation of the Gabo Room
- Tours for visitors arriving at the Cultural Space
- Support in events
- Translation of pieces for the observatory's instagram page
- Transcriptions
- Database and other document management assistance

Every day, upon arriving at work, the first task I would take care of was the preparation of the room dedicated to García Márquez (Gabo Room), where I was responsible for reporting any inconvenience I found with any of the elements there. This was so that the space would be appropriate for visitors.

Visitor tours were offered daily and especially when large groups of event attendees or visitors who had booked a tour were present. I was usually accompanied by one of my co-workers, as we both complemented our storytelling about the history and the different elements that are part of the Cloister of La Merced.

As for the support at events, this was also a collaborative task. I was in charge of notifying the general services staff about the preparations and cleaning of the room that was to be used, while I focused on the organization and installation of equipment such as video beam and computer, which were normally required. In addition, I was also responsible for the attendance register of the participants to these events. The work was divided depending on how many interns we were at the time and the size of the event.

The tasks that did not require my attendance, I developed them at home. Remote work proved to be a convenient option due to the lack of space and devices available in the office.

Challenges

My experience as an intern at the Observatory was quite rewarding for myself, there were no difficult challenges that I could not handle, as the work environment was very open and team oriented.

Undeniably, the first challenge I faced when setting up my work schedule was that it was somewhat inflexible, at first glance. I came from an internship site where I worked part-time and this place required a full-time schedule. This meant that I had to reorganize the time I spent on everything on a daily basis. However, the long working hours were compensated by the calm and friendly atmosphere at my workplace and eventually a balance was achieved with the entry of remote work.

Another challenge I faced regarding the work schedule was the extension of work hours on event days. Some large events required support even after the end of the shift because the finishing time of these events entailed an extension of 2 hours or more. Likewise, some events were scheduled for weekends, and therefore required assistance on days off. However, they were rewarding experiences and could be remunerated as overtime or meant a day off as compensation.

In this regard, I would like to mention an experience of an event that was scheduled for a Saturday. This was an event that took place within the framework of the month of Afro-Colombianity, for which a tour was planned in the MUHCA (Historical Museum of Cartagena) or Palace of the Inquisition, and had to be carried out by three members of our group of interns, myself included. This day was very important for the Observatory, thus we had a significant responsibility. We had previously received an orientation to learn the

information about the museum that was going to be useful for the tour. Now, the day of the event, we received the news that the tour was going to be for an important figure who came from Africa and understood little Spanish, so they needed me as an interpreter. I was very nervous at the time, especially because I was worried about how to communicate certain information. However, I received support from the guest's personal interpreter and the responsibility became more manageable. I had never before worked as an interpreter, so this experience made an impact on me and taught me how to adapt to unexpected situations in a professional manner.

Strengths and Weaknesses

During my internship process, I saw myself as an organized, proactive and motivated worker to learn new skills and information. In addition, a certain leadership and spokesperson profile emerged in me when communicating the concerns of our group of interns.

Characteristics such as the interesting nature of the history of the Cloister and the new heritage related knowledge that I was learning about continuously at my internship site, contributed to reinforce my motivation and proactivity. Strengths that helped me in my development as a professional capable of carrying out my responsibilities efficiently.

On the other hand, my most notorious weaknesses were reflected in the aspects of communication and decision making. Communicating assertively has been an issue I have been working on since my first internship experience, therefore I was able to handle it in a better way. However, there were still difficulties in this regard when resolving certain disagreements with my supervisor. On the decision-making side, I must learn to align my personal decisions with the objectives, in this case, of my dependency, by balancing my responsibilities with my individual projects.

Introducing the Problem

The Cloister of La Merced, for its title of cultural space and tangible asset of the city, receives a great number of visitors every year, which range from locals to foreigners. However, despite what one may think, it comes as a surprise that this Cloister is more frequented by foreigners and tourists from other parts of the country than by locals themselves. There are various underlying reasons for this:

- The majority of the locals that visit the Cloister are often related to it
- Inhabitants of Cartagena show little or no interest/have poor knowledge of the historic sites, monuments and institutions, and projects or activities related to the cultural heritage
- Heritage buildings are often seen only as an attraction for tourists and for the tourism economic development of the city
- Historical and cultural routes are not well established in the city
- Local people occupy their free time in other activities that have more value to them (work and studies related activities)

Among the people from Cartagena that visit the Cloister of La Merced, we find the scholarly community of the University, domestic cultural operators and organizations, people that the Extension and Social Outreach Office has direct contact with and groups with special interest in the agenda of the cultural space of the Cloister. Nonetheless, the number of everyday people who visit the Cloister of La Merced with the leisure pursuit of exploring it and getting to know it is very little in comparison with the number of national and international tourists that do so.

This is an issue that the Extension and Social Outreach Office is very aware of and has addressed before from an educational perspective. Their aim has been to promote the education in patrimonial subjects in educational institutions of the city, emphasizing the role

of educators as means of ensuring the understanding, replication and impartation of knowledge related to the importance of Cartagena's patrimonial heritage within/for the local community.

With this in mind, what this project seeks to achieve is the recognition of the Cloister of la Merced as a heritage institution by the local community of Cartagena de Indias. Through a series of strategies, the objective is to increase the number of visits from city inhabitants. However, prior to that, it is essential to recollect information that supports these claims in order to plan and implement the most effective strategies.

Description and Justification of the Problem: Lack of visibility of the Cloister Nuestra Señora de la Merced

The Cloister of La Merced is recognised as a building of cultural, historical and architectural heritage importance in the city of Cartagena. A series of events and cultural activities of collective participation are held there on a monthly basis. It is also a space where artistic and museographic works of art are exhibited; and currently, it is also the space that houses the ashes of our Nobel Prize Laureate, Gabriel García Márquez. From this, we can say that the Cloister of La Merced is not only conceived as tangible heritage, but that within it an intangible heritage is also remembered and promoted, which contributes to the preservation of heritage practices (knowledge of an inherited identity) and the remembrance of historical figures. As a heritage site, it is also an object of public interest, yet not a local public, but a mostly national and foreign one. Few Cartagenos visit the Cloister as a leisure activity, these are usually motivated by cultural and educational events that take place there. However, these activities do not have sufficient scope to attract a larger local community.

In order to substantiate the above, I undertook the task of conducting a survey for one week to all the people who visited the Cloister of La Merced during that period of time.

Through this, my focus was to find out how many locals visit the Cloister and their reasons for doing so, among other things. I found that out of 68 visitors surveyed, only 19 were of local origin and only one of them was visiting the Cloister for entertainment purposes. The remaining 18 people were attendees of an event that took place during that week, all of whom were part of cultural institutions. The remaining respondents (49) were visitors of national and foreign origin. Among their reasons for visiting the Cloister of La Merced, it was observed that 44.8% of them noticed the presence of the Cloister when they passed by on the street, and it captured their interest; another 22.4% visited the Cloister because it is the place where the mausoleum of García Márquez is located; and another 32.6% visited the Cloister in the company of or on the recommendation of a tourist guide. From these surveys, it is clear that the inhabitants of Cartagena do not visit the Cloister of La Merced.

There are several reasons for this. We have that the Cloister of La Merced, in spite of its constant efforts to make the most of the cultural space as an integrating space for the community, does not have a strong and attractive online presence -that acts as its front page- to reach the eye of the community (which is part of the target audience of the Extension and Social Outreach Office and the Cultural Heritage Observatory). Another point to consider is that the inhabitants of Cartagena are not aware of the Cloister of La Merced as one of the headquarters of the University of Cartagena (which they do acknowledge as the most important university in the city, the first in the Caribbean and the only bicentennial university in the city, according to the testimonies of those surveyed) and, if they do have such knowledge, they limit themselves to considering it as an academic space.

There are other general reasons, such as the low level of citizen participation in cultural activities offered in the city. This proves to be even lower after the 2-year period of the pandemic. According to the report of the virtual survey #miVozmiCiudad conducted in 2021 by the Cartagena Cómo Vamos program, participation dropped from 70% in 2019 to

47% in 2021; this is a difference of 23%. Out of 2,106 participants, 47% stated that they had not engaged in cultural activities in the past year and only 11% of the participants had visited museums, monuments and historical sites. In addition, 47% of participants said they were dissatisfied with the current cultural offerings in the city. It is here that the question arises, why do the people of Cartagena fail to take ownership of their own cultural and historical heritage? One answer to this could be the vision of Cartagena as an exclusively tourist city. Indeed, Cartagena is a tourist and cultural district. As this is a city where the sector that has the greatest impact is tourism, with a contribution of 70% to the local GDP (Semana, 2022), the area of the historic center, which is where most of the monuments and historic sites are located, is seen as an area demarcated by tourism. In other words, heritage is currently perceived as a source of economic and tourism development, and as an attraction mostly for tourists. That is, there is little interaction between the local community and heritage buildings, sites or monuments, and their importance beyond the tourism context is not recognized. In fact, within the present research, I was able to find that most of the studies that exist in relation to the interaction between community and movable heritage or, in its absence, cultural heritage, are directed towards the role of local communities in sustaining and safeguarding these places for their contribution to cultural or creative tourism.

However, other reasons can be found within this context. These include (1) the high costs of the historic center, as a consequence of being a tourist-oriented area, which makes it exclusive to a public with a greater purchasing power than the average Cartagena inhabitant -Cartagena being a city in which 40.4% of the population is in a state of monetary poverty (El Tiempo, 2022). This is reflected in the high entrance fees to museums, galleries and other cultural venues, which, when several members of a family go, are relatively expensive. To this can be added that (2) heritage sites and monuments are seen as one-way attractions. Throughout their lives, a large number of Cartagena's inhabitants make school visits during

their childhood and youth to the city's monuments and historic buildings, however, when they reach adulthood, few are those who return to visit them on their own. From the above, it could be inferred that (3) there are no well-established tourist-historical routes or tours in Cartagena de Indias aimed at the local community in order to get to know and revive these spaces. With regard to the causes just outlined, these require further work with the intervention of tourism organizations and educational institutions present in the city and the Mayor's Office of Cartagena -and other social actors- who must take on the task of generating spaces for citizen participation and creating strategies that encourage the exploration of the culture, history and heritage of Cartagena as a response to this large-scale problem.

Now, the importance of this problem lies in the question of the conservation of heritage identity. The starting point is the question: why is it important for the community of Cartagena to recognize the Cloister of La Merced and, specifically, its cultural space? As a resident of Cartagena, I have noticed on numerous occasions that the native people of the city do not take ownership of their heritage, many do not acknowledge their history or their cultural heritage; this is evidenced by the popular expression "in Cartagena there is no civic culture" (Álvarez et al., 2014). Aspects that are important for preserving their identity as a community. The individual heritage is the inherited identity. In fact, according to Tarrias (2017), identity can only be built from the appropriation of those cultural repertoires found within our environment and social group.

There is currently a widespread focus on the contribution of culture to the economy and tourism, rather than on recognising and nurturing what communities do to enrich and creatively shape their own culture and heritage (Chitty, 2017). The recognition of heritage sites, such as the Cloister of La Merced, actively contributes to the creation and preservation of identity in a community and is a tool for local empowerment (Dormaels, 2012). In this sense, the cultural space of the Cloister of La Merced is conceived as a socially inclusive

space that is in a constant search for social construction and cohesion, for the preservation of memory and the exploration of those practices that make up a common identity, ergo, it is considered as a significant heritage site within the community of Cartagena and its recognition is of great relevance to reinforce the active role of the community in its interaction with heritage.

Awareness of the cultural space of the Cloister Nuestra Señora de la Merced is also of fundamental importance to maintain the quality status of the University of Cartagena and to highlight the impact of its work. In the same way, the cultural space of the Cloister Nuestra Señora de la Merced honors the memory of our Nobel Prize winner in literature, Gabriel García Márquez. A revolutionary writer who had a great impact on the identification of the Caribbean identity. The artistic value of the Cloister of La Merced makes it a favorite place for the younger generations to share and learn in a space that is diverse, dynamic and full of history. It is also a space that the entire Cartagena community would feel compelled to respect and admire if they knew about it.

Exploring Solutions

After stating the importance of a common perception of the Cloister of Nuestra Señora de la Merced as a patrimonial building and demonstrating the significance it has that there exists an active interaction between the local community and this cultural space, the question of how emerges. How is it possible to increase the visibility of the Cloister of La Merced and make people interested in visiting it?

In order to establish the most effective strategies to follow, it is essential for me to adjust to the present context of the people of Cartagena -which is the target audience of this project- and to the current status of the Cloister. For this, it is required to take into account the following aspects: the existing digital era, the lack of virtual presence that the Cloister of La Merced has and the characteristics of the target audience (this is: the social class, age ranges and habits of the community). Therefore, the preferred strategy has to meet such criteria; it has to include a visual representation of the place, relevant historical information, has to be low-cost, be appealing to the eye, be user-friendly and should act as a digital presence for it to be accessible to everyone.

In the process of exploring different solutions, there are three that stood out the most. 1. Creating a web page of the Cloister of la Merced; 2. Using Instagram as a tool to reach more audience through a series of dedicated posts to the history and interesting facts about the Cloister; 3. Creating a virtual tour of the place. All of these options have the required digital characteristic, however, considering the innovative character of virtual tours and their current rise in the digital world, as they offer a more dynamic and real-like experience, they are the most appropriate option and the one that exceeds expectations the most.

Moreover, to ensure the success of this approach and achieve a broader scope, it is designed to be bound to an advertising strategy that will be carried out on Instagram, the

social network on which the Cultural Heritage Observatory of the Cloister of la Merced is most frequently active.

Virtual Tours as a Means of Increasing the Visibility of Heritage Buildings: A Review of the Literature

In recent years, with the rise of the digital age, new ways of presenting and learning about heritage sites have been in trend; they have transformed the way people interact with them. They use technological tools that introduce visitors to a new virtual reality experience, thereby ensuring benefits for both parties -visitors and heritage places. Here I discuss existing literature on the relation between virtual tours and physical heritage assets and exhibitions, highlighting its impact on the visibility of those places. It is important to note that related articles found for this research were aimed at most advanced uses of technology for enhancing cultural heritage, whereas this project focuses on a more limited use.

Many studies and articles have been written on this subject, which explore different existing techniques for using digital tools to offer multimodal visits in spaces of heritage value: virtual tours, 3D reconstruction and printing, serious games, digital mapping, among others (Garau & Ilardi, 2014; Cantoni et al., 2019; Mortara et al., 2014; Bekele et al., 2018). They all agree that digital communication technologies are proving to be the most effective today, and that they are often reliable tools for building a constantly evolving and transcendent digital memory (Cantoni et al., 2019). Museums nowadays are adapting to the digital age by implementing these digital technologies that, according to Din and Wu (2014), contribute to enhancing the visitor's experience as it inspires self-motivated learning and promotes engagement (Frischer, 2011; cited in Cantoni et al., 2019).

Other researchers that assert the positive impact of digital tools within cultural heritage contexts are Bekele et al. (2018) and Mortara et al. (2014). Even though they have

different approaches for the usage of these technologies, they both acknowledge that digitalization enables the spread of knowledge and that the use of innovative immersive reality tools could further facilitate the access to cultural heritage in a more appealing and innovative way; hence, they are meaningful for rising cultural and heritage awareness as they offer engaging mechanisms to motivate users into a real experience.

Furthermore, these technologies are also an answer to the limitations of physical heritage places, which is a topic that I address in this project. Li Liew (2005) states that physical exhibitions of cultural heritage are limited in demographic reach to one extent or another. This is shown in the problem statement of this document when addressing the core theme. Heritage buildings such as the Cloister Nuestra Señora de la Merced do not have the sufficient population reach and are not accessible to everyone in the local community for the reasons stated above. These technologies, however, enable user-centered presentation and make cultural heritage digitally accessible, especially when physical access is constrained (Bekele et al., 2018), as they are not limited by distance, time and space (Li Liew, 2005). They are also characterized for being a cost-effective solution -low cost option for the dominant social class in this context.

Finally, disadvantages for museums of heritage places that do not introduce new technologies are exposed by Gerval and Le Ru (2015). According to them, museums and other heritage installations that use only traditional means are regarded as less interesting and attract fewer visitors. This approach -virtual tours specifically- then, as affirmed by Garau and Ilardi (2014), increases the visibility of cultural heritage places.

Behind this project, significant representations of virtual tours in cultural heritage buildings have been taken as inspiration cases: the Louvre museum, the Paolo Orsi museum and the Contemporary Indigenous Art museum.

The Louvre Museum (see <https://www.louvre.fr/en/online-tours>) offers a 360° virtual tour made with the latest technology for an immersive experience from home. They show 360° images of famous ancient works by renowned artists from the 16th century that are exhibited in the physical museum. Additionally, they present a Virtual Reality project so that the viewer has the opportunity to engage with the painting on a personal level. It is also available on smartphones so it is more accessible to them.

The “Paolo Orsi” Regional Archaeological Museum of Syracuse is highlighted in this review, due to its partnership with Google Street View Indoor. They carried out a project to map the entire museum for it to be available for everyone on Google platforms. According to Bonacini (2015), the aim of the project was to bridge the gap of Sicilian Cultural Heritage’s visibility on the web, which was a topic that never had been addressed by the The Regional Department of Culture and Sicilian Identity even though Sicily has the highest number of heritage sites, according to the UNESCO. By taking advantage of Google mapping softwares, museums and heritage sites are able to make their collection accessible to everyone with a smartphone, offering several user-friendly features.

And, lastly, the Contemporary Indigenous Art Museum (see <https://acortar.link/wWbhxm>). The creation of this virtual museum has not been supported by the museum itself, but has been done through Google Maps with the Street View tool. This is one of the most economical alternatives for the creation of a virtual tour, and it has the most intuitive navigation of the three. The tour guides the visitor through the entire site just as in traditional google street view navigation. However, some of the pieces cannot be appreciated in detail due to the lack of quality.

Even though they all are virtual tours, each of the exhibits were created from a different approach. Despite this, all three share common features and meet the objective of

attracting the visitor by offering an immersive, didactic, innovative and economical experience. And they demonstrate the versatility that these technologies provide.

Proposal's Objectives

General Objective

Generate knowledge and appropriation in the community through a visibility strategy applied to the Cloister Nuestra Señora de la Merced as a cultural space that safeguards and promotes the cultural heritage of Cartagena.

Specific Objectives

- Ascertain the knowledge and perception that visitors have of the cultural space of the Cloister of La Merced.
- Facilitate digital access to the Cloister of La Merced by means of creating a virtual tour of its cultural space with affordable technological tools.
- Announce the virtual tour to the community through an advertising strategy on instagram that maximizes its reach.

Target audience

The aspects that would be taken into consideration in order to determine the target audience are: Age, location, social class and habits.

- Young audience, preferably, but it is aimed at groups of all ages.
- They must reside in the city of Cartagena.
- The project is aimed at all social classes, but with special distinction to the majority class: middle and lower-middle class.
- Audience with use of social networks and basic technological skills.

Implementing the Strategies

This project was conceived with the aim of increasing the visibility of the Cloister Nuestra Señora de la Merced, with which we seek to raise awareness and appropriation of the inhabitants of Cartagena towards this place. It is designed under a digital approach involving the creation of a virtual tour of the place, which would enable its visualization from any device and act as an incentive to visit the Cloister physically.

For the evaluation and implementation of the proposed strategies, a series of steps were established in the form of a proposal to the Vice-Rector of Extension and Social Outreach (annex 1). This included the survey (annex 2) applied to visitors to the Cloister, whose purpose was to determine the number of local visitors who regularly visit the cultural space of the Cloister.

Subsequently, it was proposed to convene a meeting for the first days of July with the attendance of my immediate supervisor and the Vice-Rector of Extension and Social Outreach. In this meeting we would discuss the project, its objectives, the target audience, its estimated scope, and the activities to be developed for its implementation, as well as the necessary resources and the budget for it. However, this was not possible due to the Vice-Rector's busy schedule. Instead, a short meeting of approximately 10 minutes was held with her on July 27th in which these issues were briefly discussed.

Implementation difficulties were also identified as a consequence of the interdisciplinary aspect of this project, since the work team does not have either dedicated engineering or software personnel for the implementation of the virtual tour or the necessary equipment (such as the 360° camera) for its creation.

Activities

1. Virtual tour

Due to the disadvantages regarding the available resources, different more economical means of executing the project that did not require such high technology were considered. Based on this, it was determined that the tour would be carried out with the virtual tool "slices.com" (see <https://slices.co/services/editor>), a website with which interactive cinematic experiences can be created to bring the place and the physical elements of the Cloister of La Merced to virtual reality in the simplest possible way. This website, however, has several disadvantages when it comes to displaying the site, as it is not a tool designed for virtual tours. We have few features to work with, so the content must be presented as static images or in video format. In other words, the project was conceived as a digital presentation of the place through interactive stories.

Now, the prototype of the slices.co tour (annex 3) was implemented as follows:

- With the support of an intern from the Cultural Heritage Observatory's communications team, photographs were taken of the Cloister's cultural space and the museographies on display there.
- An account was created in Slices where the photographs and the selected information related to the history of the Cloister of La Merced and interesting details about the elements found there could be stored.
- The images were organized along with the selected information to create the interactive stories. In the process, we made sure it was creative and interesting enough to engage the audience.

That said, the interactive stories were considered to be structured in the following way:

- First story: Short introduction to the Cloister of La Merced with a representative image of the place.

- Second story: Photo of the Gabriel García Márquez Patio and brief history of the Cloister.
- Third story: Once again, photo of the Gabo Patio with a mention of the mausoleum.
- Fourth story: Introduction to the museographies starting with the work Macondo by Leo Matiz and continuing with the work of Nereo Lopez.
- Fifth, Sixth and Seventh story: Tour through the museographies, mentioning details about them.
- Eighth story: Photograph of the entrance to the Gabo Room and introduction.
- Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh story: Photos of elements inside the Gabo Room.
- Twelfth story: Farewell and invitation to the Cloister.

A problem was identified in this phase, since certain photos could not be taken due to the characteristics of the museographic pieces with which we were working (the pictures had protective glass that made it impossible to take the photo without revealing the reflection). This further constrained the creation of the tour.

2. Instagram advertising campaign

In the interest of expanding the project's reach and potentially engaging more of our target audience, we considered organizing an instagram advertising campaign. It was approached in this way:

- Creation of an eye-catching instagram post on the Cultural Heritage Observatory account advertising the virtual tour of the Claustro de La Merced cultural space.
- Sharing it on instagram stories.
- Paste the link of the tour in Slices.co in the profile.
- Publicize the post for a duration of 2 weeks with the use of Instagram Ads.
- Monitor the reach of the publication.

Results and Conclusions

Due to the inconsistencies within the implementation of this project, along with the unavailability of professionals and the particular interests of the vice rector's office at that time, it became such a complicated task to shape and give life to this project that, in the end, merely consisted of a set of ideas and strategies without proper execution or that were half executed. Undoubtedly, there was interest and excitement towards this project from all people involved. On account of this, the Extension and Social Outreach Office has looked into the possibility of executing the strategies of this visibility project in a future time in conjunction with a touristic route. As highlighted throughout this paper, it is essential for the Cloister of Nuestra Señora de la Merced to increase the relation they have with the local community in pursuit of a strong heritage identity and cultural heritage. Thus, this type of project is proven to be beneficial for both parties and requires further work.

In addition, this project was also conceived as a potential scalable initiative that could be implemented in museums and other heritage sites in the city.

During the development of the central problematic of this project, it was evidenced, through the qualitative analysis of the surveys applied to visitors and the research conducted, that even though the local people have a clear perception of the University of Cartagena as an educational institution, there is a noticeable deficiency of knowledge and appropriation of the Cloister of La Merced as one of the headquarters of the university and, more so, as a patrimonial and historical asset of the city. Which is a primary reason for not visiting this place. Hence the importance of implementing this visibility project in the interest of promoting knowledge and ownership among the local community. It was also evident the critical role that technology is currently playing in facilitating the access to heritage sites from a digital approach, and in attracting an audience in engaging and innovative ways.

Finally, in the light of the research conducted in the course of this degree project, some recommendations emerge for future implementation of strategies that may contribute to the visibility of the Cloister of La Merced:

- Advertise on instagram the publications about events that were to be held in the cultural space of the Cloister for these to reach a wider audience.
- Consider the creation of booklets about the Cloister to be handed out to visitors.

These booklets would contain history and valuable information about the museographic, architectural and cultural elements and anything else that constitutes the cultural space of the Cloister. This proposal could be adapted to contribute to the heritage education strategy developed by the Extension and Social Outreach Office.

Reflections

During the development of this project proposal in the Cloister of La Merced, I had the advantage of receiving good feedback from my supervisor in charge and some assistance from my coworkers who helped me in the brainstorming phase and in the creation of the virtual tour prototype as some of them had previous know-how on the topic. Their insights and support were valuable aspects that made this process more manageable for me.

Furthermore, I acquired significant learnings that, if applied to future projects, would be of utmost importance for achieving the outcomes that I envision. For instance, to be more meticulous in considering all the events that may play an upsetting role before committing to a strategy. Analyze in depth such things as the resources at one's disposal, and perform preliminary tests to the tools to be used to ensure that they meet the expected performance. Essentially, these are aspects that have to be taken into account in the development and implementation of any future project that I may design. Flexibility was key in this case for the partial achievement of the selected proposal. Also, encouraging the involvement and collaboration of other people added more meaning to this process. This action can be beneficial to every project as in this way better results can be delivered.

As for my general experience, during my work as an intern at the Cultural Heritage Observatory I felt grateful at every moment as I was able to participate in a positive environment and experience events that made me discover skills that can help guide my career journey and enhance my potential for achieving things that I had not considered before. By this, I mean that it sparked new interests such as project management in the context of the tourism industry, especially in heritage conservation and made me aware of my leadership spirit. Moreover, all of the challenges I faced during my internship have made me recognize my own capabilities and have encouraged me to build a growth mindset with which

I am more willing to accept new challenges and to put effort into developing skills that will make me grow professionally.

From a personal point of view, this practicum time is now part of my most memorable and rewarding experiences and the one that has changed my perception of a workplace the most. During this time, I could meet and work alongside some outstanding and inspiring people from whom I learned not only work related habits and skills but also life changing lessons that impacted me on a personal level. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to be part of a talented and caring team with whom I made special connections and friendships. From them, I received a big lesson that I can summarize in this quote of Stephen Richards: “Self-confidence is contagious”. In effect, their confidence in their work positively influenced me to replicate that same attitude. Because I found that confidence is one of the key factors that will lead me to success.

This was a meaningful learning experience that pointed me in the right direction and taught me to be confident in my abilities, to be my own support but also to rely on others and to find motivation within myself to strive not only in work settings but also in my personal life.

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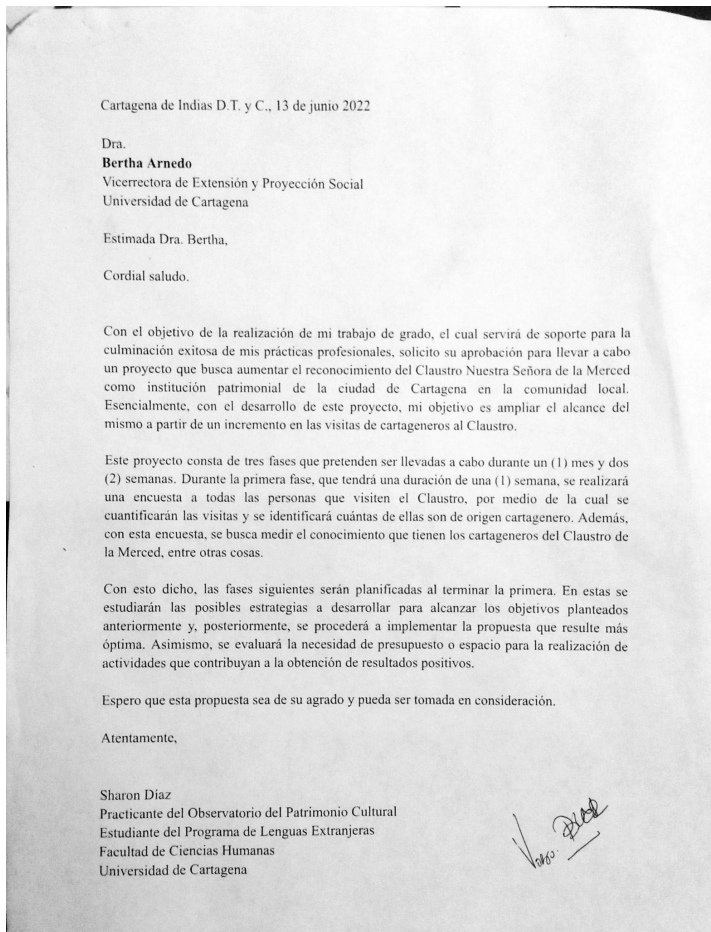
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Annexes

Annex 1. Proposal to the vice rector.



Annex 2. Survey applied to visitors.

Esta encuesta tiene como objetivo la recolección de información de interés con relación al conocimiento y percepción que tiene la comunidad sobre el Claustro Nuestra Señora de la Merced.

Número de personas: _____

1. ¿De dónde es usted?

Cartagena

Otra ciudad de Colombia

Extranjero

2. ¿Tenía conocimiento de la existencia de este Claustro en la ciudad?

Sí

No

3. ¿Cómo supo de la existencia del Claustro Nuestra Señora de la Merced en la ciudad?

4. ¿Había visitado este Claustro anteriormente?

Sí

No

No recuerda

5. ¿Cuál es la razón que lo motiva a visitar este espacio?

6. ¿Sabía que este Claustro hace parte de la Universidad de Cartagena?

Sí

No

7. ¿Qué relación tiene usted con el Claustro de la Merced?

8. ¿Qué percepción tiene del Claustro de la Merced?

9. ¿Lo visitaría nuevamente?

Sí

No

Tal vez

10. ¿Recomendaría a otras personas visitar el Claustro?

- Sí
- No
- Tal vez

Annex 3. Prototype of the visual tour created with Slices.co.



See: <https://player.slices.co/stories/-NFtxeDBhwC0LMMi2UKr>