

A STORY OF THE DIVINE SEAS

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1 / CONCEPT

This concept proposes a multilayered digital storytelling experience centered on Our Lady of the Rocks (Gospa od Škrpjela) – the world's only Catholic shrine built on an entirely man-made island, continuously constructed by the community of Perast since 1452. Located in the Bay of Kotor, Montenegro and built over centuries by local seafarers who laid stones upon a reef after each successful voyage, the site stands as a unique testament to faith, tradition, and maritime heritage. Our objective is to create a visually compelling and interactive storytelling experience that engages a diverse audience, while educating visitors about the significance of one of the most remarkable elements of our southern cultural heritage. The concept envisions enclosed, kiosk-style spaces equipped with five to six stationary touchscreen displays, designed to transport visitors back in time and allow them to explore the origins, construction, and architectural evolution of the island. Through an intuitive, user-friendly interface and a rich, immersive visual approach, the installation will encourage visitors to actively engage with the narrative.

With an inviting, easy to use point-and-click interface and an immersive visual style, these kiosks will invite all consumers not only to take a break from the real world and become part of the story, but to take a piece of it home.

Breakdown:

- 2.5D illustrated environment presented on high resolution touch screen equipment
- Spatially streamlined spaces powered by solar panels - renewable energy
- Souvenirs for consumers made of recycled materials
- Phone-free experience

2 / CONTEXT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Gospa od Škrpjela represents one of the most significant cultural, historical, and religious sites in the Bay of Kotor. It is located on an artificial island near Perast, created over many years by depositing stones and sinking old ships. According to legend, on July 22, 1452, the Mortešić brothers found an icon of the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus on a sea rock. After they took it away, the icon repeatedly returned to the same spot, which was interpreted as a sign that a shrine should be built there.

The inhabitants of Perast began bringing stones and gradually formed the island, turning it into a symbol of their faith and perseverance. This tradition has been preserved through the event known as Fašinada, which is still held annually. The current church was built in 1628 and, after the earthquake of 1667, was restored in the spirit of Renaissance and Baroque architecture under the influence of Venice.

The interior of the church is decorated with frescoes by the 17th-century painter Tripo Kokolja, depicting scenes from the lives of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Of particular value are the votive offerings—ex voto plaques—of which there are more than 1,400, testifying to the dangers faced by sailors and their faith. The greatest treasure is the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary from the 15th century, a work by Lovro Dobričević, considered the protector of sailors.

This heritage was chosen because it represents a unique blend of nature, human perseverance, and spirituality, as well as an important symbol of the identity of the Bay of Kotor. Its historical, cultural, and artistic value make it an outstanding example of cultural heritage.

The digital interpretation of this site is especially important today, as it enables accessibility to a wider audience and contributes to the preservation of traditions, customs, and artistic values. In the modern digital age, this approach helps bring heritage closer to younger generations and presents it on a global level.

Although Gospa od Škrpjela is a well-known tourist destination, its deeper significance often remains insufficiently explored and presented. There is a risk that it is perceived only as an attraction, while its history and symbolism remain in the background.

Additionally, natural influences of the sea and time may pose a long-term threat to the island, making its preservation extremely important.

3 / APPROACH TO INTERPRETATION AND STORYTELLING

The user takes on the role of a fisherman who sails around the island of Our Lady of the Rocks and explores its past through a system with point-and-click interaction. By clicking on certain areas of the display, objects or characters, the user progresses the story at their own pace. During the voyage, the fisherman meets different characters – engaging in direct conversation in some cases, while only observing in others. What unites each of them is that they all play an important role in building the identity of the island and its legend. Notably, the events that take place are not told chronologically. Due to this deliberate design decision, the user can explore the events and characters in whatever order they like, independently connecting the fragments of the story, creating their own research experience.

Displays and locations:

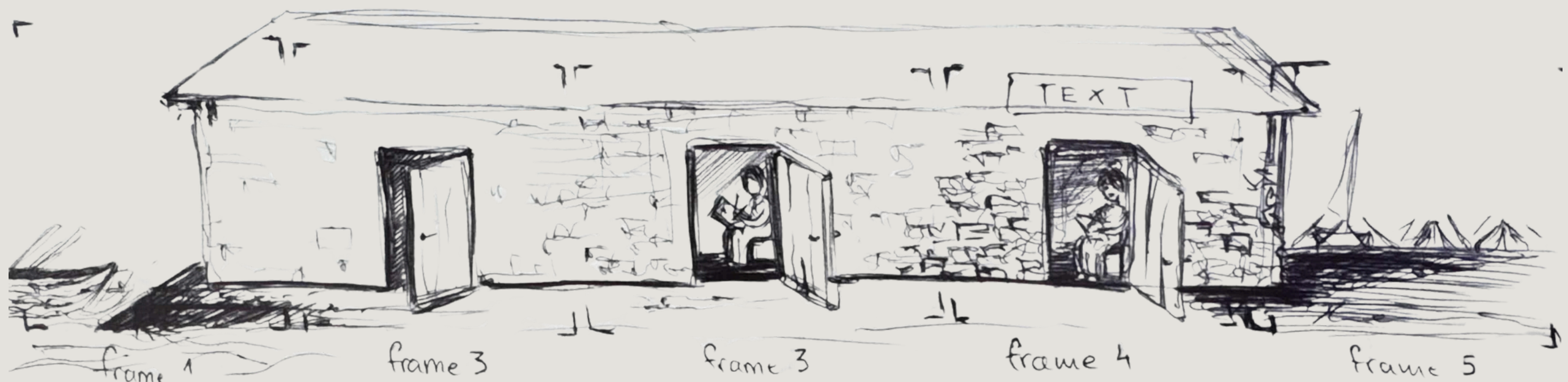
Every location of the display is connected with one particular storytelling. This is the reason why the display for first storytelling is located on local Perast Beach. The next one would be found in front of the icon in the church, third in front of the fresco in the church and final on the pontoon where you disembark when you arrive at the island

1/ The first display shows the fisherman making his way towards the reef, in a first-person perspective. Their hands, an old fishing rod, wet oars, as well as a part of the wooden boat, visually hint to the user their role of being a fisherman. The sound of waves, seagulls, as well as the creaking of wood, enhances the essence of the lengthy night sailing towards the ridge near Perast. A short text appears on the display, confirming the user's aforementioned role. The user then clicks on the ridge, visible in the distance. After clicking, another scene opens - a close-up view of the ridge, where the Mortesići brothers are standing. By having them allude to the fact that they have already been waiting for the user, we create the effect that this cycle has been repeated many times. In order to create a story that's natural and realistic, to give the user the impression that they are already acquainted with the brothers, the point-and-click dialogue begins with a simple conversation about the catch, the sea, and how the day's been at sea.

Second point-and-click conversation: The brothers explain that this has happened for the third time: every time the painting disappears, it returns to the same place where it was first found.

The scene should give the impression of an old seaside legend - an in-between of a fisherman's everyday life and that of the sea's unexplained methods by which it keeps returning the painting to its place of origin

2/ The embroidery of Jacinta Kunić Mijović from Perast and the tale behind her extraordinary work are of crucial importance to Our Lady of the Rocks. The retelling of her story is perceived from the perspective of a sailing fisherman passing by a house with open doors. There, they notice Jacinta in her youth, patiently stitching her masterpiece. In the scene that follows, we see a new opening (door, window, or otherwise), where they see Jacinta, having aged over the decades, still unwaveringly hopeful. Waiting for her sailor husband, Jacinta has stitched for 25 years a reproduction of the main altar of Our Lady of the Rocks. In her work, she used silk, gold, and silver, but for the purposes of this project, an emphasis is placed on the fact that she used her own hair as stitching material. Poetically and literally, the hair's pigment slowly faded, marking the passage of time. Ages have passed, faithfully waiting, and today the piece still holds impeccably, held together by unyielding dedication, mesmerizing with its honest and self-sacrificing material. Visualization of this project begins with Jacinta stitching while sitting, initiating communication only after making eye contact with the user, who is in the role of the fisherman. Keeping doors ajar, we symbolize her eternal hope and yearning for the sailor to finally make his way home. The fisherman becomes familiar with the story of the embroidery through a point-and-click adventure, notably without direct dialogue with Jacinta. The fisherman's role is that of the neutral observer. After completing the storyline behind the embroidery, the user continues their travels, without disclosing the next location, as the system in place intentionally leaves vagueness for the user, allowing freedom for a personalized order of visiting landmarks.



3/ The Legacy of Tripo Kokolja

4/ The Birth of the Island

4 / 3D MODELS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

For the realisation of this project, we would be designing and creating original 3D models with the exclusive use of recycled plastic filament. These miniature diorama models would serve as souvenirs or keepsakes for the users to take home as a part of the experience, offered in three different thematic designs from which one can be chosen and delivered in a capsule to be unboxed and put together following the completion of the simulation.

As for the digital technological tools which would be used to create the simulation itself, low-polygonal or painting-esque 3d illustrations would be handdrawn and designed on one of the many 'mind mapping' and rotoscoping softwares which offer features for 2.5D and 3D art. (Mental Canvas, Concepts, Procreate, Clip Studio Paint..).

In order to satisfy marketing purposes, we will offer potential consumers and other interested parties or individuals a website, on which they will be able to access basic information, as well as our kiosk locations, contact information, and a free demo that might introduce the premise of the experience we can offer them. Organisations such as schools or extracurricular groups could be offered the opportunity to reserve the kiosks for excursions, interactive classes, or day trips.

The technology that we will be using as part of this project is not meant to be the focus for the consumers, but only as a tool to allow them to experience a piece of our culture in a new light - for the length of the simulation, we wish to present them with the opportunity to put down their phones and immerse themselves fully into the visual and auditory experience, providing over-ear headphones as well as an array of other digital tools in order to adjust the experience to the consumers preferences. (Color correction, volume and brightness control, other audio-visual inclusive settings...)

Illustration Style and Aesthetic



Atmosphere



Simulation UI



3D printed Figures/Puzzle



5 / TARGET AUDIENCE AND INTENDED USE

The target audience of this concept includes several groups. First of all, we have tourists who visit Our Lady of the Rocks, which include international and domestic tourists interested in our cultural and historical heritage, as well as anthropologists, historians and artists interested in the interpretation of local identity and tradition. The focus is set on families with children and students in the final grades of primary schools since these interactive and visual elements enable them to understand local history and legends more easily. At the same time, the concept is adapted to younger generations who are used to digital formats, but also to visitors who are looking for an authentic experience.

The intended use is tied to the location itself, where a digital simulation will be made available to visitors as part of an organized or independent tour. Users access the experience through a point-and-click system from a first person perspective that allows them to move through the space and story at their own pace. Interaction with digital characters further deepens the understanding of historical events and personalities, making the experience educational and emotional.

In addition, the concept can be placed in tourist information centers, museums or educational institutions as an introduction to visiting the site. It is also planned to expand through an online platform that would serve for information, promotion and reservations, while the full experience would only be available by visiting in person.

6 / EXPECTED IMPACT

Tourism / The concept is expected to attract several target audiences by the sheer nature of the elements used. By bringing attention to lesser known locations of significant cultural importance, we are attracting local and foreign visitors. While adults and young adults might find enough satisfaction with the vocal narration, children in elementary school might find the interactivity of the digital panels and 3D miniatures more memorable. The narration followed will be done in multiple languages, so accessibility is there for multiple foreign audiences (ie. Montenegrin, English, Italian, Chinese, Russian...)

Should the concept be expanded to other sites of cultural importance, a website will provide awareness of its existence (mere bullet points, reserving the story for the in-person experience), extending the stay of tourists, but also bringing to light what a local person's next trip might be. Other than story elements, the experience template the visitors will follow remains the same.

The concept does not provide use of brand new technologies, but it provides a memorable combination of existing technologies, for most ages.

Protection of Heritage / In order to create the story displayed in the digital panels, existing material, gathered from tales of the locals, as well as historical documents, help preserve the history of the chosen site. Contributions from local retellings help enrich the exploration experience (Point-and-Click system).

Education / The concept is designed to take into account that these locations will be used for field trips as well. It is as such that we've made parts of the experience catered to children in elementary school and older.

Inclusion / The execution of the concept takes into account that it should be accessible to minorities, people with disabilities. For blind visitors, the narrator does a faithful and detailed retelling of the stories and important details. On the displays themselves, we take into account that there can be visitors with epilepsy or color blindness, so colors can be adjusted via settings.

The interior will be able to support individuals using wheelchairs. In addition, step-stools will be integrated for children, while predominantly for the elderly, chairs will be provided.

Ecological Sustainability / The concept relies on people visiting the locations in-person. The digital panels intended to be used will rely on solar energy, while the 3D model "rewards" will be printed out of recycled filaments.

7 / TEAM COMPOSITION AND COMPETENCIES

Our team consists of five members: Matea Milić, Dara Mihaljević, Aleksandra Smolović, David Sič, Rina Nedović and Nora Hupka. The team brings together students from different creative and technical fields, creating an interdisciplinary approach that combines architecture, design, digital media, storytelling and visual communication.

Matea Milić, as a student of Architecture and Design at the Polytechnic Faculty, contributed to the spatial organization, conceptual development and interpretation of the cultural context of the project. The other team members, students of Graphic Design and Multimedia, contributed through digital illustration, visual identity, animation, multimedia presentation and the development of interactive storytelling elements.

Since all team members come from Montenegro, the project carries a strong personal connection to the local cultural heritage and traditions. This shared background helped us approach the topic with authenticity, sensitivity and a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural value of the location. Through collaboration, we combined our different skills and artistic approaches in order to create an engaging and visually rich experience that connects cultural heritage with contemporary digital media.