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Orchestrating experts' assumptions and children's values in the design of Virtual Heritage experiences

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Abstract

The roles that children are allowed to play in the co-design of an interactive experience are strongly influenced and determined by the views of designers and other adult stakeholders on childhood, as well as by their expectations of children's skills and cognitive capacities. In this paper, we contrast these assumptions in the design of a Virtual Heritage experience for guided school visits at an archaeological site. The goal of our study was to analyse different viewpoints of adult stakeholders in order to find new strategies that balance power relations between adults and children. The study was carried out in the context of the preliminary design stage of an interactive learning experience for a bomb shelter dating from the Spanish Civil War, known as "Refugi 307". Our analysis reveals some of the reasons behind the assumptions of adult stakeholders. These outcomes were our starting point for defining strategies that can establish collective values among adult stakeholders and enrich the range of roles of children in a design process.

Keywords: Childhood; Design Roles; Values; Cultural Heritage; Participatory

Design; Full-Body Interaction

1. Introduction

The contemporary conception of childhood often describes children as independent agents with their own opinions and knowledge [1,2]. However, there are different discourses that underpin the understanding of childhood. Based on this premise, museums and cultural heritage sites have an increasing interest in adapting their educational programmes to novel learning approaches that allow children to explore learning contents autonomously [3]. In the child-computer-interaction community, these different notions influence the way the community designs for and with children. Thus, children have been acknowledged as valuable stakeholders to inform and participate in museum design practice for technology-oriented exhibitions [4–6].

Regardless of the contemporary perspectives on the notion of childhood, adult stakeholders hold different assumptions about children's agency and their role in the design process. These assumptions may be influenced by the stakeholders' personal perspectives on the learning topic, cultural influences, teaching methodologies, or ideologies. Due to children's limited role and agency in some of these perspectives,

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