

Visualisation in Archaeology
EH Project No: 5172MAIN



Third Progress Report

9 June 2009



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Visualisation in Archaeology
funded by
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www.viarch.org.uk

This is the Third Progress Report of the HEEP-funded Visualisation in Archaeology project (HEEP Project No. 5172MAIN). The project's start date was 3 December 2007 and has funding allocated for a period of three years as set out in the project design (13/11/2007; 5172PD). The report will review the first half of the project's second year of operation across its core activities.

Overview

Now at the halfway point of the VIA project, this review reflects the focus of project staff on data collection activities aimed at informing the VIA Strategic Report. Since its initial conception in the project design phase, the Report's structure has constantly been under review – no less so than in the past six months. The central role of the Report remains the same, namely, to examine the current condition of visualising practice within the archaeological and heritage sector. To this end a survey was envisaged among the sector's larger organisations to gather information covering illustrators' profiles, work practices, and professional development. Designed as a Snapshot Survey, the questionnaire seeks to build a detailed cross-section of life across the graphic environment on a nominated day.

A provisional mailing list was compiled and telephone contact was made with over thirty organisations in order to explain our project aims and objectives, gain support for the Survey and collect respondents' contact details. The outcome of this process showed the value of direct communication with organisations resulting in a staggering 90+% commitment to the Survey. It was, however, the more general conversations with graphics office managers and staff which highlighted the complex mosaic of those producing images and, notably, the potential range and number of illustrators working in the sector. In order to undertake a representative audit of illustrators and illustration practices it was decided to expand the Survey to all England-based archaeological and heritage organisations.

Over the past two months a revised and much expanded organisation mailing list has been compiled, comprising contact information predominantly drawn from IFA and AAI&S mailing lists, as well as extensive internet searches. Currently the list stands at over 400 organisations. It is now intended to resume making telephone contact with organisations as this admittedly lengthy process has been shown, as indicated above, to be of considerable benefit.

The Snapshot Survey benefited from a short pilot within English Heritage graphics offices a few months ago that identified a number of inconsistencies and some small degree of ambiguity within the questionnaire. The questionnaire is now being piloted within a small number of commercial organisations. Once this testing period has been concluded, the questionnaire will be revised and circulated to the Strategic Report Editorial Committee.

Running alongside the Snapshot Survey, a Structured Interview Survey has been designed and is currently being piloted. This Survey is intended to draw out attitudinal responses from graphics department managers around issues such as the professional status of illustrators, the value and purpose of enskilling and CPD, and to identify what, if any, professional culture exists within archaeological illustration.

Dissemination of the 2008 VIA Workshop is now underway through the project website, a process expected to continue over the coming months. Dates and themes for the 2009 VIA Workshop have now been agreed.

VIA Core Activities: Summary of current status and outline of intended action over the next six months

1 2008 VIA Workshop

Workshops are planned for each of the project's three years, each Workshop progressively informing the content and scope of the next. The first VIA Workshop was held at the University of Southampton on 23-24 October 2008 under the general theme of 'Visualisation and Knowledge Formation'. The Workshop attracted some 30 researchers and practitioners from across Europe, North America and Australia presenting a total of 21 papers..

Organising Committee: Garry Gibbons, Professor Stephanie Moser and Sara Perry, in collaboration with Dr Simon James, Professor Sam Smiles and Professor Steve Woolgar.

1.1

Action

Upload video of Workshop presentations -- two sample presentations have been posted online along with their related PowerPoint presentation. Each 2008 Workshop participant will be invited to view the sample products and sign-up in order to feature their own 2008 Workshop presentation.

Timeline

Week 70

Benefit

Uploaded video presentations are intended to broaden the reach of the 2008 Workshop. Videos will be uploaded onto the VIA website.

% Complete

100%

Comments

Video tapes are currently being digitised. Presentations by Trevor Pearson and Judith Dobie, both of English Heritage, are now online.

Next step

Contact all 2008 Workshop participants and offer the opportunity to feature their own presentations online.

1.2

Action

Draft a license agreement to be completed for those researchers whose presentations will be featured on the VIA project website.

Timeline

Week 65

Benefit

To protect the VIA project from possible future copyright issues.

% Complete

100%

Comments

-

Next Step

Distribute as required.

1.3

Action

Upload podcasts of Workshop presentations – each 2008 Workshop presentation was digitally recorded.

Timeline

Week 75

Benefit

Podcasts offer a popular and convenient format to broaden the reach of each 2008 Workshop presentation. The presentation podcasts will be bundled individually and made available through the project website.

% Complete

20% complete

Comments

Audio files are currently being digitally 'cleaned'.

Next step

Edit audio files. Upload onto project website.

1.4

Action

Develop an online feedback facility linked to the video presentation.

Timeline

Week 85

Benefit

To encourage an open network of dialogue, critique and information-sharing across disciplines through the direct and attributable online notation of each Workshop video presentation featured on the VIA project website. Feedback will be built up with a clear timeline of commentary directly relating to both the video and PowerPoint presentation.

% Complete

20%

Comments

-

Next Step

Identify technical and software requirements.

2 2009 VIA Workshop

2.1

Action

2009 Workshop – programmed for 22-23 October 2009, the second VIA Workshop will aim to bring together researchers and practitioners in order to encourage project-based dialogue. Following on but learning from the success of the 2008 Workshop, a limit of c.16 participants will be enforced to allow increased discussion time. The second Workshop's overall theme and session topics will flow around visualisations connected with live or recently completed projects and which explore related issues of enskilling. Participants will be selected with a particular emphasis on those who generate images, those who strategically incorporate visualisations into a project's overall scheme of dissemination, and those who deliver illustration-related skills.

Organising Committee: Garry Gibbons, Professor Stephanie Moser and Sara Perry.

Timeline

Week 75

Benefit

Papers will be invited which reflect the current state-of-play and which provide fresh insights into the 2009 Workshop's session topics. Selected participants from the 2009 Workshop will be encouraged to develop their research.

% Complete

30%

Comments

Abstract and paper submission will be made entirely online through the VIA project website.

Next step

Agree sub-topics of the 2009 Workshop. Finalise Call for Papers and distribute to mailing list.

2.2

Action

Revise and update mailing list for the 2009 VIA Workshop.

Timeline

Week 70

Benefit

Potential participants will be specifically short-listed around the Workshop's theme and topics.

% Complete

60% complete

Comments

The mailing list currently features thirty international researchers and practitioners from archaeology and other disciplines.

Next step

Connections arising from the 2008 Workshop, the Research Showcase, the VIA Structured Survey (see 3.3) and through conference participation by VIA staff will be sought and developed to expand the mailing list.

3 Strategic Report

In its initial phase it is envisaged that the Strategic Report will run to some 12,000 words and be published on-line via the VIA project's website. Feedback from a variety of constituencies will be sought and monitored over the project's third year when, it is expected, a full report will be produced in the project's publication phase. Importantly, this will have the advantage of acknowledging feedback by those directly contributing to the working report, by presenting a digest of related research arising from the VIA workshops, and by incorporating relevant data collected from the Best Practice case studies.

Working Group: Garry Gibbons, Professor Stephanie Moser, Dr Simon James, Peter Hinton, Dr Dan Hull, Dr Robin Taylor, Trevor Pearson and Rob Read.

3.1

Action

Snapshot Survey pilot phase – the questionnaire has undergone an initial pilot within a number of English Heritage graphics departments.

Timeline

Week 60

Benefit

The pilot revealed a number of areas in the questionnaire that were opaque, misleading or incomplete.

% Complete

100%

Comments

A summary of the pilot results have been drafted and copied to English Heritage.

Next step

Further piloting will be undertaken within a number of commercial archaeological organisations.

3.2

Action

Snapshot Survey mailing list – a mailing list of all England-based archaeology and heritage organisations is now being compiled and currently features in excess of 400 organisations.

Timeline

Weeks 58-80

Benefit

To create an inclusive and exhaustive database of illustrators and illustration-related working practices across all sizes of organisations, institutions and freelance artists.

% Complete

50%

Comments

-

Next step

Project staff will telephone all organisations featured on the mailing list to establish willingness of organisations to participate in the survey and take contact details of the questionnaire respondent. So far this approach has resulted in at least a 90+% uptake.

3.3

Action

Structured Interview Survey – this interview-style questionnaire is specifically aimed at Senior Illustrators/Graphics Department Managers and has been designed as a predominantly attitudinal survey. The questionnaire has been trialed with the cooperation of a small number of commercial units.

Timeline

Weeks 58-75

Benefit

The questionnaire seeks to tease out managerial attitudes to the professional status of illustrators, to assess the value and purpose of skills development, and identify the nature, if any, of a professional culture within archaeological graphics. Further, the survey attempts to chart past and future trends within the graphics environment.

% Complete

100%

Comments

-

Next Step

Revise questionnaire in line with the pilot results. Identify potential respondents following on from contacts established via the Snapshot Survey mailing list. (See 3.2; Next Step)

4 Best Practice Case Studies

This element of the VIA programme is designed to identify the key themes of best practice and innovation in the planning, management and delivery of effective knowledge dissemination models as a result of, but not exclusively from, archaeological investigations. By turning our attention away from traditional models of dissemination (paper-based publication), VIA acknowledges the many opportunities and challenges offered by 'new' technologies in the dissemination of archaeological knowledge and understanding. The proposed research-based archive of case studies will pull together strands from a number of knowledge communities to provide a compendium of inter-related best practice resources from a 'total project' perspective based directly on experience. Case studies will be showcased on the project website.

Co-ordinators: Garry Gibbons and Rob Read.

4.1

Action

Case Study guidelines – aimed at assisting those who will draft project case studies within organisations. The document will also identify data of particular interest to the VIA project and which will substantially go toward informing sections of the Strategic Report. Working group: Garry Gibbons and Rob Read.

Timeline

Weeks 58-60

Benefit

It is intended that the guidelines will also assist in ‘standardising’ the data supplied in order that comparisons might readily be made across collections of case studies.

% Complete

100%

Comments

-

Next step

Identify organisations employing non-traditional models of dissemination. (See 3.2; Next Step)

4.2

Action

Case Study licence agreement – licence agreement covering all text and visual materials provided by organisations in support of their case study.

Timeline

Week 60

Benefit

To protect the VIA project from potential copyright issues.

% Complete

100%

Comments

-

Next Step

Distribute as required.

5 Online Searchable Bibliography

The bibliographic component of the Academic Resource aims to provide users with access to a representative sample of citations of published works pertaining to the visualisation of data. The bibliography proposes to span the literature: from writings on the visual representation of archaeology, to visualisation in the wider fields of the sciences, social sciences and arts in order to offer archaeological practitioners (and the wider public) the opportunity to learn from and build upon a cross-disciplinary body of

findings and experience. The VIA website will feature both a search and view component to interrogate the bibliography and a reference submission component, allowing users to submit publications for inclusion (see www.viarch.org.uk/content/research-bibliography.asp).

Co-ordinators: Sara Perry and Steve Cheshire.

5.1

Action

Gather sources and post online -- systems for data collection and the construction of a searchable database have been developed and refined over the bibliography's first year of deployment. In excess of 300 references are now posted online featuring publications relating to visual representation in the sciences, social sciences, humanities and arts.

Timeline

Week 78

Benefit

The bibliography seeks to connect users with cross-disciplinary literature, enabling archaeologists and others to learn from and build upon the visualisation-oriented writings of practitioners from a variety of fields.

% Complete

100%

Comments

-

Next step

Continued development and expansion.

6 Online Research Showcase

The research summaries component of the Academic Resource aims to offer users access to descriptions of innovative, contemporary research projects focused on the visualisation of data. The summaries will extend across disciplinary boundaries to consider current and proposed visual projects in archaeology and the wider fields of the arts and humanities (cultural studies, visual studies, museum studies, art history), social sciences (geography, geology, sociology, anthropology), and science and technology studies. Like the bibliography, these summaries aim to link practitioners across disciplines, highlight innovative visual projects, and offer a platform for future planning and discussion of best practices around archaeological visual method and theory (see www.viarch.org.uk/content/research-summaries.asp).

Co-ordinators: Sara Perry and Steve Cheshire.

6.1

Action

Gather sources and post online – Research Summaries will continue to be compiled by communicating with researchers through project-organised activities, by contacts established through the Project Team, through attendance at conferences and via social networks. All research summary pages will follow a similar layout, identifying the project's name, researcher name(s), researcher contact information (if supplied), researcher affiliation, project keywords, a short summary of the research (in paragraph

form or point-form notes), representative project imagery (with the choice to include contextualising captions, as well as the option to identify one image as the 'cover illustration'), and citation details for directly-related publications (for inclusion in the Bibliographic listing).

Timeline

Week 78

Benefit

Like the Bibliography, the Research Showcase is intended as a community-building tool whose components work together to foster conceptual reflection within archaeology, as well as to create a network of dialogue and information-sharing across disciplines.

% Complete

100%

Comments

-

Next step

Continued development and expansion.

7 VIA International Conference

A wide-ranging international conference held at the University of Southampton. The steering committee will, from the outset of the project, work towards defining and structuring the aims of the conference. Contributors will be invited to present publication standard papers.

Organising committee: Garry Gibbons, Professor Stephanie Moser and Sara Perry.

7.1

Action

Conference date and venue – the Conference will be hosted by the University of Southampton. Dates for the Conference have been set for December 2010 or January 2011. These dates will be finalised over the coming months in consultation with the University's Conference Facilities department.

Timeline

Weeks 75-90

Benefit

Designed to bring together all aspects of inter-related research concerned with the visual representation of data.

% Complete

20%

Comment

As the third VIA Workshop and the Conference will be within weeks of each other, it has been suggested that the Workshop be incorporated into the Conference.

Next Step

Finalise dates. Outline conference structure and extent. Apply for parallel funding from BA and AHRC.