

Visualisation in Archaeology
EH Project No: 5172MAIN



Fourth Progress Report

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ENGLISH HERITAGE

Visualisation in Archaeology

funded by

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www.viarch.org.uk

This is the Fourth 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

Visualisation in Archaeology has now entered what would have been its final year of operation. However, for reasons that will be identified below, a variation order has recently been agreed with HEEP to extend the project through to May 2011. Over the past eight months all core research elements of the VIA have materially advanced towards their completion or have substantially developed in breadth and depth. Importantly, the project is now reaching out to researchers and practitioners within the archaeology sector -- both in the UK and in Europe -- by contributing papers to a range of conferences, instigating round tables, and formulating next-step proposals. As a result, national partnerships have been established and international networks are now being sought, to further encourage knowledge transfer informed by the research currently being undertaken in the UK through the VIA.

Following a project planning meeting (October 2009), hosted by the Institute for Archaeologists, it was agreed to shift the focus of the project's Strategic Report as outlined in the Project Design (Objective 3), to a document summarising 1) results of the VIA's research; 2) recommendations arising from the project's activities, and; 3) proposals for future work. The historic and current role of archaeological illustration (in its widest sense) will, in the short term, be addressed through an interim report delivered before the completion of the project. A full report detailing the results, analysis and recommendations of all VIA sector-wide surveys will now fall within the project's publication phase, subject to a separate funding application.

A summary of the sector-wide surveys now follows. First, the telephone survey of England-based organisations, institutions, and individuals across the archaeology/heritage sector is well underway providing fundamental information on the mosaic of image production. Second, a final mailing list for the VIA Snapshot Survey of imaging professionals is nearing completion, and whose respondent details are primarily harvested from the Telephone Survey, an Association of Archaeological Illustrators & Surveyors membership mailing list upgrade (undertaken by the VIA), and the charting of staff undertaking illustration duties and delivering imaging modules in archaeology departments across English universities. Finally, a Structured Interview Survey of graphics office senior staff remains ongoing.

Late October 2009 saw the second VIA Workshop take place at the University of Southampton, and resulting 2009 VIA Workshop Report published online through the project website. The final VIA Workshop is programmed to take place 21-22 October 2010 and is intended to explore proposed session themes for the VIA International Conference. In order to distance it from the final Workshop, the Conference has been programmed for 18-20 April 2011, which will isolate it from the project's end date.

The VIA constructed Academic Resource has continued to grow substantially providing a valuable research facility for visual researchers.

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

1 2009 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 second VIA Workshop was held at the University of Southampton on 22-23 October 2009 under the general theme of 'Visualisation In Context: An Interplay of Practice and Theory'. The Workshop attracted 14 researchers and practitioners from across Europe, North America and Africa, presenting a total of 15 papers. Following feedback from the 2008 Workshop, participation in this second Workshop was specifically reduced by the organisers to facilitate longer discussion periods.

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

1.1

Action

Upload podcasts of Workshop discussion periods and invite participants to also post their papers online as a podcast.

Timeline

Week 117

Benefit

Uploaded podcast presentations and discussions are intended to broaden the reach of the 2009 VIA Workshop. Podcasts will be uploaded onto the VIA website.

% Complete

40%

Comments

Video tapes have been digitally reformatted and their audio content extracted.

Next step

Contact all 2009 Workshop participants and offer the opportunity to feature podcasts of their own presentations online.

1.2

Action

Draft and finalise 2009 VIA Workshop Report

Timeline

Week 112

Benefit

To collate, evaluate and summarise feedback from Workshop participants and make recommendations for the 2010 Workshop.

% Complete
100%

Comments
2009 Workshop Report posted on the VIA project website.

Next Step
Evaluate feedback to inform 2010 VIA Workshop.

2 2010 VIA Workshop

2.1

Action

Programmed for 21-22 October 2010, themes for the third VIA Workshop will largely be informed by feedback and discussion arising from the 2009 Workshop.

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

Timeline

Week 146

Benefit

Session themes from this and the two previous Workshops will directly feed into the VIA International Conference. Themes and issues identified by the VIA 2010 Workshop Report, along with its two sister publications, will form the basis of a future academic paper.

% Complete
30%

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

Next step

Agree session themes of the 2010 Workshop. Finalise Call for Papers and distribute to mailing list.

2.2

Action

Revise and update mailing list for the 2010 VIA Workshop.

Timeline

Week 116

Benefit

Potential participants will be identified around the Workshop's session themes.

% Complete
60% complete

Comments
-

Next step

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

3 Strategic Report

As outlined above, the scope and content of the Strategic Report has recently undergone fundamental revision. The Report will communicate significant results of the VIA project to a professional audience composed of practitioners and policy makers, primarily within English Heritage.

Working Group: Garry Gibbons, Professor Stephanie Moser, Dr Simon James, Peter Hinton, Steve Allen, Trevor Pearson and Rob Read.

3.1

Action

Draft working version of Strategic Report

Timeline

Week 123

Benefit

To report the state-of-play of all research activity within the VIA project, to make interim recommendations, and to advise on future work.

% Complete

10%

Comments

Final draft of Strategic Report to be published online through the project website June 2010 (Week 130).

Next Step

Start to draft Strategic Report and, where possible, (re)timetable research to facilitate substantive discussion.

4 VIA Surveys

As central elements of the VIA project, these practitioner-focused surveys are designed to provide a wide-ranging insight into those circumstances that contribute to the production of visualisations within archaeology.

Co-ordinator: Garry Gibbons

4.1

Action

Telephone Survey – a contact list was drawn up with the IfA members' list at its core and supplemented by 1) the AAI&S membership list; 2) contacts drawn from archaeology departments at English universities of staff involved in illustration and in the delivery of visualisation-based modules; 3) contacts drawn from England-based VR Labs.

Timeline

Ongoing

Benefit

The telephone survey provides a coarse-grained understanding of those organisations within the archaeology/heritage sector who do (and do not) produce images, the technologies employed, and basic staff profiles of those producing images. Where dedicated illustration staff are identified, respondent information is sought for the Snapshot Survey (see 4.2) and, as appropriate, the Structured Interview Survey (see 4.3).

% Complete

Phase 1: 90%; Phase 2: 60% (see 'Next Step' below)

Comments

Building on the pattern of responses from various organisation types, we will now focus on those organisations likely to yield respondents for the Snapshot Survey.

Next step

Phase 1: Complete telephone survey as indicated above to finalise the Snapshot Survey mailing list. Phase 2: Return to the balance of organisations on the telephone survey contact list and complete over the coming months.

4.2

Action

Snapshot Survey – following a period when the questionnaire was piloted within English Heritage, and a number of commercial units, the survey is now finalised and ready to mail.

Timeline

Week 125

Benefit

Snapshot Survey mailed to all England-based archaeology/heritage organisations employing full/part-time illustrators. The Survey will provide core information on organisation profiles, practitioner profiles, image production methodologies, and CPD provision.

% Complete

30%

Comments

All questionnaires will be anonymised.

Next step

Finalise mailing list.

4.3

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 trialled with the cooperation of a small number of commercial units.

Timeline

Ongoing

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

60%

Comments

The questionnaire is undertaken as a formal interview, followed by an informal (recorded) discussion.

Next Step

-

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: Garry Gibbons, 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.

Timeline

Week 130

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

Ongoing

Comments

In excess of 450 references are now posted online, featuring publications relating to visual representation in the sciences, social sciences, humanities and arts.

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 130

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

Ongoing

Comments

There are currently 28 research summaries posted online relating to archaeology and related disciplines.

Next step

Continued development and expansion.

7 VIA International Conference

A wide-ranging international conference held at the University of Southampton, 18-20 April 2011. 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

Post 'Call for Sessions' on the VIA website and distribute on various mailing lists.

Timeline

Week 118

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 would have been within weeks of each other, the Conference has been re-scheduled to beyond the initial project end date into Spring 2011.

Next Step

Outline conference structure and session themes. Seek parallel funding.