

Visualisation in Archaeology
EH Project No: 5172MAIN



Second Progress Report

10 December 2008



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Visualisation in Archaeology

funded by

English Heritage
under the HEEP scheme.

www.viarch.org.uk

This is the Second 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 project's first year of operation across its main focus of core activities, as well as outline the underlying efforts to build cross-sector support and endorsement of the VIA.

Overview

This first year has seen marked progress in establishing a firm foundation from which to develop the project in line with its stated aims and objectives. Contact has been established with key organisations within the archaeological sector and support for the VIA has been kindly offered both in terms of promotion of the project and through direct involvement in its various working groups. English Heritage, in addition to their continued generous funding, have offered invaluable assistance in a number of important areas through the good offices of Trevor Pearson.

Awareness of VIA is particularly marked within the academic community through the organisation, promotion and delivery of the first VIA Workshop held at the University of Southampton. Researchers and practitioners from Europe, North America and Australia contributed to an eclectic series of papers mirroring the broad-ranging disciplinary response initiated both by the Workshop's vision and the undoubted quality of its session chairs. The aims of the VIA as a nucleus for attracting a community of researchers from different disciplines whose focus is centred on the visual is further enhanced by the posting on the VIA website of an online Searchable Bibliography and a Research Showcase.

Progress on those aspects of the project aimed directly at informing practice, have developed at a slower pace -- resulting in the project's relatively lower profile among public and private archaeological organisations. Whilst a smooth funding stream could have resolved some of these issues, it was also decided by the project managers that spending time to assemble strong working groups to inform future research would ultimately be reflected in the quality of the products associated with those groups. It is intended that those elements of the VIA which require to be fully actioned, notably the Strategic Report and the Best Practice Case Studies, will be pushed forward in the first quarter of 2009. Nevertheless, progress has been made. Following the first meeting of its working group, the Strategic Report's structure and content has been revised allowing research for its completion to proceed. To this aim, a questionnaire designed to inform the Report's first section is now in its final draft and will be piloted within English Heritage early 2009. Adjustments to the questionnaire will be made in light of the pilot and the survey rolled out across the sector by Spring/Summer 2009. Whilst the Best Practice Case Studies are intended to collectively form an online resource highlighting non-traditional models of publication and dissemination, they are also designed to inform sections of the Strategic Report. Since the Report's structure has now been reviewed, the collection of the Case Studies will progress.

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

1 Project Website

The VIA website has, in its initial phase, principally served to raise the project's profile and promote the project's various areas of interest. Over this first year, content has gradually been posted with particular emphasis on the Workshop and, naturally, the Searchable Bibliography and Research Showcase. The construction of the Bibliography database held a number of challenges that have now been largely overcome. Whilst contributions to the Research Showcase are not searchable, it is anticipated that as this resource grows this facility will develop. During the first half of the project's second year, an increase in content will see a structural review of the website (see www.viarch.org.uk).

Website co-ordinators: Garry Gibbons and Steve Cheshire, with contributions from the project team.

1.1

Action

Consolidate the first phase of the project website -- initiate Searchable Bibliography (see 5.1) and Research Showcase (see 6.1). Post 2008 Workshop programme online and disseminate Workshop results (see 2.2 -- 2.4).

Timeline

Weeks 26-52

Benefit

Systematically present results of the project's research to inform professional standards around pictorial practice, investigate viable guidelines for imaging, and, in so doing, articulate an intellectual framework for the visualisation of archaeological data.

% Complete

100%; on-going development

Comments

Next step

Review the current project website in view of the products which are now emerging as a result of the VIA's activities. Investigate possible server upgrade.

1.2

Action

Upload video, podcast and PowerPoint files.

Timeline

Week 60

Benefit

Online dissemination of content resulting from project activities, in a format that provides the possibility for a dynamic relationship with project participants and a wider online

audience. Online dissemination is intended as one aspect of an integrated and strategic approach to the wider dissemination of VIA's products.

% Complete
30% complete

Comments
-

Next step

Once digitised, videos will be remastered and edited. A sample Workshop presentation will be posted on both the project website and YouTube. A sample educational package will be posted on the project website.

2 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 second VIA Workshop is timetabled for October 2009.

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

2.1

Action

2008 VIA Workshop -- held at the University of Southampton, 23-24 October, details of which are posted on the VIA's website (see www.viarch.org.uk/content/research-workshop.asp).

Timeline

Week 46

Benefit

The Visualisation and Knowledge Formation-themed event brought together representatives from the scholarly, private and public sectors to discuss and debate the historical and philosophical dimensions -- and future possibilities -- of the visual representation of knowledge in archaeology (and beyond).

% Complete
100%

Comments

Online dissemination of the Workshop's results will feature sample videos, podcasts and educational packages. VIA Workshop participants will be invited to 'sign-up' and add their research presentations online to contribute towards an open network of dialogue, critique and visuality-related information sharing across countries and disciplines.

Next step

Workshop chairs are currently discussing strategies for publication and dissemination. Organisers are actively seeking participants' responses to the Workshop, and inviting comments on future Workshop directions.

2.2

Action

Upload video of Workshop presentations -- two presentations will be posted online along with their related podcast (see 2.3) and an educational package (see 2.4). Each 2008 Workshop participant will be invited to view the sample products and sign-up in order to feature their own research.

Timeline

Week 57

Benefit

Uploaded video presentations are intended to broaden the reach of the 2008 Workshop. Videos will be uploaded onto the VIA website and onto YouTube at regular intervals over the coming year.

% Complete

20%

Comments

Video tapes are currently being digitised. Presentations by Trevor Pearson and Judith Dobie, both of English Heritage, are currently being prepared for uploading.

Next step

Remaster and edit video in preparation for uploading. Upload onto project website and YouTube. Seek participants' permission for the VIA to post video versions of their presentations online.

2.3

Action

Upload podcast of Workshop presentations – each Workshop presentation was digitally recorded.

Timeline

Week 64

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. Seek participants' permission for the VIA to upload podcasts of their presentations onto the project website.

2.4

Action

Compile and upload sample educational resource. Post on project website. Invite 2008 Workshop participants to sign-up in order to feature their own research.

Timeline

Week 68

Benefit

The educational package offers an opportunity to build an online audience from any discipline, country or background who will not simply share in the Workshop presentations, but who will directly engage with the talks and contribute to the ideas contained within them.

% Complete

30% complete

Comments

The package will comprise a hi-res Workshop video presentation and its associated PowerPoint, both available as a hi-res download. When downloaded, each package will offer the core of a seminar, lecture or workplace discussion group. Users will be invited to provide feedback on issues and/or discussion arising from the seminar/lecture.

Next step

Edit video files and link to PowerPoint presentations. Upload on project website.

2.5

Action

Revise and update mailing list for the 2009 VIA Workshop.

Timeline

Week 64

Benefit

The current mailing list will be expanded, featuring specialists from archaeology, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, art history, science and technology studies, etc.

% Complete

20% complete

Comments

The current mailing list features 119 international researchers and practitioners from a diverse range of disciplines.

Next step

Connections arising from the 2008 Workshop and Research Showcase will be developed to expand the mailing list.

2.6

Action

2009 Workshop Call for Papers – undertaken by e-mail and announcement on VIA's project website.

Timeline

Week 64

Benefit

Papers will be invited which offer new findings arising from current research in line with the 2009 Workshop's session themes. Participants from the 2008 Workshop will be encouraged to develop their research.

% Complete

20%

Comments

Abstract and paper submission will be made entirely online through the project website. In an effort to facilitate greater discussion at the 2009 Workshop, there will be a need to either reduce the number of participants or run parallel sessions.

Abstracts deadline: c.May 2009

Next step

Agree scope of the 2009 Workshop.

3 Strategic Report

Following an initial meeting of its working group, the Strategic Report has undergone a shift in focus and structure. Since that first meeting Peter Hinton (IFA), Dan Hull (CBA) and Robin Taylor (English Heritage) have agreed to join the existing working group. An early draft of the survey questionnaire was composed in light of the Report's restructuring. Further work was suspended as stage payments from the funding body were delayed; however, those funds were eventually released in full, and work on this element of the project has now resumed. The questionnaire is in its final draft form and a covering letter has been composed. English Heritage have kindly offered to pilot the survey. Further research is now underway investigating the nature of quality assurance of images produced for professional publications.

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

Questionnaire – pre-pilot draft. The questionnaire has undergone a number of revisions following valuable feedback from Dr Simon James and Trevor Pearson. The survey has been designed to inform a range of questions arising from the Report's opening section that seeks to provide, in broad terms, a benchmark statement of where archaeological illustration is now.

Timeline

Week 52

Benefit

The questionnaire is structured to provide a 'Snap-Shot' of archaeological illustration practitioners, a profile of the organisations in which they operate, the products they produce, and an understanding of professional standards and development.

% Complete

100%

Comments

The questionnaire and its methodology will be posted online after it has been piloted.

Next step

Pilot questionnaire and amend as appropriate. Compile mailing list.

3.2

Action

Questionnaire pilot – the pilot, scheduled for January 2009, will be undertaken by c.30 English Heritage-based archaeological illustrators.

Timeline

Weeks 60-62

Benefit

The pilot will test for potential ambiguity, for clarity of the instructions, for time to complete, and ensure that all questions yield the intended information.

% Complete

10%

Comments

Respondents will be asked if they objected to answering any questions and their thoughts on the clarity of the layout.

Next step

Amend questionnaire and covering letter as appropriate. Compile mailing list, agree 'Snap-Shot' date, and promote the survey through sector-focused newsletters and mailings.

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.

Best Practice co-ordinators: Garry Gibbons and Rob Read.

4.1

Action

Case Study scope and content – an earlier draft of the document detailing the Case Study methodology will now be revised in line with the amended structure of the Strategic Report.

Timeline

Weeks 58-60

Benefit

This resource is designed to critically showcase current non-traditional dissemination practices and should not be construed as a series of ‘must’ or ‘should’ be followed guidelines. Each case study will be relevant to the sector, provide concise and useable guidance, be directly linked to related professional issues, and kept up-to-date by inviting feedback from practising professionals and professional organisations.

% Complete

40%

Comments

The Best Practice case studies, whilst providing a stand-alone online resource, will substantially impact on the Strategic Report. Indeed, as the Strategic Report content has been developed, it is now acknowledged that the Best Practice case studies might directly facilitate a picture of organisational (self-)transformation.

Next step

See 3.1. Re-draft methodology, draft interview-style questionnaire, and arrange pilot.

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 2008 -- 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 pertaining to visual representation in the sciences, social sciences, humanities and arts.

Timeline

Weeks 52

Benefit

The bibliography seeks to connect users with the 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%; on-going development

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 2008 – 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

Weeks 52

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%; on-going development

Comments

-

Next step

Continued development and expansion.