Evaluating the CULTURA System for Cultural Heritage Collections: What do Researchers of Tomorrow Think?

Article · January 2013

5 authors, including:

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

ADAPT Centre for Digital Content Technology Research View project

Cultura View project

Evaluating the CULTURA System for Cultural Heritage Collections: What do Researchers of Tomorrow Think?

Christina M. Steiner, Mark Sweetnam, Eva-Catherine Hillemann, Cormac Hampson, Owen Conlan

Digital humanities initiatives make cultural heritage collections accessible to the global community of researchers and general public for the first time. The CULTURA project is developing a corpus agnostic research environment integrating innovative services that guide, assist and empower users' interaction with cultural artefacts. A wide spectrum of users, from members of the general public with specific interests to apprentice and professional researchers deeply engaged with the cultural artefacts, is supported. CULTURA responds to the diverse needs of these different user groups with a suite of services, including adaptive recommenders, social network visualisations, annotation and group collaboration functionality. We present an evaluation of the CULTURA research environment with the 1641 Depositions collection that has been conducted with 21 trainee researchers at Trinity College, Dublin. To investigate the benefit of the CULTURA features, a comparison between a baseline version of the CULTURA system and a system version with integrated services was carried out in a between-subjects design study. Over several weeks students worked in groups on assigned tasks by using the CULTURA system as part of their humanities curriculum. Subsequently, they gave feedback on their experience of, and feelings about the CULTURA environment via an online survey and a focus group discussion. Both versions of the system were assessed positively, with good usability and user acceptance ratings. While the integrated system version with its different features was quite naturally perceived to be somewhat more complex, students' open feedback was very positive and pointed to the usefulness of the search and exploration features provided. Participants appreciated the ability to create annotations and to use the system for collaboration. A range of useful suggestions for further system and feature improvement were collected, which inspired the next development cycle towards the final implementation of the CULTURA environment.