

The Raisio Archaeology Archive: Using Design to Build Collaborations

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Introduction

Sometimes web sites get built to promote a company or a product. It is also possible that a website is constructed as part of the documentation strategy in a project. In my presentation I want to talk about how a website can be used to foster collaboration among the partners in a research project.

The web site in question is the *Raisio Archaeology Archive*. The site, which is part of my work towards the doctor's degree in design, was created with the assistance of personnel from three different institutions, namely the Media Lab of the University of Art and Design Helsinki/UIAH; the University of Turku, department of archaeology; and the city of Raisio. The web site is installed permanently in the Harkko Museum in Raisio, Finland.

Digital archive design

Archival documents arise as a result of human activity. They constitute the records of what transpired. In this manner the Raisio Archaeology archive is evidence of the activities of a group of archaeologists and a designer working with new media technology in the transitional period between the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries. The archive, however, does not intend to tell one particular narrative, but rather, to provide a platform of resources. Other parties, such as researchers, educators, museum personnel, and the public, can use it to tell *many narratives*.

The website was designed following models borrowed from traditional archival practices. The graphical user interface, for example, follows the form of an inventory register, a tool used by archivists when dealing with “the quantity as well as the complex organization of archival records.” (Fox and Wilkerson 1998)

The navigation strategies used are not always straightforward and different models are proposed. Illuminated letters, for example, allow the guest to navigate from a 2D document page into an interpretive 3D representation (3D World) of the landscape. This representation is based on an existing map, dating to 1725, that is also included in the archive.

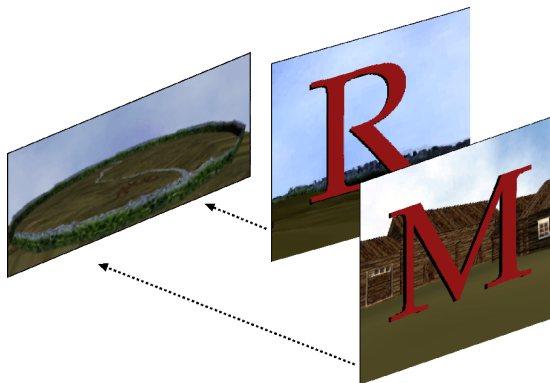


Fig. 1: Illuminated letters “R” and “M” provide entry into a 3D World.

Communication and design processes

The resources created are basically of two types: *Media artifacts* and *tools*. The designer developed the term *media artifact* as placeholder for digital representations. It is a way to translate technical language and design processes into a more comprehensible and usable framework for the content producers. There are *media artifacts* of material culture from Southwestern Finland in the form of still images, interactive panoramas, time-based digital videos, 3D models, and textual narratives and reports. The *tools* in the archive allow the guest to augment and customize the existing interface. The *Classification* system and *Search* engine, for example, allows the guest to access a textual mode of navigation. While the expert, who knows the proper terminology can find out if a given topic is covered, the non-expert can search through an expanding tree structure and see what is indeed covered.

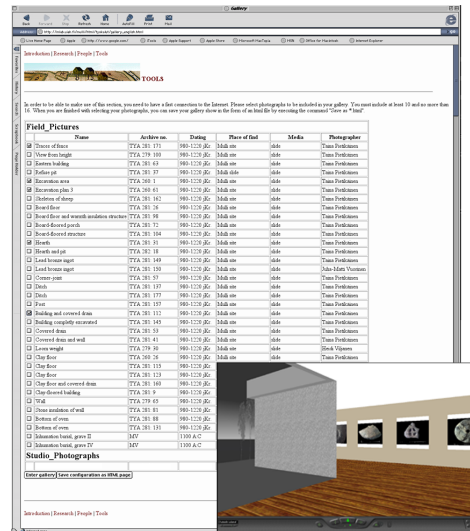


Figure 2: 3D Gallery is created dynamically. Clicking on the works displays the web page of each object in a separate window.

The 3D Gallery authoring system is a tool that allows the guest to select from the materials in the archive and curate an exhibition. The selection—that is displayed in a VRML 3D model—can be visited immediately. Or it can be saved as an HTML document for annotation and later use.

Web site Url: http://www.mlab.uiah.fi/mulli/e_index.html

FOX MICHAEL J., & WILKERSON PETER L. 1998.
Introduction to Archival Organization and Description,
The Getty Information Institute, Suzanne Warren, Ed., 20-21.

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