



FP7-JPROG-2011-RTD Project no. 277606-JHEP

## JHEP

# Coordination action in support of the implementation of a Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) on Cultural Heritage and Global Change: a new challenge for Europe

Instrument: Coordination and support actions (Coordinating type)

### Deliverable: 6.2

## Title: "Set up external web-based communication and information portal for public information".

Due date of deliverable: *March, 2012.*

Actual submission date: *April, 2012.*

Start date of project: 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011

Duration: 3 Years

Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities (Italy)

Project coordinator: Antonia Pasqua RECCHIA

Project co-funded by the European Commission within the Seventh Framework Programme (2007- 2013)		
Dissemination Level		
PU	Public	PU
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- This report is submitted in respect of JHEP Deliverable 6.2 ("Set up external web-based communication and information portal for public information") by The Heritage Council of Ireland – An Chomhairle Oidhreachta – as Work Package 6 leader.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- As stated in the Description of Work (Grant Agreement No. 277606, JHEP, Annex 1): "Methods for communication will include a public website using the existing infrastructure of the Net Heritage Observatory produced within the Net Heritage project, where stakeholders can access information bespoke to be of interest to them, and which can be used by JPICH participants".
- As such, Deliverable 6.2 refers to the transfer of the Net Heritage Observatory site from the Net Heritage to the JHEP management structures, and its re-positioning within the public consciousness an instrument of the JPICH.

## **3. REPORT ON THE TRANSFER PROCESS**

- The Heritage Council employed a communications specialist in January 2012 to project-manage Work Package 6 and handle all communications issues relating to our involvement in the JHEP project. Ms. Eimear O'Connell MA formally commenced employment as an in-house consultant for The Heritage Council on January 4<sup>th</sup> 2012.
- A process of liaison with Nick Poole at the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK – site designer and administrator for the Net Heritage Observatory – and Julie Clayton, self-employed contractor to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK – site editor for the Net Heritage Observatory – was undertaken in January and February 2012.
- As a result of this process, administration of the site has now been transferred to The Heritage Council of Ireland.
- Also as a result of this process, editorship of the site has now been transferred to Ms. Eimear O'Connell at The Heritage Council of Ireland.
- On technical advice, the physical hosting of the site (server location) remains in the UK, with Cloak Internet Ltd., a dedicated web hosting provider. The intention is that the physical hosting of the site will transfer to an Irish server location, more directly accessible to The Heritage Council of Ireland as site administrators, before the end of 2012.

- In order to ensure continuity of service while the technical and design aspects of the site are re-assessed, Julie Clayton has been retained to provide part-time content-generation and editorial services on a one-day-per-week basis. This ensures a seamless transition for all users of the site.
- Google Analytics results for the site continue to reflect a slow but steady increase in users and an expanding range of referrals from other sites, testament to the seamless nature of the transfer process.

#### **4. REPOSITIONING THE SITE**

- The Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK had already begun a process of rebranding the Net Heritage Observatory as the **Heritage Portal**, a process which has continued under the stewardship of The Heritage Council of Ireland.
- The remit of the Heritage Portal has been expanded to reflect the broader remit of the JPICH relative to Net Heritage: Content parameters have been expanded to include digital and intangible heritage and new country pages have been added to include the wider number of countries participating in the JPICH relative to Net Heritage.
- A process of 'soft marketing' has been undertaken to ensure that all existing users as well as potential new users are aware of the transfer of the Heritage Portal site to the management of The Heritage Council of Ireland, under the terms of the JPICH.
- Ms. Eimear O'Connell has attended a number of both national and international conferences on behalf of The Heritage Council of Ireland in order to maintain and raise awareness of the Heritage Portal among directly-interested stakeholder communities.
- New content, referencing the JPI, continues to be added to the site at regular intervals.
- The Heritage Council of Ireland has sought proposals from a number of specialist web development companies for a more comprehensive re-design and re-branding of the site and plans to give the go-ahead on this process within the next month.
- Further information on the process by which the need for a more comprehensive re-design and re-branding of the site was established is given in Section 5 below.

#### **5. OUTSTANDING ISSUES**

Having taken over management of the Heritage Portal, via the transfer process described in 3 above, The Heritage Council of Ireland carried out a comprehensive

assessment of the existing site as well as seeking consumer feedback<sup>1</sup>. This led to the identification of a number of serious outstanding issues with the site, which were too wide-ranging to be addressed under the terms of Deliverable 6.2 and which will form part of more long-term strategy for the management and promotion of the Heritage Portal site:

- The version of Joomla!™ on which the Heritage Portal site is built is now outdated and several technical problems have been generated as a result – notably a virus issue in February 2012 as well as other, more minor, glitches. The platform needs to be updated, requiring a comprehensive overhaul of the site.
- Perception among the target users surveyed by The Heritage Council of Ireland is that the site is not sufficiently user friendly to entice regular new users, and in particular, to entice user-contributors (our key target demographic). Navigation through the site is perceived to be difficult and confusing and – crucially – the site fails to provide a clear brand message to new users.
- As previously noted in the preliminary studies carried out under Net Heritage prior to establishing the Net Heritage Observatory (now the Heritage Portal), user-contributors are the site's key target demographic. This being the case, the site urgently needs to move from being an editorially-led information platform (which it currently is) to a user-led conversation platform (where the vast majority of content generation comes from the users themselves, who engage actively rather than passively with the site). The current information architecture of the site does not favour this transition.
- The current site is not well optimised for Search Engines. For example, there is no XML site map in place, meta-titles and descriptions are not optimised, the site name without www. does not automatically redirect to the site name with www., browser caching has not been exploited, H1 headings have not been optimised, and more concerted work is needed on building strong links with other relevant sites. Search Engine Optimisation is crucial to the development of a wider audience and an active user community for the site.

## **6. MARKETING STRATEGY**

- Given the comprehensive issues identified by the assessment process described in 5 above, a 'soft marketing' approach has been adopted in the short term, aimed at

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<sup>1</sup> This consisted of informal interviews with & written feedback from known target-users of the site: eg. those currently working in various areas of cultural heritage research, those who routinely utilise the findings of cultural heritage research, and those involved in the broader (non-research-specific) cultural heritage community.

maintaining awareness of the site among existing users, familiarising new users with the site's existence and disseminating new content among targeted user communities. This approach has been taken to minimise the risk of audience-loss and high bounce rates (where users visit the site's home page only once, but fail to explore other areas of the site and fail to return for a repeat visit) due to the identified lack of user-friendliness within the current site.

- In the meantime, proposals have been sought for a comprehensive re-design of the site, addressing all of the issues identified above, and – subject to approval of our procurement procedure at board level within The Heritage Council of Ireland – we will give the go-ahead on this process within the next month.
- All companies who submitted proposals have been advised of the importance of retaining existing content, and of minimal down time for the site during the overhaul process. Again, this is aimed at ensuring a seamless transition for existing users.
- At this stage a re-launch of the new-look site is tentatively envisaged for August 2012.
- Following the re-launch we will move to a more aggressive marketing strategy: utilising connections with multiple social media platforms (facebook, twitter, linkedin, instagram, google+, etc.), increasing public dissemination efforts, and actively soliciting content creation by new users. The crucial difference being that the site will now be optimised to facilitate this level of user interaction.
- The new-look Heritage Portal site and its interaction with the broader remit of the JPICH will form a key part of Deliverable 6.1 – the Strategic Communication and Dissemination Plan, to be delivered by The Heritage Council of Ireland in Month 15 (December 2012).

## **7. SUMMARY: THE HERITAGE PORTAL GOING FORWARD**

- The Heritage Portal has significant potential to become a single-point of information exchange and retrieval for heritage stakeholders across Europe, and as such a long-term marketing strategy for the site is essential. For this reason we have designed our marketing approach in two phases: initial soft marketing, followed by a more aggressive strategy once the re-design process is complete.
- The Strategic Communication and Dissemination Plan will also be central to this process.
- Additionally, it will be crucially important that all participant countries in the JPICH 'buy in' to the use of and potential for the Heritage Portal site.

- 'Buy in' from European Commission, as Framework Programme funders for numerous cultural heritage research projects would also be highly desirable.
- The Heritage will continue to work closely with Work Package 1 co-ordinators (Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Italy) in areas where the Heritage Portal and JPICH websites can be mutually beneficial and in areas where internal and external communications relating to the project may overlap.

## **8. AUTHORSHIP**

Report compiled by Eimear O'Connell, Project Manager: JPICH, on behalf of The Heritage Council of Ireland – An Chomhairle Oidhreachta.