

## Book Review: Cultural Heritage Information - Access & Management

Ruthven, I. and Chowdhury, G.G. (eds)

Facet: 2015

ISBN: 978-1-85604 -930-6

[Further information](#)

Reviewed by Margaret Katny, BBC Archives [margaret.katny@bbc.co.uk](mailto:margaret.katny@bbc.co.uk)

Cultural Heritage Information is the first title in the newly introduced iResearch series. It has been peer-reviewed and is aligned with objectives of [iSchools](#) to provide authoritative sources for students and researchers in the field of Information Science.

This work is a joint effort of eighteen authors from six countries. The chapters have been ordered to allow for scene setting - policies and infrastructures - through to delving into access issues, interface implementation issues and finishing with considerations of sustainability of systems and their availability for future generations.

Memory institutions have always been managing and making accessible cultural heritage information resources. These resources come in many shapes and forms - texts, images, manuscripts, audio, audiovisual files or artefacts. In the last two decades they have undergone extensive digitisation, which made them accessible in a way they have never been accessible before. Digital cultural heritage information services such as [Europeana Digital Library](#) or the [Oral History collection of the British Library](#) have come into being. Yet the design, development and implementation of cultural information services resources tends to be complicated, labour intensive and costly.

I have found the chapter on policy issues relating to digitisation and management of cultural information particularly interesting as this is something I have seen many times working for the BBC Archives. It can be argued that all cultural heritage information should be made available to all but this is often less than straightforward due to intellectual rights limitations, legal issues, contextual challenges or cultural sensitivities. The need for universal accessibility needs to be balanced against a number of issues such as protecting particular information, ensuring against undue commercial exploitation or maintaining integrity of cultural works.

Another concept close to my heart that is explored in this book is metadata. The authors discuss metadata in the context of “manga” - Japanese graphic comics. They demonstrate how manga can be harnessed by metadata and indexing and how good quality and interoperable metadata is the key to finding, accessing and using cultural information as well as providing a coherent and welcoming user experience. Metadata becomes even

more important in the linked and annotated digital environment where networks may grow and overlap.

Users and their needs feature prominently throughout this work. There are many types of users of cultural heritage information such as researchers, academics, students, children, tourists, the general public or cultural institutions. They all have specific characteristics that should be borne in mind in the design and usability of services. Not surprisingly, user-centred design is often difficult to achieve. It is becoming even more challenging as users expect access to cultural heritage information on their mobiles, tablets, integrated with their social media, crowd sourced and enhanced with user-generated content.

It has to be remembered that digital heritage information has a practical dimension. It contributes to the economy in a direct and indirect way. Providing access to digital heritage information offers economic benefits and enables cultural content to be used to develop education, tourism, media or design. Digital preservation of cultural heritage requires substantial expenditure, often involving public and private partnership but one can expect some return on investment which, to a certain extent, could be measured in commercial or monetary terms. The authors argue that economic sustainability should be taken into account when considering digital heritage information services. Social sustainability is also important to make sure that services and systems serve users and offer them value while protecting cultural heritage and intellectual rights. Lastly, environmental sustainability is mentioned in the context of energy usage involved in digitisation, processing and access functions.

This book provides a state-of-the art overview of issues in the field of cultural heritage information. It is a useful resource for academics and researchers but also practitioners working in memory institutions who wish to learn from the research and experiences of others.