



cooperation in
cultural heritage

Local Showcases: Guidelines for Involving and Training Young People

In the CreativeCH project four local showcases explore and demonstrate how combining cultural heritage content, creativity and technology can help promote the development of regions, towns and other communities.

The showcases focus on different cultural heritage: archaeological sites and routes in Tuscany, the World Heritage city Salzburg, industrial heritage sites and routes in Catalonia, and rural heritage communities in the multi-cultural region Banat / Romania.

Yet a common activity is to involve and train students and other young people in the creative promotion of cultural heritage using novel ICT solutions.

Concepts and advice

The CreativeCH team at the project partner University of Coimbra supports the showcases with training concepts and advice. The team has experience in working with students and young professionals from different countries, developed since 2006 in the EuroMACHS European Master Programme.

EuroMACHS takes a project-based approach to the development of relevant competences and skills. This brochure

- presents the general concepts of the approach,
- highlights skills that should be developed, and
- shares lessons learned (“Do and Don’t”).



General concepts

Successful projects require a balance of four dimensions: technology, content, project management and design:

Technology:

Technology should be used as a means of transporting quality content and not as an end in itself. New technologies tend to be explored because of the novelty factor and it takes time to find ways of using them to communicate content effectively.

Hence students should be trained in thinking of technology as a vehicle for content, communication and user interaction, not as an end in itself.

Content:

Content must be specially matched to the technological environment. Good content does not exist per se. Content is as good as it fits the purpose for which it is being used. In technological environments this always involves trade-offs and, hence, difficult choices to be made.

Students should become aware that just presenting a lot of content is not enough. The specificity of the medium, the usage scenarios and a clear view of the relevance of information is essential to shape existing and new content for digital formats and applications.

Project management:

Project management skills are essential for the development of innovative initiatives in the area of Heritage and New Media. Real world projects always involve multidisciplinary teams and complex interactions and decisions. Therefore students should be put into situations where they learn how to interact with peers and actors in other fields and develop a project-oriented view of the tasks at hand. This includes basic project management techniques, exposure to relevant content development tools, and understanding of copyrights and licensing.

Design:

Design is important as it impacts both the look and feel of products and their usability. It is possible to combine adequate content with proper technology in a well-managed project and still produce a result which is unattractive and not user friendly.

Hence students should learn to appreciate the role of functional design and the aesthetic dimension in user oriented products.

Skills that should be developed

The training of students and other young people should help them to develop – in a real context – some of the following skills:

- Formulation of ideas for new projects that use historical content and new technologies, including project concepts aimed at specific funding opportunities.
- Analysis of the web presence of heritage institutions, aimed at proposing new solutions take account of their mission and possibilities offered by innovative technical applications.
- Development of original ideas towards real projects, including target audiences, stakeholders and partners, project tasks and budgeting.
- Understanding of the processes necessary to produce real and concrete projects.
- Participation in on-going projects with relevant functions at sub-coordination level, for example,
 - research of relevant content for a multimedia project,
 - preparation of selected content for integration into the product,
 - interaction design and quality control, and
 - working with end users, e.g. testing and evaluation.

From the experiences of working with EuroMACHS students some lessons learned can be shared about what to do and what to avoid:

Lessons Learned – Do and Don't

Do:

Integrate students in project activities where they can understand the overall aims and success criteria and how they fit into the project organization.

Make students part of the management team of the project, so that they can gain insights in decision processes and project dynamics.

Allow them to understand that decisions must be made sometimes with insufficient information, processes occur in far from ideal settings, and errors do happen, even if they can be minimized through risk management.

Make some scarce resource available for students to manage (a small funding, limited time of experts or technical support staff) so that they learn how to think strategically when allocating resources.

Clearly define roles and related responsibility: A role is defined as having responsibility for one or more project areas (e.g. general coordination, content development, technological interface, usability testing, etc.). Responsibility means keeping track of things, define tasks, and oversee relevant matters. It does not mean doing everything related to that area.

Don't:

Assign students to tasks where they miss the overall context, aims and particular goals to which the tasks contribute.

Isolate them from the relevant decision-making process and management dynamics of the project they are working in.

Give students a perfectly managed environment where work was previously defined for them and problems and errors are not part of their experience.

Take a “you will have everything necessary for your work” approach; instead: allow students to decide on how to use scarce resources.

Assign successive atomic tasks to them; instead: assign responsibilities for certain dimensions or aspects of the project.