Sydney Culture Network

Data Salon #5 Briefing:
February 28ᵗʰ 2020

Topic: Location responsive museum interpretation

Convened by: Lizzie Muller and Keir Winesmith
Location: Hyde Park Barracks, Macquarie Street, Sydney.
Host: Sydney Living Museums
Speakers: Tim Girling-Butcher, Head of Digital, Sydney Living Museums, and members of the Local Projects team engaged by SLM.

Data Salon #5 turned to the theme of place-based and locational approaches to data. We examined ways to connect audiences to heritage objects and sites through intimate storytelling and location driven interactive technologies. We focused on Sydney Living Museum's new immersive experience at the Hyde Park Barracks, which opened a few days before the salon took place. Delivered in partnership with experience design firm Local Projects, the new experience tracks visitors as they move around the site and uses their location to deliver custom audio directly to their headsets.

Tim Girling-Butcher spoke about the formative evaluation the SLM undertook, the overall project goals and values and the sorts of stories they wanted to tell and audiences they wanted to reach. Tim explained the SLM goal of a "heritage museum without text labels".

The Local Projects team talked about the technical realisation of the project, which includes; location aware smartphone audio-first application that is given to every visitor, interactive spaces, custom software development, spatial tracking and reporting, as well as detailed exhibits, audio story-telling, innovative videography and collection highlights developed by SLM staff. The experience has been covered by [The Guardian](#) and [explained by SLM](#) for those who have not experienced it.

Discussion threads:

1. **User behaviour, prototyping and evaluation**

    Permanent public projects of this scale pose challenges of evaluation and adaptation. How can something this large respond in an agile way to emergent public behaviours? SLM and Local Projects' strategy was to keep the project at "proof of concept" stage in key ways right up till the point of opening, and to build in plans for ongoing change and adjustment. They provided some fascinating insights into how to use tracking analytics on site to

interrogate visitors' dwell times and respond to these through design and content adjustments.

2. **Audience experience and accessibility**

    We debated the pros and cons of an audio-led visitor experience. Participants were struck by the intimate and immersive qualities of the experience, and its affordances in terms of social v individual experience. The project team described their multi-layered approach to accessibility and diversity - including a number of different language versions of the audio tour. Local Projects gave insights into how audience experience and environmental considerations drove hardware and interface choices - including very high quality headphones.

3. **Organisational values as a driving force in technology decisions**

    In building an entirely audio driven, device dependent experience SLM have committed wholeheartedly to a specific approach to audience engagement at this site. An interesting theme that emerged in the discussion was how SLM as an organisation was able to make this decision. Members of the curatorial team explained how the organisation's strong values of bringing the past to life through multiple points of view, individual stories, and intimate insights into people's lived experience, drove the experiential and technological choices of the project. These core values also enabled the curatorial and technical teams to work together closely, and ensured buy-in across the organisation.

Future salon dates, locations and topics for 2020:
If you have topics or speakers you'd like to suggest, or your institution would like to host future salons, please contact Lizzie or Keir (lizzie.muller@unsw.edu.au and k.winesmith@unsw.edu.au).

Future salon dates for your diaries in 2020: August 28th, October 30th.

Sydney Culture Network's Data Working Group members:

Tim Girling-Butcher, Sydney Living Museums	Robin Phua, State Library, NSW
Lizzie Muller, UNSW Art & Design	Keir Winesmith, UNSW Art & Design