CASE STUDY EIGHT
Artefacts of Encounter: a collaborative project at University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Authors:
Carl Hogsden, Research Associate and Technical Lead for Research and Development, Artefacts of Encounter, MAA, University of Cambridge
Dr Billie Lythberg, Research Associate, Artefacts of Encounter, MAA, University of Cambridge; Research Fellow Mira Szaszy Research Centre, University of Auckland

Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA)
http://maa.cam.ac.uk/
http://maa.cam.ac.uk/aofe/


Project background

Artefacts of Encounter was developed by Dr Amiria Salmond in collaboration with a research team at MAA and project partners, including Toi Hauiti.
Aims and outcomes

Artefacts of Encounter was a 3-year project (April 2010 – March 2013) that located and examined artefacts collected on more than 40 voyages that entered Polynesia between 1765-1840, and used these artefacts as primary evidence of the nature and legacy of encounters between European explorers and Pacific islanders. A key project aim was to develop a way to collaborate with institutions holding artefacts, and the communities from whom these originated, via a digital platform. Our collaboration with Maori arts group Toi Hauiti was intended to initiate a reciprocal platform for co-creation around objects, providing access and authorship at a local level whilst simultaneously sharing information amongst project partners.

Were you merely providing access / information or was this a project with mutual aims and outcomes?

Neither the MAA team nor Toi Hauiti was merely providing access or information. Rather, Toi Hauiti’s longterm digitisation visions for a knowledge archive were compatible with the MAA team’s aims to develop a digital research network.

How were the aims/outcomes agreed?

Aims and outcomes were agreed via a consultation process over a year-long period, through face-to-face meetings and workshops when possible, but more often via email or Skype. Project applications that specified aims and outcomes were co-written with Toi Hauiti, who guided the production of, and gave approval for, project outcomes specific to their involvement. Several conference papers were co-presented by MAA and Toi Hauiti team members, and articles have been co-authored.

Who were the lead personnel on the project?

New Zealand-based Research Associate Billie Lythberg, and Technical Lead Carl Hogsden (who relocated to NZ for 6 months to live and work with the community) lead the face-to-face collaboration with Toi Hauiti, under Principle Investigators Professor Nick Thomas and Dr Amiria Salmond, and with guidance from Distinguished Professor Dame Anne Salmond. Toi Hauiti’s lead personnel included Dr Wayne Ngata and Hera Ngata-Gibson.

Who were you working with (a whole community, a selected group or an Individual)? Please describe:

Toi Hauiti is an arts-focused working group of Te Aitanga a Hauiti, a Maori tribal group who live in Uawa, Tolaga Bay on the east coast of New Zealand’s North Island. They descend from Hauiti who lived at Uawa in the sixteenth century. They have shared lineages and interests. Many are artists; they are heavily involved with their local school and the promotion of Hauiti arts and knowledge.
Are you clear about why you were working with this selected group and with their role as representative of others? Please comment:

We had clear reasons for working with Toi Hauiti. They are a discrete group of highly motivated individuals who have shared goals, are adventurous with technology, and are willing to travel. For the past thirty years they have been underpinning their tribal development through the repatriation of knowledge contained within carvings and other artefacts now held in museums worldwide. They have visited taonga (treasures) in museums throughout New Zealand, as well as Tubingen, Florence, London, and New York, and had previously contributed to the Pasifika Styles project at MAA. Locally, they have held influential exhibitions within Uawa, and do much to nurture and promote their community. Toi Hauiti’s interests and previous practice in developing a digital outlet for Hauti knowledge on behalf of their wider community (Te Aitanga a Hauiti) provided the foundation for an effective research partnership. MAA offered to assist in return for a reciprocal arrangement around the exchange of digital objects and information.
Assessment of authority: why were you dealing with this individual or group; how were they empowered to speak on behalf of a community? Were you satisfied with their 'credentials'?

MAA had developed a working relationship with Toi Hauiti during previous collaborations. In addition, their Chairperson Dr Wayne Ngata is a well-respected senior academic whose personal credentials allowed us to attract support funding for a partner project, Te Ataakura, that ran in tandem with Artefacts of Encounter for two years.

Other partners – who were they? (Please provide website addresses if possible):

Pitt Rivers Museum, http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/

Was it a museum-to-museum; cultural centre project?

The collaboration was between MAA, Toi Hauiti, researchers and partner museums via a digital research network.

What were the budgets and other resources? (e.g. grant awards, dedicated staff, sponsorship):

The budget for our collaboration with Toi Hauiti came partly from the funding received from ESRC and AHRC for Artefacts of Encounter, and from the Nga Pae o Te Maramatanga funded project, Te Ataakura. There were dedicated travel budgets for Toi Hauiti and MAA researchers to visit Hauiti taonga (treasures) in overseas museums (Figure 2); partial salaries for technical developers; workshop and conference funding; and percentages of equivalent fulltime salaries for research team members from MAA and Toi Hauiti.

What were the timescales?

Artefacts of Encounter was a 3-year project, and Te Ataakura was a 2-year project. In actuality the timeframe for development allowed only a year-long lead-in period (mostly not face-to-face) and 8 months of actual development time. Toi Hauiti continue to work towards their goals with a boundless timescale.

Ethical considerations – describe what these involved in relation to the project and how they were agreed/adhered to?

Artefacts of Encounter observed ethical considerations when dealing with culturally sensitive content, intellectual property, copyright and publishing restrictions. It was necessary to develop access agreements with each institution from which collections were gleaned and MOUs with the institutions with which the project shared live data streams. In our work with Toi Hauiti we observed protocols put in place by Dr Wayne Ngata. In particular it was agreed that their digital repository and offshoots of it would
be 'owned' by Te Aitanga a Hauiti; publications would be referenced and quality/culturally assured by Toi Hauiti; Toi Hauiti would be kept well informed about knowledge concerning them; and Toi Hauiti would share knowledge on their terms in the same way as requested by some of the museums involved. A hierarchy was established wherein Toi Hauiti member Hera Ngata-Gibson was first point of contact for all communications, and Dr Ngata gave final approval on behalf of Toi Hauiti.

Please also describe any compromises, surprises and how the project may have been transformed through the engagement:

Much of our planning and early stage communication was carried out via Skype, which unfortunately proved insufficient for building relationships. It was only when we had regular face-to-face communication that we could establish the nature of the digital platform Toi Hauiti required, and more importantly, establish an adequate mechanism for sharing community-held knowledge. It took longer than anticipated to conceptualise technology according to Hauiti matauranga (knowledge systems) and whakapapa (relationships). However, the discussions that ensued facilitated the project team’s greater understanding of whakapapa/relationships, which allowed us to structure a technology platform that, whilst predicated on Western epistemologies, would be commensurate with Hauiti matauranga. During the project it was not possible to identify technical developers within the community with the specific expertise required to co-develop and sustain the digital platform. This initiated a program of training for key individuals so that Toi Hauiti can mobilise in-house resources when embarking upon future digital work.
What things would you consider if embarking on a similar project again?

First and foremost, there must be equal commitment from all project partners. The agendas of each party need to be clear and open to revision, taking into consideration the prerogative of communities to contribute to projects on their own terms in order to get the results they require and desire, over and above what has been written in grant applications. Partners must anticipate that considerable time will be spent figuring out how to do things rather than doing these things. Projects such as Artefacts of Encounter require a project liaison who is respected by both sides; in our case, Distinguished Professor Dame Anne Salmond became a necessary and effective facilitator at our workshops. Consideration must be given to the longevity of relationships and outcomes for greater sustainability, especially where projects have a long-term scope but only short-term funding. Whilst projects such as this benefit enormously from both institution and community being supported through independent funding, when co-creating technology this only becomes truly effective if both funded development time-scales are as closely aligned as possible.

What things would you avoid?

In addition to the points already made above, we would avoid relying upon virtual conferencing during the foundation stages of a collaborative project.

References to publications relating to project (online/in print):


