

## **Virtually Medieval – Web, Telecom, and Cultural Heritage (summary)**

The new information and communication techniques provide museums and other cultural institutions with outstanding possibilities with which to fulfill their tasks. It is clear that centralised national archives can be made available through the Internet, and over the last ten to fifteen years we have seen efforts to make that happen. But the new technology also puts organizations committed to cultural heritage services in a new situation, with new rules and different demands. The post-modern influences from the academic world during the 1980s and 1990s have created a different approach to the subjects in the humanistic arena. The background to this development is a greater understanding of the processes of interpretation involved in the writing of history. Today we know that the history written during the 1940s had more to do with the contemporary political issues, than with history itself.

In two cases: "Historical Worlds" (2001) and "Nordic Handscape" (2005) I described this development from a practical point of view. "Historical Worlds" is a web project maintained by the Museum of National Antiquities (Sw. Historiska Museet) in Stockholm, directed towards youth with an interest in role-playing games. The project was made in cooperation with Sverok, the society for role-playing games and conflict-games in Sweden with about 66000 active members (2003). The webpage ended up with content that included information on historical costumes, historical dictionaries online, 3D-world recreated milieus and a book on how to role-play using the museum itself as a source and a bulletin board for discussions.

Compared to web pages today "Historical Worlds" shows what the standard was when it was produced, rather obviously, since technical development is running fast. Today the only really active part is the discussion forum with about 500 000 visits per year. From working with the project I have learned that flexibility and sensitivity towards the needs of the users will be important in future projects of this kind.

"Nordic Handscape" is a project trying to find out in which way we may best serve our users with cultural information – on location. The best way of doing this may be through mobile phones, and the answer will be found out by the time the project ends in 2005. This step seems to be about ten years behind the Internet, with an aim to provide information *when* needed, *where* needed. Experiences show that users of mobile guides want

simple information, in audio format not longer than 3 minutes. Most users seem to request answers to general questions about the cultural landscape.

High quality will always win over time, when it is competing with commercial rubbish. An issue that must be raised today is what quality in digital media really means – a question just started being looked at in the cultural heritage sector.

Henrik Summanen

IT project manager

The Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm, Sweden

henrik.summanen @ historiska.se