

Digital Applications for Cultural and Heritage Institutions, edited by James Hemsley, Vito Cappellini and Gerd Stanke. Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2005. 305pp
ISBN 0-7546-3359-4 £45.00

This book represents a selection of papers taken from EVA (Electronic Imaging and the Visual Arts) conferences between 2000 and 2003. EVA conferences offer a 'cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary' platform for discussion of new technologies in the cultural sector. As such, the papers have been chosen from a wide range and breadth of source material (over 1000 papers). The body of the book contains a brief editorial introduction, a selection of papers organized across seven thematic chapters, and a final concluding chapter from the editors. The papers represent cutting-edge developments from their time and were undoubtedly of merit when initially presented, but several are already outdated and there is little further analysis of the conference papers beyond the editors' final conclusions.

As a whole, the book is weighted towards the topic of digitisation – perhaps because this is a primary topic of interest for the conference itself. Overall, the book provides a valuable overview of the breadth and scope of topics that are relevant to digital applications in the cultural heritage domain. This is reflected in the seven major themes that the book tries to cover – each of which is a huge area in its own right. However, from the perspective of a domain expert, the quality of each selected paper within these themes varies considerably in insight, accuracy and strength. Furthermore, several cover very technical issues whilst others provide an overview of programs being undertaken in specific countries (which are inevitably dated). Certain pieces, particularly those designed as introductory pieces, suffer from lack of references to wider research communities and topics related to the subject.

A significant disappointment of the book is the contrast between the chosen themes and the papers placed within each section. No explanation is provided as to the rationale behind the choice of papers or the choice of selection topics, and more could have been done to draw the different papers and chapters together into a more coherent and integrated body of work. In practice, several section titles bear little resemblance to the relevance of the papers within the section, and one is left with the feeling that the section titles may have been chosen before referring to the papers. Sections do not provide a coherent introduction to the theme in question; instead, the papers function as a series of insights or opinion pieces. The addition of a brief preface to each section, providing the background information that would be necessary to interpret each paper in the wider context, would represent a considerable improvement and more clearly differentiate between this published collection as a work in its own right and a set of conference proceedings.

Though the editors have not suggested a target audience of this collection, we felt that it

may be of use in several scenarios. Its usefulness to students is limited by the lack of interpretive analysis. Others, particularly in the section dealing with IPR and copyright (Part 5: Design, Review and Protection), are clearly pieces that should be situated in the wider discussions on the issue by active discussion, comparison and reference to case studies. However, as a series of case studies, the book is likely to be of use to the intermediate student – not in isolation, but as a resource to underline and inform discussion – and to professionals in the field looking for examples and ideas. Finally, several of the papers within this book would be relevant to the novice in the field looking for examples of the role of new technologies in the sector.

Reviewers

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