

**Themata 3**

E-learning Archaeology, Theory and Practice

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# E-learning Archaeology, Theory and Practice

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*University of Amsterdam 2009*

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## 04

### Evaluation of the course 'Archaeological heritage in contemporary Europe'. Survey of students' questionnaires *Andris Šne*

Among the aims of the project 'Archaeological heritage in contemporary Europe' was also a thorough evaluation of the e-learning course content and results of training in all of the participating countries. In order to reach this aim the questionnaire was prepared and everybody who participated in the course was asked to fill it in and give responses to several issues related to the organization, content, technical side etc. of the course. The questionnaire consisted of 67 questions. In this paper, the survey of questionnaires from the Netherlands, Sweden and Latvia is offered. Altogether 25 questionnaires were compared – two questionnaires came from the Netherlands, five from Sweden and 18 from Latvia. The different number of questionnaires received from different countries does not allow to make a reasonable comparison of responses among the countries and thus further they mostly will be treated together.

Altogether, in the discussed group of trainees participated 11 females and 7 males from Latvia, 5 males from Sweden and two females from the Netherlands. The average age of students ranged between 22 and 29 years, although there were also participants at the age of 44 and 66 years. Almost all of the course participants were students (i.e. 8 students from Latvia) while some of them were employees of museums, archaeological firms or heritage institutions. It is interesting to note that this course was taken also by a holder of a Ph.D. in physics and previous head of a school.

The received questionnaires make it clear that participants had decided to take part in this e-learning course to improve their skills or simply as a matter of curiosity. Only seldom it was mentioned that the interest in the course would relate to current or future job prospects. Most of the students had learned about the course through advertisements at their universities, while

some had found the course via the internet. It was the first e-learning course for most of the participants and only five of them had previous experience with e-learning. It is not so often when universities could have a possibility to offer courses prepared by an international team of scholars, and that might explain why almost half of respondents replied that their decision to enrol in the course was influenced by its international character.

Participants of the course usually were satisfied with its duration as well as the scope of discussed issues. Different opinions were expressed concerning the changes that respondents would like to make in the course but most of them were satisfied with the amount of theory in the modules and activities in the discussion forums. Several participants would have liked to have seen more exercises in the modules and also more possibilities for their own individual work.

The themes of the modules were treated as very interesting or somehow interesting by the course participants. Among the modules which students liked the best they named actually all of them but with some preference of, for example, *Theorizing cultural heritage*, *Geographic Information System as a method of management of spatial data*, *Images of the past*, *Cultural biography of landscape*, *Methods of engagement, publicity and media relationships*. But it shall be noted that at the same time almost all modules were named among those which students had disliked (while some students politely indicated that they liked all of the modules). The same situation applies to the questions about the modules that required the largest and smallest effort from students. A similar situation is reported as regards evaluating the modules from a technical point of view. They were evaluated in a very similar way which implies that subsequent modules were similar as regards their structure.

Some participants indicated that the first modules were particularly complicated due to the exposure to the previously unknown e-learning character of the course, but others had remarked that these were the modules with theoretical issues that demanded more time from their side. The dominant part of the students agreed that the course introduced new issues for them and that their content was understandable and the language was quite clear. However, opposite opinions were expressed to the questions whether subsequent modules were introduced in a proper order and whether the order of the modules were clear and straightforward.

Participants in the course had agreed that the knowledge and skills acquired during the course would be useful in their work and that those involved in archaeology would need to know these issues. The course content was considered as high (very high, high or rather high level) and the literature suggested for each module was usually treated as useful, interesting, appropriate and professional (while some indicated that it was also boring). Participants generally positively reacted to questions about the discussion forums and their meaning in e-learning while not all of them were satisfied with the writing of a group essay. It is interesting to note that students indicated their preference of individual work over collective undertakings. Very different figures appeared concerning the amount of time spent on the course. In general, students spent from 30 minutes to 3 hours working on each module while participation in the forum required 15 minutes, 30 minutes or even 2 hours daily. Most of the course participants admitted that the study of the modules were a more useful training method while some had also stressed the role of discussion forums.

The students generally held a positive view on the navigation through the modules and their interactive and multimedia features. The technical side of the course was also highly valued. But it appears that the syllabus was very seldom used and that almost everybody had met some technical problems during the course. Hence, it partly explains the opinion of several students who would prefer a traditional (academic) course if they had a choice to choose between traditional or e-learning solutions. Doubtless to say, this is also partly due to the limited experience with e-learning training in general but it is nice to remark that students see the future prospects for e-learning in archaeology (as well as in other disciplines). Students had indicated that e-learning has several advantages, such as organisation of their own study time, interactive character and discussion forums, use of new technologies, etc.

Most participating students indicated that this e-learning course (alongside training innovation) changed their view quite considerably about current and actual issues and themes in the archaeological heritage sector in Europe. They made it clear that they would use and apply the knowledge acquired in the course, even if they were not sure how and where it would happen. In this respect, for example, Latvian students were for the same time exposed to several topics, especially those relating to theoretical issues in archaeological

heritage. And that it is very much due to the international character of this course that allowed students to pay attention to contemporary approaches in archaeological heritage despite the fact that there are significant differences among participating countries as regards the practice and understanding of archaeological heritage protection and management.