SPARKLE case

DRS Digital Incubator for Museums

Who | Institutional Profile

Institution	Urajärven kartanon ystävät ry
Location	Asikkala, Finland
Short Description	Urajärven kartanomuseo is one of the oldest historical site museums in Finland. It was opened in 1928 and since then has served the local community. The museum is located on the peninsula of the lake Urajärvi. The main building and surrounding outbuildings serve as an exhibition, showcasing the life of the last owners -Lilly and Hugo von Heideman. Urajärven kartanomuseo and the surrounding English-style garden and park, called the culture park, is managed by an association - Urajärven kartanon ystävät ry, and supervised by the Finnish Heritage Agency. It was carefully renovated from 2008 to 2013. The museum's main building and two closest outbuildings are the place of permanent exhibition, which is open during the summer from May to September. Sightseeing is organised in small groups with a guide. Different events like the summer theatre, children's days at the museum, opera concerts and other activities are held in the park and the garden. Both are open throughout the year. In 2015 the museum was to be closed down, but the local community established the association to keep the museum open. Urajärven kartanon ystävät ry is a non-governmental organisation that was established by the local community in 2016 to ensure that the Urajärvi kartanomuseo remains open to the public. We strive to develop the museum´s operations, which are increasingly diverse, with thematic guides focusing on different topics and activities designed for various target groups. Most of the work is done by members of the association as volunteer work. In summertime part-time workers are employed as guides.
Ownership	Urajärven Kartanomuseo is a non-governmental organisation
Size	The museum is visited by 4,000 people yearly, led by volunteers and part-time employees

Approach to Digital	***Input by Justyna Neuvonen*** The Urajärven kartanon ystävät ry understood from the beginning that there is a need and space for a change inside the association and museum operation through use of digital technology. Although our team was lacking skills and knowledge about digital tools, we were trying to showcase ourselves on different social media platforms. We had even managed to create a mobile game about our museum! We are now in a process of creating our own strategy, where digitisation occupies a very important place. We are learning new solutions, some of which turn out to be a perfect match, other of which work less well, and we let them go. Currently we have one person doing most of the admin work, but slowly we are giving more tasks to our team members. Our digital skills are slowly growing. We try to find better ways to communicate with our audience throughout the whole year. Our goal is to be attractive to younger people so they can work with us and generate more ideas. We would like to answer the needs of the new young generation both locally and internationally.

Digitisation is creating challenges and opportunities for our small association and the museum. We believe that we can become a better organisation and the museum's stories will be enjoyed by many more visitors in future.

What | Case

Project Title	AR Quest: Urajärvi Manor
Timeframe	November 2022 – September 2023

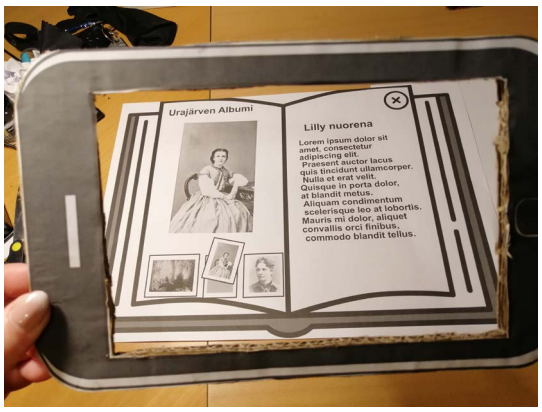
Concept & Approach

The Urajärvi Manor Museum is a little historical site museum which is hard to spot on the map. What is unique about it is that it is the oldest historical site museum in Finland, and it is operated by a local association. The last owners, the siblings Hugo and Lilly, wanted to give their home to the state for museum purposes and they prepared for this. Even now the museum interior looks as if they had just gone away for a minute and will come back soon. It is easy to move back in time with the help of our guides who tell stories of the von Heideman family. What stories those are! Love, hate, tragedies, happiness, misery and joy. With a bit of imagination, you can feel it. The problem is that the museum is open only through the summer season and even then, it is hard to reach. Also, the building is not suitable for all types of wheelchairs and people with disabilities might need assistance.

The museum in the old picture, The Urajärvi Manor Museum

Our road to the DOORS Digital Incubator for museums started about two years before the application to the first stage. Two students of Game Design from the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences made a mobile game for us. One of them was living close to the museum and also had an archaeological background. When we heard about the first stage of the application, we decided to go for it, as we had one more tech-savvy person on board.

It was obvious to all of us that we have quite a few problems at the museum. First and foremost is the opening time and smaller number of visitors every year. We had to find different solutions to expand the time our visitors could interact with the history of the place and our collection. To be able to do that, we had to change our old and dated website. We had been thinking about how to present our collection so it would be scientific, yet also fun and creative. Augmented Reality seemed to be a good choice, as there have already been applications where users could check how a furniture piece would look in their home. We had not seen such a solution at any museum website ever before and thought that this might be it.



Screenshots of a new website, The Urajärvi Manor Museum

We wanted to raise interest in the museum for people who are coming to the culture park, but not to the museum. So, we thought of using a rather different approach to those AR experiences. We assumed that people who will use this solution will come to the museum or have already been there and their motivations are somewhat different. Our target group here are young adults, as well as older adults coming to the park for a walk, either alone or with families. Those people are interested in resting, relaxing and spending time with their loved ones. They are not interested in downloading an application if they are to use it just once. Space on their phone is valuable. Web-based AR with fun and concise information could meet their needs. Later on we have made a survey which has proven that our assumptions were right. Some of our visitors had already been familiar with the museum and just wanted to relax. This is how we have managed to create a set of different experiences where Hugo, Lilly and their friends, through different quotes, letters, diaries and postcards, speak about their life and opinions. The design includes 2D graphics to ensure that the experiences will not look dated in a year or two.

We believe that by using open-source libraries and other solutions and plugins, we can create something fun and meaningful for other museums, too. Through the development of this *project*, we have been cooperating with Lahti University of Applied Sciences. Students helped us to make 3D scans of the objects, a cooperation that warmed our hearts. We have created personas to better understand who could be using our solutions, and a game design canvas to understand better as a group what we have been doing and why. The cooperation resulted in the layout of pages with objects and an AR solution. It was a fun journey where students said that they had a feeling of making something for the greater good. We hope to continue the cooperation next school year as well.

Students 3D scanning at the museum, The Urajärvi Manor Museum

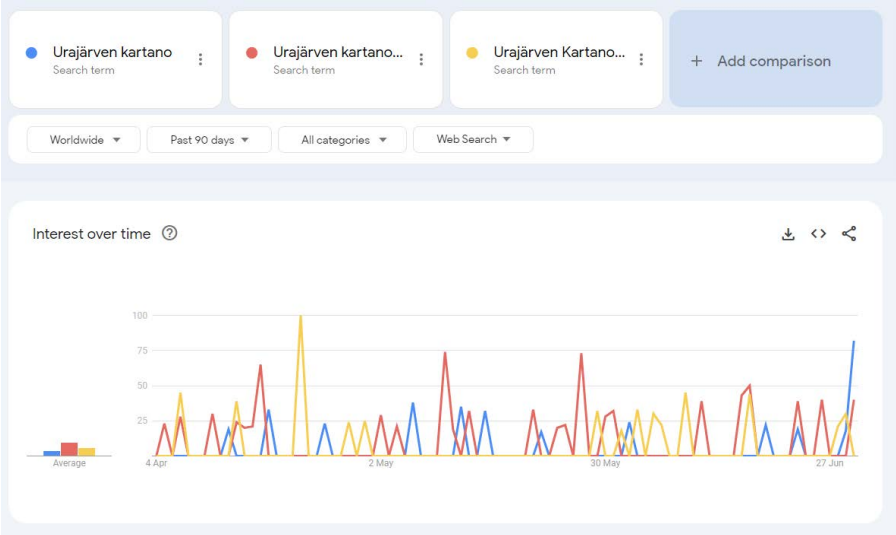
Side-by-side view of the real object and the AR experience, The Urajärvi Manor Museum

The municipality of Asikkala granted us with a small grant for renewing our information boards. This helped us to create new coherent visual identification. We were able to showcase our project in one exhibition in Päijanne Talo that allows us to communicate with a wider audience about this project. The summer theatre has returned after the pandemic. We are now having a renovation of toilets in one of our outbuildings and we received preliminary approval for using free space there to create a digital exhibition about our local history. It seems that the DOORS Digital Incubator for Museums sparked a big change. The Urajärvi Mansion Museum is getting its first facelift since 2013, when major renovation was carried outby the Finnish Heritage Agency. We are grateful to be able to work with the whole Doors Team and hope to create more projects in the future with innovative technologies.

Benefits & Impact

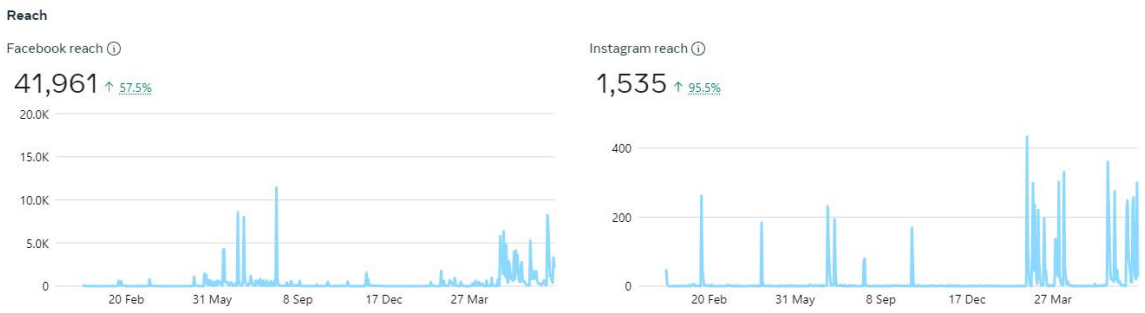
The most significant short-term impact is the amount of publicity the project gained in the media. Special programmes and interviews have been made. The information has been showcased on news, the radio, the national broadcast website YLE, the free local newspaper, and the regional newspaper, a full article.

Our website has gained a lot of traffic. Now the website is visited over 500 times weekly, and the average stay at the site Is 1.32 seconds. Google trends confirms that when features about the museum had aired on TV, the museum had been searched more times. The picture shows three main keywords - Urajärvi Manor (blue), Urajärvi Manor Museum (red) and Urajärvi Manor Theatre (yellow).



The Urajärvi Manor Museum

The increased interest in and searching for the museum usually starts around May. The end of the month marks the holiday season in Finland. The traditional holiday is Midsummer when most people search for the nearest events. Facebook and Instagram also show this trend, and this year increased interest started already in February when we announced 3D scanning with LAB. The first announcement post gained the biggest peak in December on Facebook.



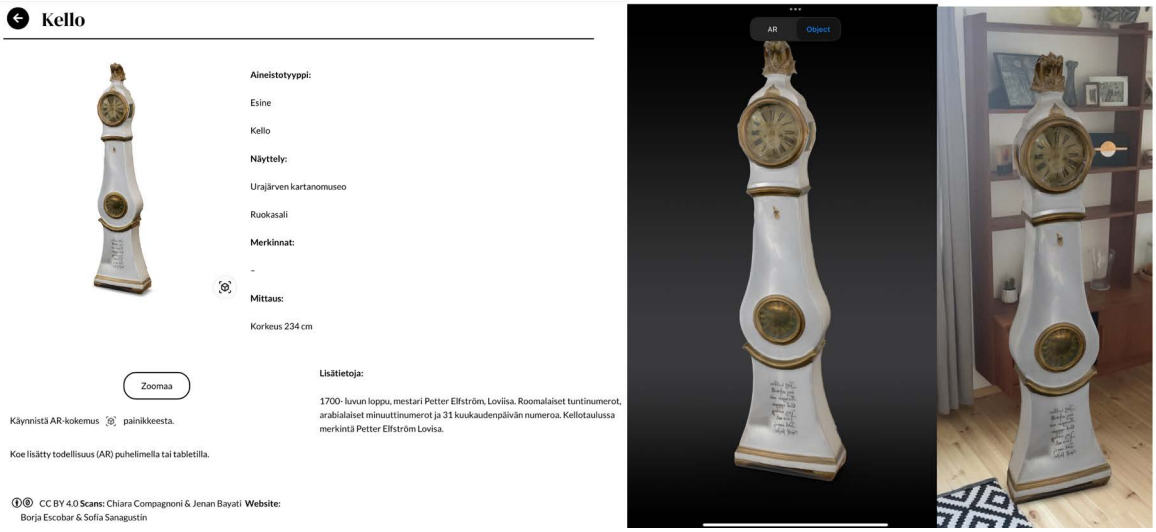
The Urajärvi Manor Museum

A bachelor thesis has also been written using knowledge and data gained through the project. Justyna Neuvonen wrote ‘Game development for museums’. The thesis is available online.

As the project proceeded, Urajärven kartanon ystävät ry decided that there is a need to create a digital exhibition and activity space in our outbuilding. We got preliminary approval for the use of the space. This idea will be developed further this year.

Limits & Drawbacks

Web-based AR solutions seem to be very popular nowadays, making people think it is a simple task to create such a thing. The biggest problem in this case was to choose a technology which would support different devices like phones, tablets, computers, and would be cost free and with low maintenance time required in the long run. The idea was to search for an open-source technology that would not generate additional cost, but would suit most different devices, depending on what AR experience we needed. That is why for 3D models, published on our website, we have used the <model-viewer> library and plugins for Word Press.



Objects seen on website on tablet view, AR object view on tablet and object in space, The Urajärvi Manor Museum

This allowed us to showcase the models on computers and scrollable objects and access AR when the user is using a tablet or smartphone. Unfortunately, this solution does not work on all devices - smartphones without gyroscopes will not be able to access the AR solution, but it Is still possible to see the object on the monitor. For the other AR solutions, we have been using the MindAR library, and for blocking and basic first testing the Adobe Aero. This has allowed us to design different triggers and experiences for visitors.

Future Prospects

The DOORS Digital Incubator for Museums was a great opportunity for us to open ourselves up to new technologies. We are trying to think about how to develop different ideas and we are creating new collaborative partnerships. This project has made us think in three different ways.

First reflections concerned us as an organisation, who we are, where we stand in a digital world, and who we would like to attract to join us. We are now creating a new strategy and we are trying to answer those questions and create an expansion plan. Strategy writing will help us understand our needs, coordinate tasks, and aim at goals. This part will be expanded after the end of the project as well.

The second way of thinking was how we expand as a museum. The experiences which we gained while 3D scanning, and development of the experiments, showed us that there Is interest in showcasing our collection online in different ways. With the help of Lahti University of Applied Sciences, we can do scientific projects and showcase them in a fun way to the audience. We hope to develop more ideas together and create a relationship of long lasting cooperation.

	The third way of thinking is how we can help other museums in our municipality and region. We wanted to test how we can use open-source libraries and tools to improve visitor experience. The work of micro museums, run by associations, is very Important for local people. Such museums count every euro and sometimes even the smallest amount of money could be a problem. The DOORS Digital Incubator for Museums could also expand into creating an open-source database of good practices and solutions in a form of do-it-yourself. Small museums and local companies could then continue the digitalisation process based on free tools and solutions.
Key Take-Aways	• Testing is the most important element in creating digital solutions. Even well designed and tested solutions might need some redesign now or in the future. • Understanding your audience is crucial. For whom the solution is designed? This question and various needs were taken into consideration at every stage of the design process. Did we succeed? Probably not, but we are for sure closer to the ideal scenario! • Communication, communication, communication... There were better and worse moments, but overall we have improved communication inside the association, both with visitors and our stakeholders. • Strategies, digital solution canvasses, game design documents, personas etc. Those tools all help to communicate, and it is worth using them and changing them to fit our needs.
Involved Parties	• Ometta Softworks (DSP) • Municipality of Asikkala (funding) • LAB University of Applied Science (3d scans) • Museovirasto