

## **digitalpasifik.org – Reflections on designing and delivering a bridge between worlds**

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### **Synopsis:**

The Pacific Virtual Museum (PVM) pilot project is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade in Australia, and implemented by the National Library of New Zealand in collaboration with the National Library of Australia, but with a deliberate focus on making an impact in the twenty two Pacific Island countries and territories.

The aim of the pilot is to make visible and accessible the digitised cultural heritage of the people in and of the Pacific. The pilot team have worked with a co-design group from across the Pacific, in a way that honours Pacific relationships, realities and timescales. The project has delivered an interface that leverages and presents metadata only, on a site designed to work usefully across the Pacific, on low bandwidth networks and mobile devices first.

As the design has been led by the co-design group, this has included how metadata is presented. The defined users for the site are those in the Pacific regions of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, who are not aware that cultural heritage institutions hold digitised records.

Some key points for consideration, that will be discussed with examples.

1. To make records visible and accessible required choices about how much metadata would display on the site. The schema for the digitalpasifik is based on Dublin core. We ingest copies of publicly accessible metadata from multiple content partners, and we never edit fields. As a result the challenge we have is how to map those fields to our front end in a way that best meets the needs of users of our site. This process has been led by our co-design group, and in a way that seeks to honour both content partners and the people of the Pacific.

2. We have designed the site for people who are not aware digitised records exist, or may be unaware of our content partners, there are a number of UX choices designed to make it easy to access records. Due to constraints (mobile first and functional in low bandwidth environments) we work hard to balance complexity of search and metadata and consistent experience on the site.

One consideration is that we have not presented all metadata fields on the interface, but rather seek to provide key data in a limited tabular form. We only ever present a thumbnail and do not embed any digital content such as audio or video. The site is designed to “push” user to engage with the source content, where the full metadata set and any media can be fully explored.

3. Location metadata is problematic to present and display – given it is often inaccurate, reflects a Western bias, is generic or missing. We made choices on how to reflect this metadata on the front end that were to make finding and accessing records easier. We do not always accurately present location data, but it is based on the metadata created and held by content partners.

4. Language is critical to being about and for the Pacific. Metadata in cultural heritage institutions is predominantly recorded in Western languages. There are a vast number of languages in use across the Pacific, and we are conscious of how to represent them. If a record has metadata in more than one language, the challenge is how to build a frontend that represents that metadata and complexity usefully.

We always present metadata as it's recorded, and this enables us to present multiple languages, if a content partner uses a language other than English. We only require that we match up the fields

correctly to enable our interface to be populated correctly.

We also considered how we design for people who may be able to speak English, but don't read it and who may not be academics. Our user testing reminded of this context and led us to utilise more icons and less words in the design.

5. We have fields in the API for Traditional Knowledge labels and are exploring ways to best reflect fields such as the Māori Subject Headings. We work with content partners and the co-design group to consider how to best represent their metadata, whilst holding to visibility and accessibility for Pacific based users. We

6. We have sought to make the search/discovery experience more engaging by designing a "Related items" functionality. The logic for these records is based on matching "subject" and "title" fields, to search for other items in the API. We then present the most related three options on the record page. The algorithm does not use any external service, so content partner metadata is never utilised outside out of our technology stack. This function is very beta and we are hoping to further develop it.

We have sought to enable Pacific people to access the content and taonga held by the cultural heritage sector, as well as honour the work of that same sector. In doing so we have designed a site that serves as a bridge between the worlds of Pacific people and the worlds of cultural heritage institutions. We also recognise that our site serves as a mirror for cultural heritage institutions – in that their metadata is available to them to view – through the perspective of Pacific peoples. The mirror construct asks institutions to consider how they might better record and provide access to metadata, and to imagine how they come into relationship with not just the artifacts of the Pacific, but with the people.

We also seek to enable Pacific based institutions to hold and honour their metadata, their artifacts, records and stories in ways that are relevant to their cultures, and to use the digital platforms they can leverage, from their islands. This approach can push at Western norms and standards, but also seeks to centre a lived Pacific experience and authority in a way that empowers these institutions and communities to make decisions on their terms.

My talk will reflect on some challenges and opportunities that the project faced and what these might mean for cultural institutions in the Pacific and around the world, when they are designing digital experiences for those in the Pacific seeking to access Pacific cultural heritage.

**Format:**

20 minute sharing, including live demo of the site <https://digitalpasifik.org/>

## **Related Work:**

### **DigitalNZ - <https://digitalnz.org/>**

Begun in 2008, DigitalNZ is built and maintained by the National Library of New Zealand. It is the search site for all things New Zealand, with more than 30 million digital items from the digitized collections of more than 200 organisations.

The site is built upon [Supplejack](#), the open source toolset developed by the team. Supplejack can be used to collect metadata about millions of items, from hundreds of data sources, across many different data formats including HTML, RSS, XML, OAI-PMH and RDF/XML. It transforms messy data, creates a unified search index and makes consistent metadata widely available via an open API data service.

### **[Ngā Upoko Tukutuku](#) (Māori Subject Headings)**

Ngā Upoko Tukutuku was developed by the Māori Subject Headings Project, jointly sponsored by [LIANZA](#), [Te Rōpū Whakahau](#), and the National Library of New Zealand.

The tool provides a structured path to a Māori world view within library and archival cataloguing and description. It supports cataloguers and descriptive archivists to assign appropriate terms for the material, and helps users find those items within a framework they relate to.

The terms listed are not a dictionary, and shouldn't be seen as authoritative beyond their use in libraries and archives.

### **Local Contexts - [Traditional Knowledge Labels](#)**

Local Contexts was founded by Jane Anderson and Kim Christen in 2010. Local Contexts is focused on increasing Indigenous involvement in data governance through the integration of Indigenous values into data systems.

Local Contexts offers digital strategies for Indigenous communities, cultural institutions and researchers through the TK (Traditional Knowledge) & BC (Biocultural) Labels and Notices. Together they function as a practical mechanism to advance aspirations for Indigenous data sovereignty and Indigenous innovation.

Developed through sustained partnership and testing within Indigenous communities across multiple countries, the TK Labels allow communities to express local and specific conditions for sharing and engaging in future research and relationships in ways that are consistent with already existing community rules, governance and protocols for using, sharing and circulating knowledge and data.