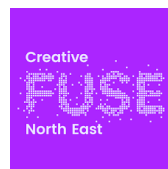# Durham Digitale

pilot project

2020-2021

Pilot project evaluation findings

A pilot project led by Durham University with key stakeholders/partners:

- Durham County Council
- Visit County Durham
- Durham BID
- Durham Cathedral
- Durham City Parish Council
- Creative Fuse NE

Report prepared and submitted to the Digitale Steering Group

by Ladan Cockshut, Mariann Hardey, & Aarron Toal, Creative Fuse NE

November 2021

Table of Contents

Report overview and Digitale introduction

This report shares the findings and observations collected by the Creative Fuse NE research team during the Durham Digitale pilot project. The project's collaboration and work began in November 2020, with activity starting in earnest in early 2021 and the bulk of activity taking place between February and July 2021. The project aimed to evaluate the various areas of the Digitale project to determine whether its approach could be developed beyond the pilot phase.

Durham Digitale was a Durham University-led pilot project taking place between January and August 2021, with input from key stakeholders such as Durham County Council and Durham Cathedral, aimed at providing an infusion of digitally oriented activities, content, and promotion across the City of Durham and, potentially, around the wider County with the overarching aim to promote tourism, economic growth and resiliency, with broader participation and opportunity for individuals and communities around the area, which has been in support of the UK Government's Levelling Up Agenda.

The **delivery of this work** took place across the following major areas:
- **Durham History Hunt app:** The development and launch of an app, engaging families and individuals in a digitally driven content 'treasure hunt' over the summer of 2021 (launched July 2021, with the beta test taking place with 23 people (including families) in May 2021)
- **Digital content audit:** A digital content audit across the university and key stakeholders to see what content can be adapted for use in the app (between January and March)
- **Digital art commission and installation "Vug":** The commission and installation of an online, digital art show entitled "Vug" by artists Petra Szeman and Sam Aaron at the Killhope Mining Museum in April 2021
- **Creative Lab:** The establishment of the Creative Lab, a freelance creative space for young people from the County in March 2021
- **Digital Symposia:** The holding of a Digital Symposia with key countywide leaders in May 2021 around the theme of digital placemaking

Pilot research

The Creative Fuse NE research team at Durham University supported the delivery of this research. Dr Ladan Cockshut led the work along with colleagues Professor Mariann Hardey and Aarron Toal to review Digitale's pilot, the aim of which has been **to research** the perception and impact of specified Digitale activities in order **to evaluate and monitor** its potential effectiveness and viability to move beyond its

pilot phase. This also helped inform the May 11th submission of a Community Renewal Fund application to support Digitale moving beyond the pilot phase.[1]

The evaluation and monitoring work of this pilot phase has been primarily qualitative in nature, utilising methods including interviewing, participant observation, focus groups, and group interviews across the following Digitale outputs (with ethical clearance granted on February 15, 2021):

- **Durham History Hunt app:** A series of five focus groups with app users in May to ascertain their engagement with and perception of the app, based on their use of it over a ten day period in May. This activity involved 23 participants comprising a representative sample of those using the app. The focus groups were recorded, transcribed and analysed for key repeating themes.
- **Stakeholder meeting:** A short and informal, Teams-based discussion hosted during the March stakeholder meeting to ask stakeholders about their motivations for participating in Durham Digitale, their evaluation of the pilot project, and their vision for the long-term project
- **Creative Lab:** Observational work during the sessions for the Creative Lab in the form of notes and participant observation by one of the research team
- **Digital Audit:** An informal interview/discussion was held with the digital content audit team
- **Digital Durham Symposia:** A member of the research team attended the April 2021 symposium and took observational notes
- **Overall:** Reflective notes were compiled by the research team on their own use of the app

Funded and supported by the university, this project provided critical opportunities to explore forms of engagement across the intersections of the digital, community and audience, and cultural and heritage areas.

---

[1] This application was ultimately unsuccessful.

Overall project findings and summary

About the Digitale project

1. This report evaluates the work completed during the Durham Digitale pilot project, which took place between November 2020 and August 2021. Research into and an evaluation of the project was conducted by the Durham University Creative Fuse NE team in parallel with selected key activities of Durham Digitale, namely the Creative Lab, the Durham History Hunt app, and the Digitale Symposia.

2. Durham Digitale was designed as a "new digital placemaking project centred around the technical development of public-facing apps and digital products. Initiated by Durham University and in partnership with the Digitale project co-founders (Durham County Council, Creative Fuse NE, Durham Cathedral, Visit County Durham, Durham Business Improvement District)."

3. The project aimed to use these projects and the research into them as a "method to support and enhance the digital economy, culture and ecosystem of County Durham post Covid-19, with evaluation and impact assessment designed in from inception. Aiding dynamic vision mapping for the County's digital futures, grounded in the practicalities of technical development."

4. Digitale was funded and supported by the university through its SPF fund. The project was an evaluative action research project which explored and provided critical opportunities for engagement across the intersections of the digital, community, audience, and cultural and heritage areas. The active funding period for the project was December 2020 through March 2021, with the actual project delivery work taking place between February and August 2021.

5. While Digitale benefited from Durham University's leadership and initiative in securing the funding and delivering its research aspect, it also benefited from the engagement, steering and involvement of key stakeholders across the project, including the Durham County Council, the Durham Business Improvement District (BID), the Durham Cathedral, Visit County Durham, and Creative Fuse NE.

6. The structural organisation for Digitale was steered by its Steering Group, which had representation from the university and Durham County Council; its stakeholder group, which met several times in early 2021 to provide input and feedback on planned activities; and the delivery team itself, which was comprised of Durham University colleagues, freelance creative facilitators, and members of the Creative Fuse NE research team at Durham University.

7. Digitale itself was focused on many areas of digital engagement innovation, some of which were about idea sharing, content generation and digital content curation (i.e., Symp0sia, Killhope), while others were focused on original digital content creation. This diversity of offerings allowed the Digitale project to explore and experiment with different areas of digital engagement and content generation:

- **Durham History Hunt app:** The development and launch of an app, engaging families and individuals in a digitally driven content 'treasure hunt' over the summer of 2021 (launched July 2021, with the beta test taking place with 23 people (including families) in May 2021)
- **Digital content audit:** A digital content audit across the university and key stakeholders to see what content can be adapted for use in the app
- **Digital art commission and installation "Vug":** The commission and installation of an online, digital art show entitled "Vug" by artists Petra Szeman and Sam Aaron at the Killhope Mining Museum in April 2021
- **Creative Lab:** The establishment of the Creative Lab, a freelance creative space for young people from the County in March 2021
- **Digital Symposia:** The holding of a Digital Symposia with key countywide leaders in May 2021 around the theme of digital placemaking

Understanding the economic opportunities and challenges faced by County Durham

8. In considering the improvement of digital activities and provision across County Durham, it can be helpful to consider its broader economic challenges and opportunities and how an improved digital presence and innovation could bolster the County's prospects, thus justifying the need for this project.

9. County Durham enjoys a rich cultural and industrial heritage, contributes significantly to the economy of NE England, and boasts a Russell Group university which brings significant economic impact and benefit to the County itself. It also has a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the City of Durham and nationally awarded cultural venues such as Beamish, Locomotion, and the Bowes Museum. Regular festivals and events are also crucial to the County's cultural and tourism activities across the calendar year, including the Lumiere Festival, Kynren, the Durham Book Festival, the Brass Festival, the Durham Gala, and Summer in the City.

10. The landscape of County Durham is also of note. It comprises largely rural and semi-urban towns, running from Weardale, part of the Northern Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, to the rugged coastline of Durham Heritage Coast in the east of the county. The Coast has undergone a painstaking recovery over the last couple of decades, now boasting exceptional coastal conditions and clean

beaches and drawing visitors and residents from as far north as Seaham and as far south as Crimdon. The historic City of Durham boasts historical spaces and

11. These impressive strengths stand in contrast to the challenges that County Durham faces as a transitional economy that has a high proportion of workers in low skilled and low paying jobs; high levels of deprivation, poor health outcomes, and unemployment; and low levels of productivity.

12. As noted in a recent report out of the Durham County Council, there is still a great deal of levelling up needed across the County to ensure it is on par with the rest of England, "In 2018, County Durham contributed Gross Value Added (GVA) of £8.8 billion to the UK economy, accounting for 16% of the North East total (compared to 17% of the employment base and 20% of the regional population). However, as a symptom of historic structural decline and under investment centrally in critical infrastructure, the GVA for the economy per head of the population is £12,259 below the national average."[2] This translates to a £3.2 billion gap in the annual value of the economy.

13. A region that is still impacted by low levels of infrastructure investment and recovering from its post-industrial and mining heritage, County Durham has been hard-hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Its already fragile industries such as tourism, the creative sector, culture, hospitality, and retail have experienced further challenges since March 2020 and put the County through a 'traumatic shock'[2] causing many businesses 'revenue downturns'[2] and increasing unemployment and benefits claims, particularly among young people. Exploring and developing opportunities to support these affected industries as they work to emerge from the pandemic and be part of the County's overall strategy to level up the wider economy and improve investment and infrastructure.

Digital engagement in County Durham

14. Digital engagement has become increasingly integral to civic activities and local tourism. It enables ongoing and widening inclusion of communities, expands the reach of the retail, hospitality, and tourism sectors, and improves access to critical cultural and creative activities across and within regions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, digital tools and activities have given local communities and businesses sought new ways to engage with residents and potential visitors beyond the traditional forms of face to face or bricks and mortar engagement that

---

[2] "Economic Recovery and Prosperity: Levelling up and Investment for County Durham". https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s133603/Economic%20Recovery%20and%20Prosperity%202-%20Levelling%20Up%20for%20County%20Durham_%20c.pdf

cultural, tourist, hospitality or retail spaces might have ordinarily relied on. This became particularly critical across County Durham's tourism, cultural, hospitality, and retail sectors, which found themselves disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the related public health measures put in place that warranted lengthy closures of services, venues, and businesses.

15. Whilst there are digital travel, retail, or event-based apps that reference or include County Durham (such as TripAdvisor or the biennial Lumiere Festival app) and does have online engagement through Web sites such as Business Durham or Visit County Durham Web (e.g., https://www.visitcountydurham.org/) and other social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook (e.g., @DurhamBID [Twitter], @durham2025_ [Instagram]), there have been less specific apps or digital platforms for the community or visitors to gain access to. Comparable examples where there are more apps specific to the region or city would be Brighton (https://brightonjournal.co.uk/the-best-apps-for-brighton/), Oxford (https://www.oxfordcityguide.com/app), or Cornwall (https://www.explorecornwallapp.com/). Improving the presence and access to public-facing apps is an aim of the Digitale project.

Highlight of project findings

The following outline key findings from evaluating the project, including overall observations; reflections on the Durham History Hunt app; a review of the Durham Digitale Symposia; the project's digital content creation work; and Creative Lab. It concludes with a series of proposed next steps for further consideration.

16. *Overall:* The piloted activities of Durham Digitale fill an essential need for digital placemaking by creating digital products in County Durham and can also provide new opportunities to engage visitors and county residents. It has the potential to contribute to the economy and provide local businesses new routes to market. A range of activities appears to provide effective engagement for different services, audiences and groups as well. There was some mixed success as to the final outputs generated through Digitale. On the whole, however, all of the predominant and related outputs were achieved by the project and enabled engagement across diverse audiences and groups. For example, Creative Lab was a crucial mechanism to engage with an often underrepresented group-- young people aged 16-24—while the Digitale Symposia facilitated a dialogue with key decision-makers across the County about cutting edge ideas and concepts such as digital placemaking. There appears to be scope and interest in developing this work further, with some elements requiring more development in a further phase of work.

The Durham History Hunt app provided an important idea of what was possible. Due to time constraints and challenges experienced by the digital firm in completing the work on time, the final product only provided a limited number of places to visit in the city of Durham and historical information on the selected apps was informative but clearly targeted toward specific audiences.

An important consideration is ensuring fair compensation for commissioned or participatory contributions to the project. Compensating participants for their time, either by paying the 'creators' who took part in the Creative Lab or gifting vouchers for the Durham History Hunt beta testers, helped ensure the success of engagement with and evaluation of those areas of Digitale. By compensating participants fairly for their time and contribution, the project ensured that their time and skills were valued and facilitated participation from vulnerable groups who may otherwise find it unaffordable to make time to give feedback or participate in ideation sessions. Going forward, a further phase of Digitale should ensure it has sufficient funding to pay for all of these activities in the same way that it should ensure it can fairly pay creative freelancers or digital firms who support Digitale going forward.

It would be advisable to pursue long term funding support so that digital activities and engagements are sustainable and updatable. This could take the form of in-kind funded support or redeployment from project partners and key stakeholders onto Digitale activities; commercial investment in the form of branded content creation, sponsorship or advertising; and/or funding from available innovation or economic funding streams, including Innovate UK or the anticipated Levelling Up Fund.

17. *Durham history hunt app:* The app in its current form is not particularly suited to any audience, though it may be most appropriate for solo travellers, couples, and adults with interest in local history. For families, there may be some benefit to considering the use of colour illustrations and other gamified elements such as a hidden object game or a themed walk (such as a Horrible Histories walk through Durham City). At the same time, Durham University students may appreciate seeing content that is of relevance to the university's history over the years. A recommendation for including a QR code and other similar features to help gamify the app, such as rewards for finding specific features or locations or new elements 'opening up' once certain places have been found or viewed. Another recommendation came in the form of a flexible interface with different choices or features depending on who the user was (so an interface that's suitable for young families versus solo travelling adults).

18. *Durham history hunt app:* The app's design featured some elements of accessibility and inclusivity (with a range of content and features such as both text and illustrated content), but could benefit from far more development to make it more accessible to a range of audiences (such as audio content or the ability to

change font sizes for visually impaired; colourful images to attract young children and families; information on access and steps for those with mobility difficulties; and customisable content to accommodate different types of audiences (i.e., students, young families, older adults, neurodiverse users, etc.). This customisable approach is readily achievable, though it will require significant resources, and was widely mentioned by focus group users.

19. *Durham history hunt app:* As a history-themed app, the app may not appeal to all audiences, but one recommendation to expand its reach would be to focus on different representations or periods of history, including contemporary history. Inviting the public to contribute to the app's content (with incentives and rewards for submissions) can also help expand its content development. To enable an ongoing process to submit ideas and content, however, there must be sufficient resource and funding to enable its management.

20. *Durham history hunt app:* In its beta form, and later publicly-released form, there was little to no engagement with or signposting of businesses either near or related to the specific sights that the app invited the user to see. Working with retail, tourist, hospitality, and creative sector businesses to help promote or sponsor sights or connect the user to existing business promotions (such as a 10% discount to app users) would generate additional support for the app and create more opportunities for local and visitor engagement.

21. *Durham history hunt app:* Going forward, more funding is essential to further develop the app to meet the needs of short-term visitors to the region and engage the wider local community. The app itself will likely be well adopted if it has some kind of functionality that permits users to specify their preferred usage—such as content that can be customised depending on how you want to use the app—and should have a process in place to add new content that is updated on a regular basis. A convergent approach that couples the app's content with multiple media, such as printed guides and maps along with audio commentary, would provide an enhanced engagement. An app will be most effective if it can benefit from ongoing management and development, so consideration should be given to pursuing additional funding that supports its development and maintenance on an ongoing basis.

22. *Digitale Symposium—digital placemaking:* The strength in this event, planned as a lunchtime digital information session, was its focused theme, varied speakers, and manageable timeframe, making it accessible and relatable for the target participant, key digital decision-makers across County Durham. While the format did not allow for a lot of interactivity between the audience and presenters, it did allow for a high-level introduction into the topic ('digital placemaking'), with the

option to further explore going forward. The use of surveying and the chat was innovative, but it could be worth considering additional mechanisms for dialogue during future events.

23. *Digital content curation:* Any future digital content auditing and curation would benefit from a centralised library system that permits the contribution of content from project partners, key stakeholders, and the public, and also clarifies access and rights to this content. A process and system to enable ongoing collection and stakeholderwide

24. *Digital content curation:* In addition, this work will benefit from the input and review of digital rights management and/or data collection and management through appropriate legal advice. A memorandum of understanding or a more suitable legal agreement would be advisable if the desire to established a centralised digital content reservoir

25. *Creative Lab:* Creative Lab represented a novel digital engagement activity for the County, in that it brought together young people from across the County— either in college, university, or in work--and Durham University undergraduate students to ideate a digital solution. This provided a new way for DU students to collaborate and interact with young people across the county and also secured input from a typically difficult-to-engage with demographic, young people ages 16-24.

26. *Creative Lab:* Creative Lab worked well as a mechanism to engage a diverse range of stakeholders to explore and ideate solutions to specific questions. It is a flexible model that permits time-limited workshops with specific 'creatives' in the lab event. In the case of the March workshop, it worked well as a series of workshops over two days with 29 young people who were both representative of the county (local college students; young people in work; and university undergraduate students) and the university. Participation levels were extremely high (100% of expected attendees), and only approximately 10% kept their cameras off during the Zoom calls. All but one participant (due to a scheduling conflict) attended the second day, and all participants (including the one who could not participate) completed the assignment set for them overnight.

27. *Creative Lab:* Creative Lab paid the young people fairly for their time and they appeared satisfied with their experiences. When surveyed after the event, all (100%) respondents (n.20) stated that they 'liked hearing different points of view' and 75% of them stated that they felt the format worked well, with the other 25%

noting that the format's effectiveness was dependent on the type of products and/or experiences being explored.

28. *Creative Lab:* This concept was clearly a good one and worth continuing (in fact it was recently run again with a Creative Lab workshop for Cosin's Library), although some feedback to consider would be ensuring time is built in for the participants to present their findings more (the facilitators did tend to speak on behalf of the young people a fair amount at times) and to ensure there is training to build confidence to present in front of the wider group. It may be possible to build up capacity amongst the Creative Lab participants to become facilitators and workshop leaders themselves.

29. *Creative Lab:* This is a model that is garnering some positive attention beyond the project itself, with it being referenced as a case study in a recent paper by Culture Forum North: *Culture Forum North: Research to support creating a new vision for higher education and cultural sector partnership.*[3]

30. *Next steps:* An evaluation of this project shows that there is a need, and desire, for more digitally driven content and products across Durham City and the wider county. There is also clear benefit from engaging a wide circle of content users and producers in its design and scope going forward.

31. *Next steps:* Next steps should include exploring which areas of Digitale to focus on next and also to explore a roll-out to more than just the city itself.

32. *Next steps:* There is interest in the Durham History Hunt app from our users, particularly if it factors in further development and improvements. It should consider a tour that not only looks at Durham Castle and Cathedral but also takes the user to Auckland Castle. This would require adding in Bishop Auckland to the app itself. The app may benefit from a long term, funded approach to make it as robust and user-engaging as possible. A super user group to help design and shape content—through the use of Creative Lab—would be one route toward that.

33. *Next steps:* The Creative Lab has proven to be a well-received, impactful and engaging model, with new creative labs already happening around Cosin's Library and plans for its use in the Durham 2025 bid. This mechanism has allowed Durham University students to connect and collaborate with young

---

[3] http://cultureforumnorth.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CFN-report-Towards-a-new-Vision-for-Partnership.pdf

people across the county—this should keep happening and helps support the access to university strategy of the university. This should be a key strategy of the university, going forward.

34. *Next steps:* The Symposium is a relatively low-risk and low-resource intensive activity that would benefit from consideration of further topics or even potentially tap into visiting scholars or speakers to the university to enable that content and expertise to be made available to our key decision makers around the County.

35. *Next steps:* A key learning element has been that this kind of large partnership-working project benefited from the external funding provided through the SQF fund as it enabled the project to reasonably support participants' time and involvement, which has contributed significantly toward the project's outcomes, beyond what each individual partner specifically contributed.

36. *Next steps:* The fund's flexibility also allowed the delivery team (through the Steering Group's oversight) to pivot re: Covid 19 'roadmap' disruptions, something we found notable about this fund as well. Our ability to be flexible and pay contributing partners quickly (many of whom were local freelancers across our County's economy) created goodwill for the project and garnered a positive reputation in the County, ensuring that the collaborators and respondents were more varied and engaged. This positive reputation has positioned the project as an authentic collaborator with a legitimate stake in the region, has been benefited by engaging with and influencing local policymakers in a small county where professional and personal networks are closely interconnected across multiple vital organisations.

37. *Next steps:* The steering group and stakeholders should convene a follow-up meeting (in the next few months) to determine a level of interest going forward and also to explore those areas that did not benefit as much from the Digitale pilot: namely the involvement and signposting of local businesses through the app and other digital activities.

38. *To sum up:* The Digitale pilot proved that there is demand and interest in digitally-driven content and products across the city and wider county. This momentum should be maintained by: exploring future funding options, considering expanding beyond Durham City, and better determining how to involve local businesses—particularly the digital, creative, hospitality, tourism, and retail sectors--in the work going forward.

Appendix A: Durham History Hunt app

The Durham History Hunt app was a core part of the Digitale project. Working with County Durham digital firm LOCALE, the project developed an public-facing app aimed at engaging visitors and the local community in exploring and discovering the city of Durham.

In its initial application, the project team described the app as:

> Our dev team will develop a series of apps and digital projects that will in themselves support local economic recovery and cohesion, and through satellite activities share live research and learning outcomes with partners and stakeholders. The pilot project is the 'Virtual Durham' app, an ambitious proposal by Adam Deathe of the Durham BID, with the goal of kickstarting greater e-commerce and virtual cultural and heritage experiences in Durham.
>
> App development will be structured as a series of 6-8 week iterative digital projects, pivoting to the changing economic and cultural needs of the region. For the sake of cost, speed and offsetting any risk associated with personal data management – we intend for the 'alpha' Virtual Durham app to be a tailored offshoot of a pre-existing app and platform, ideally from developers from County Durham. 2 such apps have been identified: a) ROAM (roam-everywhere.com) and THE LOCALE (thelocale.info). For their services they would be paid a fee.

We will have a transparent approach to the specifics and details of technical development in our digital projects, purposefully documented so as to be shared with non-specialists, that will give maximum benefit to the region with minimal impact on the speed of technical workflows and timelines.

The aim of the app was to pull together digital content through the app to encourage visitors and local residents to explore Durham through its history and places.

The use of focus groups was critical to exploring and understanding the app itself. We recruited 26 individuals and families (though that number was more like 52 when factoring in the family sizes, and we had asked individuals to test the app with their families), and 23 attended the focus groups. Participants were a sample of families, single individuals, couples, Durham University and local college students. Families were paid a £50 voucher for their time and individuals received a £30 voucher. Participants were sent a beta version of the app in May 2021 (released to the broader public in July 2021), approximately a week to ten days before their assigned focus groups. They were asked to take a couple hours to go into Durham City and test out the app themselves.

All participants underwent informed consent and groups were recorded for transcribing purposes. All anonymised data (in the form of otter.ai transcriptions) is stored securely on the university's servers, while identifiable recordings have now been deleted. All signed informed consent forms are also on the university's secured servers. Before each focus group, the focus group facilitator (Ladan Cockshut) dropped off a bag of creative materials (boxes, pens and pencils, papers, play-doh, etc.) to be used during the focus groups.

Focus group users were asked to respond to the following questions (and given creative materials to help devise and deliver their responses):

Question	Activity	Est. time	
1. Write down a word to describe your impression of this app.	• Use the post-it note pad/pen/pencil. Share with the group, perhaps explain the word. (1 min per.)	8 min	00:10
2. The app designers describe this app as: 'a	• Verbal discussion, go around the room (1 min	15 min	00:25

Pokemon Go-style treasure hunt mobile game app, free to download, and for individuals and households to enjoy safely.' Based on your experience using the app, do you agree with this statement? How did you use the app? Please explain.	per)—**write on the post-it note** • Use the box and draw an example of how you used it. (3 min prep, 1 min each) • Share with the group.		

3. Accessibility:
   a. How accessible did you find this app's **functions**?
   b. As far as the activities within the app, how accessible did you find **getting to the locations and venues**?
	• Verbal discussion (1 min per topic)	8 mins	00:33

4. Inclusivity:
   a. Do you feel that this app's features and content were inclusive?
   b. Can you suggest ways that this app and its content could be made more inclusive?
	• Verbal discussion (1 min per topic)	8 mins	00:41

5. Think of something you'd love in an app that explores Durham City (or even the wider County) and draw or map it onto the box. Feel free to use the materials in the box to support you.	• Use the materials, feel free to build. (4 mins) • Share, introduce your idea (1 min each)	10 mins	00:51
6. Would you use this app again or recommend it to someone else? If no, why not?	• Write **YES, NO, I DON'T KNOW** on a post-it note. • Discuss, share. (1 min each)	8 mins	00:59

Sampled data from focus groups (correlated to key questions/activities)

Question
1. Write down a word to describe your impression of this app.
'incomplete'   'curiosity'   'exciting'   'interesting'   'incomplete'   'Intriguing'   'progress'   'innovative'   'serious educational beautiful'   'charming'
2. The app designers describe this app as: 'a Pokemon Go-style treasure hunt mobile game app, free to download, and for individuals and households to enjoy safely.' Based on your experience using the app, do you agree with this statement? How did you use the app? Please explain.
• was kind of expecting something I but it seems to me that it's basically it's just different sites to go and visit and then there's information about them, but there wasn't sort of a gamification kind of element to it. As far as I can see.   • would be more like the pokemon if … when the green sort of bubble things [flag markers in the app] come up, and then when you maybe when he got to the site, if then it may be popped up the facts or information, then that might make it a bit more subtle.   • I do think that you could see the elements of that that we're working towards, but I don't think right now, you could say that's what it is.   • Yeah. So there's just enough kind of wireframe to get a sense of what it should be like. But yeah, obviously, a long way from completion.   • it was kind of difficult to navigate. So it was I mean we were in two minds at the time whether it will be good to have set routes to take or whether you know you just want to go on a wander and see And see what what comes I suppose if there was an option for both of those within the app, then that might be good. But that's that's essentially how we used it.   • I will said is completely different. I play like a lot of Pokemon Go. And it's like, nothing at all. Yeah. No.   • tiny thought when the new version is in development is some clearer kind of onboarding process. So you get a sense of what you're supposed to do with the app.

Yeah. And who it's for and you know, because it's, obviously this stage, you just loaded up and you expect to get on with it.

- And you sort of can see AR and you're like that, but it was more like a guidebook that you sort of just looked at it
- I mean, I haven't played Pokemon Go. So I understand thing here. But that was what I was expecting. I was expecting to be so like I expected focused on to be like, if you see what I mean. And I assume there's going to be some sort of, you're standing somewhere and okay, I know the apps not working but your phone is going to be even there's going to be some sticker or whatever it is little face animal thing that you're going to collect as a user engaged with that spot. So I agree with this statement is basically an online guidebook. Yeah. Which is fine. It's what it's sold. And if you're definitely not aiming it, children, but if you are trying to have it as a more gamey, then it really isn't that I don't think

3. Accessibility:

    a. How accessible did you find this app's functions?

    b. As far as the activities within the app, how accessible did you find getting to the locations and venues?

- It wasn't kind of age appropriate for a five year old. I think the visuals as well also speak to a different audience. Which isn't about you know, you don't have to be audience specific. So that's not a criticism necessarily. It's just, yeah, I don't think it's a family five year old app.
- I would actually use the app to plan a route rather than to discover things. And there's two reasons for that. First of all, I'm, I'm a planner. That's what I do in life. I like things to be organised and planned, rather than wandering. And also I have a three year old, and he won't walk very far he walked long distance, but you need to have a route. You can't just meander and you need to know what's coming up next.
- the first place that we went to was St. Margaret's church. And that was quite difficult, you know, there are steps at the front and then having to climb up there and then walk around that the ground was uneven. So I think if anybody had any mobility issues, that that might have been a problem. And the one thing that we discussed is whether the app could have some sort of information on about particularly difficult places to access that. So just as a warning for anybody that might have any issues.
- if you know the accessible route via the dual carriageway, there are no steps you can get there with a push chair or wheelchair. But if you don't, and you convey a silver Street, then there's lots of steps. So I think it depends on your local knowledge as to how you access specific sites, and also the hills. Like you wouldn't want to go up the hills and then come down a hill if you knew a route where you only did that once, for example.
- There's a combination of kind of business information, information, you probably don't need, like, where the prisoners and then all the, the enticing green flags as well. And I can imagine for someone who's neurodiverse, that's a bit of risk of information overload. So a layering system will be good.
- I'm not sure from a different angle to be quite nice if there is some more like sound layer to that. Because if it's so focused on the visual side of things, I think those visuals need to be like very punchy, very bright, whereas if it maybe had some like sound and stuff, that side can be turned out a bit more interesting.

4. Inclusivity:

    a. Do you feel that this app's features and content were inclusive?

    b. Can you suggest ways that this app and its content could be made more inclusive?

- One angle I had on inclusivity is user generated content. So that rather than a central developer or person inputting data, which is always going to be curatorial, to allow people to contribute their own suggestions. Which, you know, would that will genuinely tease out some of the hidden places in Durham or places that people think are interesting that perhaps from a single person's perspective, you don't notice.
- the app itself should be designed to adapt to, I suppose the type of user

5. Think of something you'd love in an app that explores Durham City (or even the wider County) and draw or map it onto the box. Feel free to use the materials in the box to support you.

- you can have like a list of places of, I don't know, the Eighties or Old Durham. Like very, very antique. So if people wants to do something different, they can just click on that. And they just can choose the places that are very, very old or recent.
- So for example, if you look at the cathedral, and then you look at one of the churches, they might have a similar type of structure, but then you have all the other structures outside a university that there are more and more than so you can see the difference of the the art that is changing.
- So if you had some night signs to get and then a QR code, you snap and get the app out only a certain point, then that's fine, but heads down looking at the app. That's the thing you want to do, I think discourage what I do anyway.
- So I guess having music is complicated because you get into all sorts of copyright issues and that but there are several of the links, which would actually, you could have some music and it would really work well like talking about mediaeval stuff.
- Even if you had, let's say, a QR code, each each location and through the app, you scan the QR code, and it all up the correct pin. And then you're sort of adding that engaging element that kids could get involved with. Like, it's like geo caching, people love geocaching, because they love a treasure hunt. Yeah. Is there anything you can use to play on that?
- you could change the interface depending on who was using it. Like if when you download it, you signed up with let's say, your age or your age bracket, and it would then tailor the app for you. So if let's say you do have, let's say an older married couple from somewhere new You give them the sophisticated app. But if it's a young family, you have a more child friendly, where there's more interactivity with the people and places they're going.

6. Would you use this app again or recommend it to someone else? If no, why not?

[Participants universally said yes, but a significant number wanted to see a more developed version before recommending.]

Findings/recommendations:

The overall impression from the focus groups was that this was an interesting, appealing concept for an app, but there were limitations as far as types of users and how engaging the app was for different audiences. The general theme from all five focus groups was that the idea was great but needed more development.

Findings/recommendations include:

1. **Use audio as a key element of the app:** A noticeable number of focus group participants recommended music or audio to accompany the app. This was partly for safety—as some were concerned about users looking down at their app while standing in some of the precarious spots in Durham City [by the Shakespeare, for example]—but also to accommodate those with visual impairments or neurodiversity or to allow users to engage in different ways with the app itself.

2. **Game-like aspects:** While focus group users could see the potential for it to be something like a Pokemon-style app, those who were familiar with the concept (or regular players of it), could not identify much in the way of gamification. Recommendations that came through were:
   a. Geocache like elements where participants would get a reward or unlocking new content when they discovered or explored new placed
   b. Themed walks or tours that related to particular parts of Durham's past (like a prison tour, famous Durham-people tour, or a murder mystery tour)
   c. A mechanism to allow app users to submit their own history content to be included in the app—user-generated content could allow the app to be used regularly rather than as a one-off for special events
   d. Games or fun facts that would unlock when new places were found
   e. Hidden objects that could be found using augmented reality (AR) or other tools.
   f. Audio content that provided narrative depth to the areas visited or just provide more detail as users walk and visit
   g. Use of additional materials, such as Web site content, downloadable colouring books, or other features to encourage use beyond the app itself. These could be given out at tourist spots in the
   h. Use of other digital features such as QR codes to encourage users to scan and evidence that they'd visited a space; and also to generate more content or unlock new content. It would also be a safer way to look away from phones and at the surroundings.

3. **Interface:** While much of the interface design concerns and recommendations are mentioned in item 4 below, a note about the size of the screen did come up for some focus group users. A suggestion to

4. **Customisability as an enabler of accessibility and inclusivity:** A layering approach, which would include the ability to toggle on and off different features or elements of the design, was recommended by the majority of focus group participants. As one participant said: "change the interface depending on who was using it'. This would accommodate all types of users (be they visitors or local residents; college-aged students or older adults;

neurodiverse people or disabled individuals; or young families or couples) and enable wider usage. Some suggested a kind of series of boxes that could be ticked or unticked to just a series of selections; this would then take the user to a more bespoke map or series of places to visit. This could also be designed around length of visit to Durham (such a tourist who only has a few hours versus a local resident looking for something to do on a weekend afternoon); accessibility issues (such as best way to travel with a pram or wheelchair); or type of places to visit and from what period (for example, an interest in viewing Georgian architecture, visiting important churches in Durham, or visiting places with spooky ghost stories). Another recommendation around customisability was to offer an option to view the map from different ages (e.g., Durham during Medieval times or Durham in the 1960s)—this could greatly benefit from AR functionality.

5. **Age-appropriateness:** There was concern across the focus groups that the work was not appropriate for all ages, particularly children. One parent explained that trying to read the long text was either 'boring' for some of her children (she and her partner went out with their six children) or at times unsafe based on where the hunt took them. There was also concern that the activities were not interactive or entertaining enough for small children. As one parent noted:

> "we had had sold it to our little girl [4 year old] as doing, … a treasure hunt in a game and for her it, it wasn't that. it was, I suppose … you know, we had fun, but we had to kind of make it fun rather than it being the fun."

6. **Illustrations:** These were widely appreciated by the focus group participants (often being raised as a key attraction), but those participants who were parents of young children all noted that the illustrations themselves did not hold the attention of their children. Recommendations were for either a colouring book or some sort of colourful images that could be 'layered' in over the existing images. It may be worth exploring adding in a digital colouring element (much like is available in Jackbox games) when engaging with the app. This would allow children to view it.

Appendix B: The Creative Lab: March 2021

Overview

In March 2021, Ladan Cockshut attended all of the Creative Lab sessions to observe their impact and work. She had participated in a series of planning discussions with the strand organisers—Ellie Mathieson and Ged Matthews—to discuss issues of consent, research design, and survey methods to use during the Lab sessions themselves.

The research team's interest in the Creative Lab slice of Digitale was to understand:

1. the ways in which young people (both at the university and across the county) might get involved with a university project
2. how their insights and knowledge could be built into products and services that the Digitale project might develop or offer
3. what the organisers of this strand (Ellie Mathieson and Ged Matthews) felt about its organisation and impact.

Ladan attended a few video call meetings with Ellie before the Lab sessions, to give her insight into research design and to generally discuss how the project was unfolding. She then attended the sessions (3 each on the 30th and then the 31st) with 29 participants, two members of DU staff, and Ellie (the Lab coordinator). Her primary role was as an observer though she did participate as well during some activities and I facilitated the final planning discussion in one of the breakouts on the 31st.

The structure of the Creative Lab was as follows:

- 29 participants, aged 16-23 and located within County Durham, were recruited in February and March. Participants submitted invoices for their participation. Participants were local college students, local young people attending university outside the area, and students attending Durham University
- 2-hour sessions were held on March 30, 2021: 'work as a team to create a concept for an app to explore Co. Durham'
- Participants were asked to work 1-hour on a task overnight
- 1-hour, 45 minute sessions were held on March 31, 2021

Findings

The notes on the Lab sessions are included below. The aim of the observation was to follow the activities with the participants and observe for *levels of engagement, participation, and interactivity* on the part of the participants.

Session 1: March 30, 2021 (notes)

> **Group 1:** All 9 participants arrived by 9,04 am ('impressive')
>
> Most had video one (just 1 didn't)
>
> Participants from across the region: Consett, Low Pittington, Seaham area (participant wouldn't say more than that), Darlington, Neville's Cross (Durham), Tudhoe, Durham University (via Northern Ireland), Hartlepool, Peterlee, East Durham College (participant wouldn't say more)
>
> Favourite places: coffee shop, beach, musicians' guild in Durham, staircase by the Wear in Durham, Grandad's garden, the shower, the bed, a cemetery
>
> Polls: Insta highest social use (70%), Google maps used for finding locations/places (80%), 80% use videogames to socialise
>
> Group 1 observations: a bit quiet, but everyone participated. Quite a few observations and some suggested content that felt personal and meaningful. Despite age mix (16-23), did not seem to intimidate the younger participants and the breakout sessions had a good flow. One person not using her video turned it on in a breakout in order to intro herself to another participant who went to the same college.
>
> **Group 2:** All attended, only 1 didn't have video on
>
> From: Houghton, Durham Uni, Durham, Peterlee, Barnard Castle, Sunderland
>
> Favourite places: lion in Sunderland, bench near the old DLI location, spot where participant did her singing lessons, top of the hill, bookshop sofa, white cliff in Chester-le-Street, Sunderland football season ticket seat, hangout spot

in Wingate, exact same spot at a Durham park (possibly Wharton) ['wouldn't be the same otherwise'], Bridge at Ox Hill ['walk the dogs with mam']

Polls: 70% Youtube; 80% Google maps, 80% videogames to socialise

Group 2 observations: More chatty group (noon the perfect time?), more interested in geocaching than the first group. Age mix seemed unimpactful and the groups mixed well. Some chattier than others but everyone participated (though a couple needed some gentle inviting).

Group 3 : All attended, seemed a bit tardy on arrival with a couple. Only 1 didn't have video on (might have been a tech issue)

From: Durham Uni, Sunderland, Hartlepool, Durham, 'East Durham' (did not specify), Easington

Fave places: Bridges in London, Fireplace, mountain (Scotland), being at home, marina at Hartlepool, Castle Eden Dene

Polls: 63% Insta/YouTube; 75% Google Maps; 50% use video games to socialise

Group 3 observations: None had heard of Geocache; tone seemed a bit sedate (afternoon siesta time?); one commented on how they loved their Sixth Form and would save that—it was a 'hub with activities'

Examples of things the groups would save from Co Durham

Seaham Beach	Durham Cathedral
Crimdon with caravan park	Gill Bridge (Consett)
Castle Eden	McDonalds in Peterlee
Prebend Bridge	Boat Shack (Derwent Res,)
Beamish	Durham Marketplace ('pick and mix of local businesses')
Fish and chip shop in Horden	Nando's (Hartlepool Marina)
Heritage Coast	

Metrocentre*	Cafedral
Seaham Beach	Ushaw College
Penshaw	

First day observations

Q: Was the direction too prescriptive maybe? Pace seemed to suit it, though. Maybe not so much time for thinking and reflection, but the participants seemed very prepared and ready to participate.

Spaceship activity: people had fun kind of personal things to suggest and also some very situational/natural places they would save. Some interesting banter about saving the 'entire coast'. How do you save enough whilst still agreeing to the terms of the exercise. The spaceship exercise suggested the bigger things (like the Cathedral), but also included the personal (such as a favourite restaurant/café). Seemed like the 'obvious' choices were included but kind of dismissed as well.

Another interesting observation was when participants suggested places like Newcastle or MetroCentre to 'save' on the Alien Spaceship (not possible considering that they aren't in the County), Ellie pivoted and asked 'What would you like in Co Durham that you don't have in Co Durham?' (like the MetroCentre or a city the size of Newcastle)

Q: Was it appropriate for me to join in and clarify what the 'boundaries' of County Durham were? I may have impacted interactions, though it would seem better to know what the limits were perhaps when planning an actual app/creative output?

Good comment: 'we are learning from you what's doable' [in an app] ←organiser

All ended on time.

Participant comments:

The NE is 'hard to think of it as contemporary and forward-thinking'

'hard to think of places that are modern'

'we are not so contemporary'

'no one ever goes there' (about a park they like to visit)

I don't want to walk around Durham: 'I know it too well' (this participant much preferring Newcastle)

Session 2: March 31 (notes)

> **Group 1:**
>
> 1 participant was unable to attend, but they did send their work in (which Ellie shared)
>
> All participants produced and shared work, submitting to Ellie on time. Very few (maybe 1-2?) used Mural
>
> Mural use comment: 'a bit tricky, but it was fine'
>
> **Group 2:**
>
> All attended, all on time
>
> Group 2 appears to be the most energetic of the groups (midday best for this age group?)
>
> Higher engagement with Mural than Group 1. A bit more similarity in some of the research ideas than I saw in Group 1.
>
> Geocache featured prominently in a few research presentations
>
> Quite a good understanding of local economy and business support came up
>
> Mural use: 'quite clear' 'problem with the link'
>
> **Group 3:**
>
> All attended, all on time. *Q: Earlier start maybe helped?*
>
> Slightly more atsmopheric and abstract in their research ideas
>
> Interesting approaches to engaging with the County (use of the County flag to generate art style and content, for example)
>
> Visual rated highly, as usual
>
> Higher engagement with Mural in this group

> Group 3 comments (from participants)
>
> 'I didn't know a lot of the places mentioned yesterday'
>
> 'I choose what I want to see first'
>
> 'It's a bit like Beamish, if Beamish was an app'

Observations from Session 2 participant presentations:

- participants were articulate and prompt (better than uni colleagues!); well prepared; strong focus on visual and conceptual; not bad with the titles either
- Even though presenting to the group generated some empathetic anxiety from me, the participants themselves did not seem very shy or anxious.
- Ellie was masterful at drawing out positives from all presentations; Ged had supportive comments as well
- Did feel at times that some presentations did draw fairly heavily on examples that Ellie had presented the day before

Group work observations (Ladan only observed one group as she was facilitating as well):

- Collaborative and supportive, the participants themselves seemed very generous in recalling what others had shared and had good retention from the higher level presentations beforehand
- Presentations/ideas even drew from absent participant's presentation (quite generous to do that)
- Some groups may have struggled with their set app idea (summer holidays)
- Felt like interactive, hands-on concepts were emerging toward the end of the 2nd session
- Some astute understanding of business needs, visitors' needs, and locals from presentations and discussions
- Some groups were better at presenting than others. Some did a good job of drawing on everyone's input
- Some groups relied on the facilitators (myself, Laura, or Ellie) to present for them, whilst others chose who would speak
- Dynamic of groups seems positive, a fairly equal level of participation, some were quieter than others but everyone spoke (and wasn't just Durham Uni

students who did the speaking, in some groups they were being quiet, I noticed)

- AR and Geocache came up a lot—genuine interest or because of facilitators leading?

Researcher note on the day: Felt a bit rushed on this day (shorter time?) compared with day 1 but did end on time. Also a bit hectic for the facilitators (though the last few minutes catching up together after it was all over felt a bit like a 'wrap party' for me as an active observer, which was fun).

General observations from Creative Lab:

1. **Participation/interaction/collaboration –** There were very high levels of participation (100% participation during the sessions), collaboration and interaction. Very few kept their cameras off: 3/29 [10.3%]. It wasn't clear if that was due to technical reasons, though it did appear that one participant did keep her camera off out of choice as did put it on when she wanted to introduce herself to another participant briefly. I was honestly most taken by this.
   a. Comment/queries about confidence and participation being/appearing high: was this because it's a job? Because everyone was in equal footing? Because it was via Zoom and not to face to face? Accessible content?
2. **Attendance/connection issues –** Zero no-shows by selected participants. Very prompt attendance and most appeared to have a stable internet connection. Excellent attendance with all but one participant attending both sessions (28/29, 96.6%), and the participant who did not attend the second session had to pull out due to pre-disclosed scheduling issues rather than being a no-show.
3. **Participant mixing -** I think mixing the ages and backgrounds was not an issue from an observation point of view. Putting groups into 'working groups' based on their ages [my group were all college students] did seem to help (at least with the group I was with) with generating content and a supportive atmosphere, though I also saw a very supportive vibe with a more mixed group. Using a digital platform appeared to help remove any power dynamics that might consciously/unconsciously emerge with face to face.
   a. *Re above:* I have anecdotal experience with this issue. In 2017 I co-hosted an ideation session with Catherine Turner in the Law School with her LLM students meeting with my then Teesside University games design/development students (most year 2 and 3) to discuss how to develop a game to teach the laws of armed conflict. A few of my

Teesside students (about 10 of them came) asked me before attending if there was a 'dress code' for this meeting as they were worried they'd not fit in with the Durham students. We struggled to get the Durham and Teesside students to interact with each other (this was partly due to the physical space we were working with), though some improved interactions came toward the end of the 3-hour session.

4. **Ideas, work, and research activity –** Exceptionally high levels of compliance and completion of set work and activities, including by one who was absent at the 2nd session. This made it feel like the participants were treating this more like a work assignment than a classroom assignment.

5. **Putting the work together -** *Q:* I came away wondering: how do you synthesize and present the result of a collaborative discussion? Was there sufficient time for that? Is it even worth doing? Perhaps that necessitates a third session: generating a prototype/wireframe/mapped out example and also

6. **Facilitating and group sharing -** Perhaps it's worth having additional time to help participants learn how to facilitate, notetake, synthesize, and then feed back group perspectives to the wider group (to report back?). Also, perhaps tools like polling or other forms of sharing could be taught to the participants, if you wanted them to take over the session. Not sure how easy it is to really collaborate, though having a kind of quick fire approach seemed to be working with the group.

7. **Facilitator role –** For the time and newness of this process, was very good that the facilitators had an active role. I think it helped relax the participants and they could see actual support. In the future, would be helpful to provide that training and role to willing participants to help develop that work skill as well. Also, would be interesting to see how that works in face to face versus virtual. But in general, the 4 'staff' at the event (myself as active observer and Ellie, Ged, and Laura as active presenters/facilitators) felt like a good ratio and not too intrusive. Would be interesting to see how that shifts in face to face activities.

8. **Presentation content vs group work –** Balance felt good, though there was a lot to look at in the first session. Felt a little rushed at times. Not sure how much of that was synthesized. Presenters can also consider things like pre-watching content or video for participants to 'come prepared'. They appeared willing to do the work assigned to them, so may not be a stretch to factor in an hour or so of pre-work before Lab sessions, particularly if they are being compensated for it and are familiar with the CL process.

9. **Work vs. classroom -** The session felt more like a work/collaborative event than a classroom, but there was still a bit of a 'teaching' vibe. The participants, however, did not act like they were being taught as their levels of engagement and sharing appeared far more interactive and engaged than we're seeing in the typical university online classroom setting (with most students turning off their cameras and not necessarily volunteering their involvement). Suggested

that they felt this was a 'job' and brought tones of professionalism, attention, and engagement to their endeavour.

10. **Considering their own demographic -** I did notice that across the sessions that some participants appeared to struggle to think of their own demographic when designing these apps. Not sure if that was due to the context of the assignment or open nature of the idea generation or if that was due to other factors. Would be interesting to do some work to help explore what, if any, consideration needs to be given to that kind of auto-reflective work where you're thinking 'would I use this tool?' rather than 'would this be a fun tool'? I just noticed a few groups relied on 'this would be fun for kids or families' as a target user rather than 'yes, 16-24 year olds would definitely use this app'.

11. **Use of various chat tools -** Chat was used to varying levels, though was more prominent in the middle and final session.