



Cultural Identity, RSA Heritage Index, the Silver Economy and 360-degree Immersive Technologies

The RSA Heritage Network Launch

On Monday 29th January, a packed room of fellows at RSA HQ in London gathered for the launch of a new RSA initiative, the RSA Heritage Network. In the event, led by the RSA Heritage Network Lead, Isilda Almeida-Harvey, the participants were introduced to the RSA Heritage Index - a comprehensive study of Heritage assets and activities across the whole of Local Authority Areas in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland which was effectively completed in 2016.

Isilda then introduced Michael Jansen from Germany to talk about a small town called Monschau. Michael's description of this picturesque town experiencing many of the problems of globalisation resonated well with similar scenarios today in the UK highlighted by the Heritage Index i.e. high cultural assets but low community engagement which are seen as an opportunity for social and economic development. .



A packed inaugural RSA Heritage Network Meeting

The RSA Heritage Index project was described in detail by RSA Researcher Jonathan Schifferes and this provided an ideal backdrop to presentations where the Heritage Index has been a catalyst for positive community engagement with illustrations from project case studies in the UK.

Heritage index Case Studies – Swindon & Art Gene

Martin Newman described how the RSA Heritage Index had been used to stimulate community engagement in Swindon through meetings which explored how Swindon could better leverage its cultural assets and activities. He was followed by Maddi Nicholson who runs a specialist social enterprise in the North of England with innovative creative installations which they use to inspire communities to use heritage as an agent of change. One of Art Gene's projects involved an inflatable house positioned on the sites of demolished housing whilst another brought an environmentally sustainable travelling cocoon-like "caravan" to areas with unexploited natural beauty and history.

These presentations created a perfect atmosphere for some networking a brainstorming session from the RSA members

The Role of Heritage & Cultural Identity in Community Development

This article looks at the role of heritage and cultural identity in the social and economic development of communities and the role of consumer digital technologies in supporting this and acting as a catalyst for the silver economy and inter-generational collaboration.

For most of human history, cultural identity, place and people have been the key economic drivers behind community development and the reason why people choose places to live and work. Families lived and worked in the same area for generations and stories were passed down from grand-parents and parents to shape the perception and value of the place called home.

Today, the story is very different as a result of the explosive growth of the communications technologies that have enabled greater mobility and a breakdown of the ties between people and place and between generations.

Digital Technologies have had a very disruptive impact on business and society and the human relationships that determine stability and sustainability, such as customer/supplier, employer/employee, husband/wife and citizen/place, are increasingly temporary and volatile.

The sustainability and livelihood of physical communities in a globalised society depends on their ability to leverage the potential of all their assets, both human and physical and to harness the positive elements of technology to re-establish and promote their cultural identity to the world. This ability to create a differentiated and unique identity is important in attracting people and commerce to a region, location or institution.

Case Study (1) Rural Social and Economic Development Market Harborough ComKnet Project (1998-2000)

Market Harborough is set in rural Leicestershire and, like many market towns, it has seen the effects of globalisation and the loss of local services as well as a High Street populated with Charity Shops. In the neighbouring village of Lubenham, there was a successful digital media company, Mass Mitec, operating from a converted barn. Mass Mitec was the Founder of the National Presentation Network, one of the first digital imaging networks in the UK, and the winner of several prestigious awards for its innovative use of Digital Communications Technologies. The company had seen its presentation services business severely impacted by the takeover of its main customer and, as a consequence, needed to refocus the business.

In 1998, the UK Govt launched an award scheme called MMDP (Multimedia Demonstrator Program) for consortium project ideas that would boost the use of Multimedia and the Internet amongst SMEs. Mass Mitec devised the Community Commerce and Knowledge Network (ComKnet) project,

based on the creation of a community portal to encourage knowledge sharing and trading, and formed a consortium of local partners to build a network of community champions.

Local heritage was the inspiration for the development strategy and created a shared vision to make Market Harborough a leader in the use of the communications technology of the new millennium, the internet, to open up new horizons and opportunities for local people. The inspiration behind this ambition was the fact that over 150 years earlier, a resident of Market Harborough, Thomas Cook had used the emerging communications network of his day (the railways) to also open up new horizons and opportunities for ordinary people.

A video of the project was made by two local residents (one an ex-BBC senior cameraman and the other a special effects man who works on Harry Potter films). This video is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/clKSAKx2j5g>.

The Comknet project also won the attention and support of the newly appointed E-Envoy, Alex Allan, leading to an invitation to the Comknet team to video interview him in Downing Street and this video interview (which the ComKnet team scripted) is also on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/LE7GskuGBQk>

ComKnet successfully brought £250k investment into the local economy and substantially raised its profile nationally and internationally through innovative uses of technology which included one of the first global webinars in 2000 and the first community radio show to combine local radio with teleconferencing and virtual classroom technologies with “The Radio with Pictures Show” in 2002.

Case Study (2) Regional Social and Economic Development and “Rebranding within”

Advantage West Midlands / Coventry University Serious Games Institute (SGI) (2007-2013)

The West Midlands Region of the UK was once the industrial heartlands of the UK economy with a thriving manufacturing industry and a reputation for engineering excellence. By the early 21st century, these industries, along with their jobs had been decimated by foreign competition. The cultural identity which had served the region so well in the 20th century had become an unwanted legacy and, in order to support social and economic development, a new strategy and a new identity was needed.

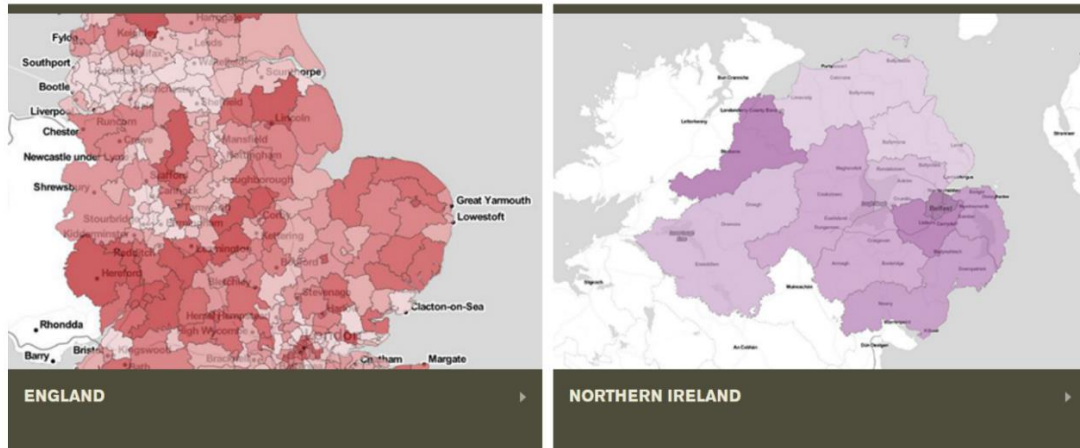
The Serious Games Institute (SGI) at Coventry University was a manifestation of identifying the demographic and cultural assets of the West Midlands and identifying the “Phoenix” industries that showed promise for sustainable economic growth and a fresh cultural identity. The rapid rise and success of independent computer games companies led to investment in the SGI as a focal point for establishing the West Midlands and the UK as a global leader in a fast emerging but relatively unknown discipline.

Once it was launched in 2007 as a strategic partnership between the Regional Development Agency and Coventry University Enterprises, the SGI quickly built a new global identity for Coventry and the West Midlands as leaders in the understanding and application of computer games technologies for non-entertainment purposes. Their business model has been copied in Asia and the USA and has created new strategic partnerships across the globe. At the same time as attracting new talent and

investment into the region, those who came into the area attracted by the opportunities have now begun to use technology to explore and promote the rich cultural heritage of the region.

The RSA Heritage Index

THE HERITAGE INDEX 2016



The RSA Heritage Index Maps for England and Northern Ireland from 2016

The RSA Heritage Index is based on a detailed survey of the cultural heritage assets and activities in each local authority area and, in many ways, seeks to indicate not only the quality and quantity of local heritage assets, but also how active each community is in taking advantage of this important local resource.

The maps are supported by spreadsheets and raw data that can indicate in more detail where the opportunities and challenges are in each community. These resources potentially provide a very valuable foundation upon which to engage local communities in a personalised digital heritage strategy as a catalyst for local social and economic development in similar ways to the previous case studies.

ENGLAND

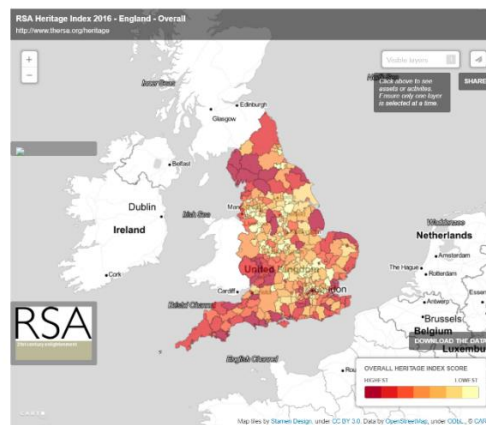
Explore the Heritage Index for England – searchable maps break down the results for different types of heritage.

HEADLINE SCORES

ENGLAND - OVERALL HERITAGE SCORES
HERITAGE OPPORTUNITY AREAS

IN DEPTH: 6 DOMAINS OF HERITAGE

HISTORIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT
MUSEUMS, ARCHIVES AND ARTEFACTS
INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE
PARKS AND OPEN SPACES
LANDSCAPE AND NATURAL HERITAGE
CULTURES AND MEMORIES



The Heritage Index Map for England showing the Domains of Heritage

Milton Keynes		2016 rank (of 325)	Change from 2015
Overall score		263	19
Assets		323	-1
Activities		153	-20
Heritage Potential		22	<i>Higher score indicates high levels of assets relative to activities</i>
Historic Built Environment		138	7
Assets		258	-5
Activities		78	-25
Museums, Archives and Artefacts		190	5
Assets		237	-1
Activities		94	13
Industrial Heritage		275	-33
Assets		225	-31
Activities		257	7
Parks and Open Space		292	-22
Assets		297	-8
Activities		164	-17
Landscape and Natural Heritage		253	37
Assets		294	13
Activities		141	29
Cultures and Memories		110	-8
General / Infrastructure		187	63

The ratings for the Milton Keynes Local Authority

The extract from this spreadsheet for a single Local Authority gives an indication of how the individual rankings are assessed and provide pointers to where there may be opportunities to build on either assets or activities to strengthen cultural identity and stimulate social and economic development.

The Silver Economy

The problems of the Ageing Society grow more serious by the day. Greater longevity and length of time in retirement, lifestyle related medical conditions such as obesity, cancer and cardiovascular diseases and the dwindling ratio of employed vs unemployed/retired people not only places an increasing and unsustainable cost burden on society but it also is likely to be a cause of social unrest and societal divisions.

Older people from the “Baby Boomer” generation currently contribute spending power to the economy as consumers but the rapid demographic changes brought about by the Ageing Society phenomenon mean that future generations will have to work longer before retirement and/or continue to contribute to the economy as producers as well as consumers.

The growing challenge therefore, as well as trying to reduce the cost burden of elderly people is how to enable older people to be economically productive for longer. This significant challenge is made worse by technological advances in AI, Robotics, IOT and other areas which will inevitably lead to a substantial reduction in available jobs and more competition to fill those jobs. Since older people lack the physical strength, mental agility and technology literacy of younger generations, we need to find ways to harness the positive characteristics of ageing to create economic opportunities which the elderly have a competitive advantage over younger people.

360-degree Immersive Technologies, Virtual Reality and Storytelling



A 360-degree Image from the Milton Keynes Museum

Computer games have enjoyed success because of their inherent ability to immerse players in a virtual environment with freedom to move, explore and respond to situations in 360-degrees. Storylines, narratives and scenarios create the context that motivate and challenge players but, in the most popular console games, these environments are synthetic and require a significant investment in money and expertise to create.

The latest generation of consumer 360-degree cameras capture real environments and events in broadcast quality at minimal cost and with minimal experience needed and these digital/virtual representations of real world environments offer consumers the ability to experience, explore and share these environments in the same engaging way as computer games.

The ubiquitous nature of social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube make these experiences accessible to a global audience at near-zero cost.

The component needed to add context, attraction and influence is storytelling which can best be developed by those most familiar with and most passionate about the location.

It is this combination of the democratisation, affordability, accessibility, usability and attractiveness of 360-degree technologies which I believe can regenerate communities and enable them to share and celebrate the extraordinary people, places and experiences that makes each community unique.

The 360in360IX Value Proposition

360in360 Immersive Experiences is a start-up SME whose origins began in February 2017 with a 360-degree video blog based on a day visit to the Learning Technologies Show in London. Since that original recorded 360 video and associated story, many hours of 360 video experiences have been recorded around the world and published to the social media channels that Facebook, Youtube, and LinkedIn etc are developing at a rapid pace. The consumer camera technologies that make this possible, accessible and affordable are also rapidly maturing and the devices such as VR goggles and smartphones that show this immersive content are also evolving rapidly with new functionality being introduced almost every week.

These developments in this emerging disruptive set of technologies open up commercial and societal development opportunities across multiple sectors where there is a demand to both create and experience immersive video, images and sound and a growing number of technology platforms to facilitate this, along with tools to curate, promote and target content via social media in precise ways.

The 360in360 Immersive Experiences value proposition has the potential to address some of the problems of the today's global society described above and summarised and expanded on below :-

- Increased longevity with associated health problems is an increasingly unsustainable cost burden to society
- Most approaches to the use of technology for independent living seek directly or indirectly to reduce the cost burden of the elderly rather than develop the "silver economy"
- Redundancy or retirement often brings with it social isolation, a loss of self-worth and a sense of being on the scrap-heap with consequential mental and physical decline.
- Older people generally want to make a contribution to society after retirement and many want to continue in meaningful employment as long as possible
- Some employers (e.g. DIY stores and supermarkets) value the attributes of older people and their employment contributes to both physical and mental well-being
- In a world where developments in technologies like AI and IOT will severely impact employment opportunities for all ages, older people cannot compete for jobs which require physical strength, mental agility and IT literacy
- Older people have the advantage that they have had life experiences that younger people have not had and never will be able to have.

Digital Heritage and the Ageing Society

The memories and life experiences of older people are a precious societal asset which is currently under-exploited and under-valued. 360-degree technologies provide an opportunity to capture and share this human heritage and not only preserve it for future generations, but also provide an opportunity to develop community identity and bring generations together in ways that are also commercially sustainable.

Many museums and heritage sites use older people, mostly volunteers, to act as guides to the exhibits and the value that this brings to the individual in terms of self-worth, physical activity and general well-being are evident, if not properly researched or validated.

The Conclusion

Technologies which help older people to leverage the characteristics which give them an advantage over younger people e.g.

- Life Experiences
- Local Knowledge
- Wisdom
- Spare Time
- Tolerance
- Empathy
- Loyalty
- Endurance

and enable them to contribute economically are likely to improve their physical and mental health as well as contribute to a more integrated, inter-generational society.

The Technologies and Applications

The core technologies of 360in360 Immersive Experiences are consumer 360-degree cameras such as the Gear 360, Ricoh Theta, Insta 360 and many others around a price point of between £100 - £300. These cameras produce broadcast quality video and high quality images in 360-degrees in combination with IOS or Android Smartphones.

These cameras publish directly or via desktop software to all the main social media platforms and the results can be enjoyed across all technology platforms, including VR headsets. The quantity, quality and ubiquity of 360-degree content is developing rapidly and the number of potential commercial and non-commercial applications is also rapidly developing – some of these are shown on the home page of www.360in360ix.co.uk.

360in360 Immersive Experiences Applications and Services Gallery



Camping and Caravanning



Canals and Rivers



Churches and Cathedrals



Cruises



Drones



Education



Events



Exhibitions and Conferences



Experiences



Holiday Homes



Stately Homes and Gardens



Hotels

In additions to these application sectors where the above technologies provide commercial opportunities, these devices are able to stream live video and audio via Facebook, Youtube and other platforms, providing an opportunity to share and/or experience activities such as meetings, events or even family connections in a new and richer way.

Older People as Consumers

The ability to access live or recorded people, places and experiences provides all generations with an opportunity to share in the world around them and, for older people, it can have added benefits in helping to develop or maintain cognitive well-being as well as social integration.

Older People as Producers

These technologies also enable older people to create and/or contribute to content, especially where it can tap their life experiences or local knowledge and in this way they can support the silver economy.

The 360in360IX Development Methodology

The development plan and business model for 360in360IX is based on a social enterprise franchise around a strong 360in360IX brand. The aim is to start by running masterclasses/workshops in communities across the UK and Europe as a way of both recruiting creative partners for the franchise and bringing together multiple stakeholders such as museums, heritage sites, leisure industry, development agencies, schools and colleges.

Each workshop/masterclass would aim to kick start the local economy and engage young and old in promoting and leveraging the cultural heritage in their community through 360-degree technologies and sparking innovative uses of the technology at a local level.

The 360in360IX business model is intended as a commercial venture which can thrive without public money. Its aims and objectives are directly aligned with societal needs and commercial opportunity.

360in360 Immersive Experiences is actively seeking partners, sponsors and investors to finance the incubation and rapid development of the business via a national and international series of workshops across the UK, Europe and at international conferences.

These workshops are designed to bring together heritage organisations, development agencies, creatives, schools and colleges to not only learn how best to use these technologies to showcase their cultural identity to a global audience but also to leave a legacy of 360-degree images, videos, sounds and stories with local creative champions who can commercially sustain the use of these technologies within their community.

The target cost of these workshops is £1500 per day inclusive but the commissioners will have the freedom to charge workshop participants to offset or recoup the costs.

The workshops can be delivered in heritage spaces such as museum, stately homes etc. or in local schools and colleges with IT facilities. For more information and a detailed discussion of requirements, please contact me.

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