'This looks a bit dodgy': data usability and maintenance when funding runs out

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What do we mean by sustainability?

• Assumption of scientific model
  • Closed data set, finished, stable

• Sustainability means
  • Terabytes of storage
  • Dark archiving
  • Preservation for later access
  • Migration to new platform as necessary
The nature of Humanities data

- Often small amounts of data
- Not a closed resource
- Scholarly effort represented by arrangement, linkages, search
- Presentation of material vital
- Maintenance & updating needed
  - Usually by someone who understands material
The nature of the problem

• Example 1

• Example 2
Why is this a problem?

• Users decide on website in fractions of a second
  • Reaction is visceral not thought out
  • ‘That looks a bit dodgy’
• Grown used to look of commercial resources
• Don’t trust something that looks ‘wrong’
• Lack of trust leads to non-use
  • Unless resource already known or absolutely vital
Financial reality

• No budget for updating and maintenance
• Grants run out, PIs move on, RAs have other work
• Funders won’t provide ongoing budget
Implications of this?

• If people won’t use ‘dodgy’ resources all money spent is wasted
  • As well as intellectual effort
• Only commercial resources usable long term?
• Implications for universities
  • What about the REF?
  • What about impact?
Possible solutions

• Dedicated funding for updating and maintenance
  • Without having to promise bells and whistles
• Not just for a few outstanding projects
  • Successful and usable ones
  • Could be related to end of grant assessments
• Universities need to dedicate resource to this
  • REF may be a driver
• Funding bodies need to check this is done
Resource aggregation

• Could we use ‘small science’ model
• Bring small humanities projects together with common front end
  • Web services layer
  • Doesn’t require data to be changed
• But that means....
Designing for the long term

• Design as well as possible for current users
• Follow recommendations on user testing
  • LAIRAH, JISC Impact toolkit
• Don’t just design for yourself and your colleagues
• Use open standards
• Try to make front end and backend work independently
Documentation

• Provide as much documentation as possible
  • Technical and user orientated
  • Link it to resource
• Imagine someone trying to understand the resource without your help
It can be done!

Example 1

Example 2