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# Sentenced to Transportation: An iDoc for Australia's Convict Past\*

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**Abstract.** An interactive web documentary (iDoc) was produced to highlight multinational perspectives and give users the option to choose their own experience by exploring different narrative paths about convict transportation to the 11 UNESCO World Heritage Australian Convict Sites. The iDoc prototype provides a map-based main menu, an alternative "stories" footer menu, and a traditional linear progression. It brings 11 physical locations into the digital landscape and provides a series of "stories" from the perspectives of female convicts, Irish convicts (and their famous escape stories, convicts' life in prison), and the impact of colonialism on the Indigenous populations. The iDoc also addresses the issue of growing public rejection of experts' presentation of history through a bottom-up approach of remixing user-generated (i.e., non-expert) content with curated archives and tourism marketing content. The public can interact with the work through a web browser (preferably Chrome) with an internet connection by clicking on the hyperlinks in the interface.

**Keywords:** iDoc · virtual tour · transmedia · edutainment · colonial narratives.

## 1 Introduction

This paper presents an 'edutainment' experiential work in the form of an interactive web documentary developed for UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS), which were chosen as the narrative focus because they are recognised as culturally significant to the world rather than a single culture. These sites also allowed for the inclusion of multiple perspectives and the communication of worldwide shared heritage. Furthermore, WHS designation involves a rigorous selection process based on a set of criteria and UNESCO, being a world-recognised organisation, provides a common frame of reference to situate cultural heritage as a concept. At the time the case study was selected, there were 1072 designated UNESCO WHS, of which 832 were categorised as cultural, 206 as natural, and

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35 as mixed [1]. The list of cultural sites was reduced to those with some tourism infrastructure to ensure that user-generated content exists and to sites where the majority of content is available in the English-language. After applying these selection criteria and doing preliminary research on the amount of existing content produced by the tourism industry, experts in related fields, and Internet users, the 11 UNESCO World Heritage Australian Convict Sites were selected.

This case study actually consists of 11 smaller location-based case study narratives connected by the central theme of convict transportation. This more recent history (1788-1868) presents opportunities for a vested personal interest on behalf of the public today whose ancestors may have been transported or moved as free immigrants to Australia and this history has a long-term impact on national identity. For example, it was referred to by some in certain contexts as “the convict stain” [2],[3]. The 11 UNESCO WHS featured in the iDoc include four sites in New South Wales—Hyde Park Barracks, Cockatoo Island, Old Government House, and Old Great North Road; five in Tasmania—Port Arthur Historic Site, Cascades Female Factory, Coal Mines Historic Site, Brickendon and Woolmers Estates and Darlington Probation Station; one located in Perth—Fremantle Prison; and one on Norfolk Island—Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area [5].

## 2 Bottom-up Remix Method for iDoc Development

The iDoc prototype was developed through remixing existing content from multiple different sources into a narrativized cultural heritage system [4]. The goal was to allow users to select the story options provided that most piqued their personal interests. This bottom-up approach followed Lawless et al.'s [6] best practices for tailoring access to content which included: modelling users, modelling content, and then creating an adaptive system through the four steps of guiding, exploring, suggesting and reflecting [6].

Three corpora were selected for a multimodal data analysis to capture specific perspectives (based on the producers) and the rhetorical purposes of the content. The first corpus was produced by the tourism industry, which focuses on marketing experiences to generate capital. The second corpus included user-generated content produced by the general public who post on social media posts for a variety of intrinsic (e.g., help others) and extrinsic (e.g., monetisation) reasons. The third corpus was expert-produced content (e.g., scholars, governments, and professional writers) who publish primarily for educational reasons. This bottom-up 'big data' analysis of the three corpora let the data speak to what themes are of interest to the primary target audience of cultural heritage tourists and the results led to the formation of a narrative content model for the iDoc prototype titled, “Sentenced to Transportation: A Virtual Tour of Australia's Convict Past.”

### 3 Results from Content Modelling

Documentary genre conventions were referred to for creative inspiration if the narrative production process based on the content model. Penz [7] outlined that the common narrative layers for documentaries about cities are: the story and history of the buildings, the narratives and points of view of the city planning process, the tales and personal stories embodied by passers-by, and the narrative intentions of the film itself. The results of the multimodal data analysis highlighted that visitors to the 11 UNESCO Australian Convict WHS are interested in tangible heritage, natural heritage, and intangible heritage in terms of literature, arts, and dark tourism. It also led to a content model with six thematic narrative layers, namely: (1) natural heritage and the site's 'sense of place,'; (2) infrastructure and the settlement's chronological timeline; (3) the rationale for UNESCO designation and cultural significance of the heritage site; (4) convict narratives, related artworks, novels, and other media such as mobile apps; (5) nearby tourist attractions and modern-day usage of the WHSs that are no longer functioning prisons; (6) the convicts' daily life as prisoners; and finally the colonial impact on Australian history and national identity. There were also six main points of view included in the iDoc, which are: British convicts, Irish convicts, Female convicts, New Zealand convicts, juvenile convicts, Aboriginal Australians, and the historical Australian authorities (e.g., British magistrates, governors, ship captains). This allows users to select a particular convict site to explore or a narrative path from the perspective of a specific sub-group.

Two user surveys for this iDoc prototype were conducted and the results showed that (1) users preferred video content and historical photography; (2) the narrative structure provided freedom for exploration and encouraged non-linear navigation but its unfamiliarity caused some confusion; (3) the ability to measure agency was inconclusive due to contradictory survey responses and the difficulty of measuring this academic concept through simple survey questions; and (4) users were inspired to physically visit one or more WHSs and related nearby attractions, to view additional materials, and to share their travel experiences and the iDoc with their networks [4].

### 4 Conclusion

The user experience surveys highlighted the revisions/updates required prior to a public launch of the iDoc for edutainment purposes. These revisions include: adding more narration to further connect the 290 different nodes of content, performing additional user testing on the non-linear narrative structure to visually map the level of user accomplishment within the iDoc, further improving the user experience (UX) design for the iDoc genre, and providing user training on new interactive digital narrative interfaces. This iDoc prototype demonstrates how a bottom-up remix can create a new narrative about cultural heritage sites; how a map-based main menu can be used as the primary navigation mode and be supplemented by both alternative branches and a linear progression option, and

finally a non-linear narrative structure can lead to unique emergent narrative experiences for each user, thus increasing the iDoc's replay value.

## 5 Link to iDoc

The iDoc prototype is available at: <http://nicolebasaraba.com/Australian-convicts-prototype/>

## 6 Technical Requirements

The technical requirements are minimal. The optimal viewing experience would be using a Chrome web browser on a laptop with headphones. Since there are embedded videos a strong internet connection would help for faster buffering. Since this is a prototype, it is noted that the Google Maps menu is also in a prototype view due to the expired API funding, but it still functions when an item is selected.

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