A DOMESDAY PROJECT FOR AUSTRALIA?

Information about the U.K. Domesday Project has been filtering into Australia since it began two years ago.

In celebration of the 900th anniversary of the Domesday Book, the B.B.C. have produced a 20th century Domesday Book on interactive videodisc. The original Domesday Book was England's first official record of property owners and was the outcome of a land survey ordered by William the Conqueror. It is widely used by historians and the hope is that, 900 years from now, historians will be referring to the 20th century's videodisc in the same way.

The original was written with quills on sheepskin parchment and was in two volumes. The modern version stores film, photographs, text, data and computer software for analyzing the data on the surface of a videodisc and is also in two volumes, split into the Community Disc and the National Disc.

The Community Disc looks at Britain from a geographical point of view. It is based on a linked set of thousands of maps, with pictures and text about areas and communities. At a regional level, the material has been prepared by professionals, while at the local level the pictures and text have been provided by local people, usually in schools. 14,000 schools participated. This gives the disc a unique flavour — a self portrait of the U.K. in the 1980's painted by her (mostly young) citizens.

The National Disc as a complement to the Community Disc is a view of life in the U.K. as a whole, drawn mainly from official sources. It is arranged by topic and offers statistics and film as well as maps, pictures and text.

The information contained on the discs is highly selective. The producers prefer to compare it to the Great Exhibition of 1851, offering the user an opportunity to wander around gaining insights and images that characterize the England of the 1980's. The innovative use of maps, "surrogate walks" and picture menus provide easy and friendly access to information.

A Steering Committee has been established to investigate the feasibility of a similar Australian project.

Sandra Wills, feasibility study coordinator, has said "The British project is exciting with its use of new technology and the involvement of whole communities in creating a shared national resource".

"We have been involving educators in the initial planning so that the project can more directly meet their needs in developing
students' research skills for local area research and in the use of computers for collating the data”.

“We will not only be looking at a videodisc publication but plan to develop a range of electronic publications. For example education may require a low cost sub-set, even telecommunications access to the data bases, whereas others may require the full sophistication of a hi-tech information retrieval system”.

“The full system will be an invaluable resource for future social and economic planning. As a reference tool it is a publication medium that is more economical and accessible than print. Potential users include government departments, businesses, libraries, museums, and tourism offices. It also has immense potential as an export product”.

The Steering Committee is currently investigating funding of the full project and is negotiating with relevant government departments, sponsors and investors. They aim to have the project ready so that Australians can collect data about their part of Australia in the bicentennial year.

For further information contact:
Sandra Wills
Commission for the Future
PO. Box 115
Carlton South, 3053
Phone (03) 663 3281

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