

InSpace: The Informatics Exhibition Space

Draft vision statement

InSpace vision sub-group*

April 6, 2005

1 Manifesto

InSpace is a space in which to explore the cultural significance of informatics in Edinburgh.

Informatics studies the ways in which natural and artificial systems capture, transform and act on information. Natural systems range from tiny molecules, to people, to whole societies. Artificial systems range from chips, to robots, to the world wide web.

Understanding how information works - in computation, communication and cognition - leads to technological advances. Technology leads to advances in the sciences, humanities and medicine. Changes in science, technology and society are intertwined.

Space a wider and more active range of things and events than a traditional gallery.

Explore visitors and passersby interact with open-ended, evolving work in progress.

Culture the worlds of work and play, creation and consumption.

Informatics the collaborating informatics disciplines are at the heart of all projects involving the space.

*In alphabetical order: John Lee, Jon Oberlander, Andrew Patrizio and Mark Wright.

2 InSpace Programme

InSpace will accommodate permanent—but evolving—displays, as well as temporary displays and events. Programming the space will be guided by six themes, and by three questions. The precise management mechanisms for the space have yet to be decided; one option is sketched below.

2.1 Themes

The six thematic strands which guide the programme of exhibitions and activities arise from the many cultures with which informatics interacts:

1. Arts + Environment
2. Commerce + Finance
3. Communication + Media
4. Education + Scholarship
5. Entertainment + Recreation
6. Science + Medicine

2.2 Questions

The first question is the broadest, and the biggest: the place of informatics in the wider world. The other questions are about the place of informatics in the world of ideas.

1. How does informatics *interact* with our daily lives? Does a potential programme item help explore how informatics affects, and is affected by, the greater cultures around it, through the arts, commerce, education, recreation, medicine, or the media?
2. How do ideas flow *into* informatics, within the academic world? Does a potential programme item help explore the interactions between diverse disciplines which make informatics possible: artificial intelligence, cognitive science, computer science mathematics, electronics, linguistics, psychology, neuroscience and biology?
3. How do ideas flow *out of* informatics, within the academic world? Does a potential programme item help explore how informatics is, in exchange, changing research culture and practice in collaborating fields, and in others like architecture, art, geoscience, medicine, physics and philosophy?

2.3 Spaces and times

The six themes are played out both on the *inside* of the exhibition space, and on its *outside*.

OutsideIn the inside of the exhibition space will be used to bring the world outside the informatics building inside it. Views of, and from, the outside of the building will be projected into it, processed and treated in ways which reveal unexpected features of the everyday world. More broadly, the bigger picture of the community - University, Edinburgh, and beyond - will be explored here by visitors entering InSpace. This will be a place for temporary exhibitions and hands-on activities, with room for art and science exhibits, mostly interactive, but also potentially traditional.

InsideOut the outside of the exhibition space - particularly the large west-facing windows - will be used as a shop window to bring the world inside the informatics building outside it. Visualisations of activity - both real and virtual - inside the building will be displayed via large-scale screens to the people who pass-by, or come to look at, InSpace. The visualisations will be interactive, intriguing, and inviting. They will contain abstract images and evocative words, and they will constantly evolve, reflecting life going on inside the building, and responding to the passers-by outside. Well-executed, InsideOut can make the building a positive talking point.

InsideOut: will be always-on. The type of interactive visualisation will change on a regular schedule, daily (and eventually hourly). The library of visualisations will continue to be built up over time, allowing ever-increasing choice over what is displayed for interaction.

OutsideIn: will be a more traditional temporary exhibition space, with a rolling programme, and four main phases to its year. It would sustain four main activities: workshops, exhibitions, artist residency working space, and art projects. Performances (specifically, multimedia) are a possibility. A proposed calendar:

1. September-March: experimental projects.
2. April: hands-on science-based workshop activities during the Science Festival; programmed in association with the University's Sci-fun unit.
3. May-June: artist-in-residence.
4. August: informatics-arts exhibits during the Edinburgh Festival; suitable for either a programmed artist (see below), or for a general exhibition of experimental project work.

OutsideIn would be publicly accessible throughout phases (2) and (4), and on specific open days during phases (1) and (3). Visitors would usually pass through a short orientation area, posing some ideas and questions about the nature of informatics. The continuing visual interest of the overall space would be secured by the always-on InsideOut exhibit.

3 Animators and audiences

3.1 Animators

For the moment, it is proposed that InSpace and its programme will be overseen by a steering group, the InSpace Agency. The group will be small, but will draw upon representatives from the School of Informatics, the College of Science and Engineering, the University, and the Edinburgh College of Art. If funding permits, there will be a Director, who will be responsible to the Agency for proposed programming and arranging operational delivery. Establishing the sustainability of the space will be a key goal. Programming will be guided by the themes and questions.

Three (or four) main groups could propose and create projects within the framework:

1. Informatics. Academic and research staff; postgraduates and undergraduates.
2. University and College of Art. In particular, projects in the School of ACE, and in the ECA, could be hosted within the InSpace Programme. Science education activities would also be accommodated.
3. Invited creative practitioners. A residency programme, and possible temporary curated exhibitions, could accommodate visual artists, authors and poets, musicians, architects, and designers.
4. (Possibly) Invited community groups. Community and school groups could experiment with the space and toolkits for helping use it.

3.2 Audiences

The guiding idea of the space is that people should be able to have only a very casual interaction with it, but walk away entertained, intrigued, and informed. That is, we want to: gain positive attention for informatic research and innovation; generate the desire to know more about how it works; and (at least sometimes) satisfy that desire. Our primary targets are, in rough order of importance:

1. Non expert passers-by. Engaging both locals and visitors.
2. Schools visitors. Hosting open days.
3. Creative sector. Leading to new avenues for research collaboration.
4. Users of the building. Making them proud of it.
5. University colleagues. Engaging local and (conference) visitors.
6. Commercial and governmental colleagues. Increasing visibility.

4 Measures of success

The primary measure will be whether people engage positively with the space, and choose to interact with it. Footfalls within the space are less important than the number of interactions with it, either inside or outside.

InSpace should also generate:

1. A sustainable, regular programme of activities, including at least some exhibitions (as sketched above).
2. Publications: possibly catalogue-based, but definitely also research work suitable for RAE submission.
3. Software: for creating and controlling flexible, interactive visualisations
4. Experimental hardware configurations: for use in interactives; this includes both sensor technologies, and presentation technologies.