Spacialist – A Virtual Research Environment for the Spatial Humanities

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Many archaeological research projects generate data and tools that are abandoned after the project funding ends. Moreover, research data handling and the deployed tools are often highly specific for single projects. This practice leads to solutions that are incompatible with other tools, projects and infrastructures, and they often do not rely on accepted standards.

To close this gap, the project Spacialist was tasked to create a modular virtual research environment that offers an integrated, web-based user interface to record, browse, analyze, and visualize all spatial, graphical, textual and statistical data from archaeological or cultural heritage research projects. To address the highly heterogeneous requirements of such projects, Spacialist is developed as a software platform that is instantiated, customized and deployed for each research project. Spacialist uses project-specific controlled vocabularies based on the SKOS-XML standard, thus facilitating data analysis and interoperability with other projects and infrastructures.

The project is now beyond its development phase and is used by a number of projects in productive operation. In our presentation we will first present the functionalities and architecture of the software and then discuss in detail the experiences made so far. Special attention will be paid to the problem of sustainable further development and maintenance of Spacialist.

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