

Vici.org: crowdsourced citizen science in the e-humanities

ir R.J.J. Voorburg MA. / Vici.org / rene@digitopia.nl

Introduction

Vici.org is a citizen initiative aimed at creating, documenting and sharing a crowdsourced map of both hidden and visible remains from classical antiquity. Vici.org is inspired by Wikipedia but additionally offers a platform with free APIs and data services.

Vici.org started early 2012 as an initiative to create a GPS-enabled mobile map that would visualize the hidden remains of Roman history nearby. It has since grown into a community of over 200 registered users that added over 20,000 entries and images to the map, covering the entire Roman-Greco world.

Impact or results

Many sites and markers that users added to Vici.org have been imported and published by the Digital Atlas of the Roman Empire (DARE) project¹. Through DARE, these sites, or the improved geo coordinates offered by them, ended up in the gazetteer for classical antiquity, Pleiades². Various websites use, or plan to use, the javascript widget offered by Vici.org to publish a map of sites and images from classical antiquity. Among them are Livius.org³, and Romaq.org⁴. Further the linked open data⁵ records published by Vici.org form a part of the international Pelagios network⁶.

Success factors and concerns

The Vici.org project did not start as a science project as such but primarily as an attempt to truthfully map and visualize classical antiquity and its remains. Thus for scientific reuse of the data, data quality can be a concern. Data on Vici.org are often founded in the local knowledge of the contributors. If references are presented, these are rarely to scientific reports. However, the level of professionalism of the active users is often high. For example: one user added the sites of 14 previously unknown roman temporary camps. Local archeological authorities confirmed the nature of the finds but for the sake of protection of the sites requested the markers to be hidden. Even when data on Vici.org should be reused with some care, specifically the markers that point to visible sites or objectes prove to be more exact than much of the data in the renown Barrington Atlas⁷ and data on Vici.org helps to improve and extend the Pleiades gazetteer and supports the Pelagios network.

Vici.org shows that crowdsourcing can be a successful approach in digital humanities. Usage patterns provide insight in how to foster a crowdsourced project.

Future directions

In following iterations of the platform, Vici will strengthen the design philosophy of providing both a pleasant and rewarding experience for the casual visitor and a set of tools that help the community to collaborate and to further integrate with the web of scientific data.

1 Åhlfeldt, Johan: Digital Atlas of the Roman Empire. <http://imperium.ahlfeldt.se/>

2 Pleiades, a community-built gazetteer and graph of ancient places. <http://pleiades.stoa.org/>

3 Lendering, Jona: Livius.org, Articles on ancient history. <http://livius.org/>

4 Passchier, Cees., Opstal, Driek van. & Schram, Wilke: Roman Aqueducts Project. <http://www.romaq.org/>

5 Linked Open Data in the Open Annotation Collaboration format: <http://vici.org/void.rdf>

6 Pelagios: Enable Linked Ancient Geodata In Open Systems. <http://pelagios-project.blogspot.de/>

7 Talbert, R.J.A., ed.: Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World. Princeton University Press.