

Annotating Space and Time in Historical Atlases: Then and now

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As described earlier in this program, the Paper and Virtual Cities is a joint research programme of the Virtual Knowledge Studio of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the department of Humanities Computing, and the department of Art and Architectural History of the Groningen University and is financed by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).

The topic of this lecture falls within the project area identified as coding the virtual city: the development of a mark-up language to describe these historical and contextual aspects and made them both understandable to the computer and the user.

Area studies

Both old and modern digitized maps contain errors and manipulations. In order to compare digital maps they have to be manipulated, other manipulations can be deliberate distortions falsifying a historical situation. To make the user aware of such manipulations and to allow a critical use of digital resources they need to be annotated.

In the Paper and Virtual Cities project we have created a toolbox – “draw over image” - that enables the researcher to compare visually the same area of various digitized maps and to annotate them. We will present this application that consists of a simple editor enabling users to draw separate layers on top of a map and to project these on other maps for comparison. The output layers from this application might be stored on a server, so that other researchers can benefit from the annotations and compare them with their own data sets.

Then and now

Map makers, collectors wrote notes on historical maps explaining choices in production and consumption. Apart from illustrating these annotations that give historical information on the making and (re-)use of maps, we need to be able to demonstrate how we handled this information in the digitization of maps and how we assessed errors and shortcomings in relation to original function and contexts of use.

Existing languages focus on formal, rather than on contextual elements which are important for historical research and the assessment of the historical evidence of resources. The proposed research tries to overcome certain limitations of GIS-systems in the handling of historical contexts. It concentrates on the question how at the base of existing languages a new mark-up language can be

developed which allows an optimal linkage of maps with primary and secondary sources to place them in historical context.

The well known historical mark-up language HEML focuses on events. However the proposed paper does not focus on the "events" themselves but rather concentrates on the primary and secondary sources which "illustrate" historical processes. This allows the annotation of different points of views and interpretations (reconstructions) over time of the same historical event. In this paper we will show these different layers of annotation by the makers of paper and digital maps and by their users.