

12 July 2017

EU project led by University of Exeter to use virtual and augmented reality to revolutionise the way we experience cultural heritage sites

The France (Channel) England Programme has today announced (12 July 2017) that it will help co-fund a new 7.8 million euro project, led by the University of Exeter, that will develop and implement a range of exciting augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) experiences for a number of tourist attractions in the South of England and the North of France.

The cross-border project, known as VISTA AR, will work closely with Exeter Cathedral and Fougères castle in France, to develop an understanding of visitor experiences, create new VR and AR digital tools, and explore new business models and opportunities presented by digital technology.

VISTA AR will explore the use of different digital devices to create new visitor experiences. Virtual reality helmets, tablet and smartphone devices, and immersive room experiences will be used to bring history to life, allowing visitors to meet characters from the past and providing access to inaccessible heritage artefacts.

Once developed the digital tools will be used to create new digital experiences in a further four locations; the National Trust Tin Coast, and South West Coastal Path in the UK, as well as the Lorient Submarine Museum and the Gardens of Valloires in France.

The tools developed by the project will be made available to other UK and French cultural heritage sites on a cloud-based system where they can be easily accessed and adapted to the needs of each specific heritage location.

The project is a major step in providing cultural heritage sites with an effective way to enhance visitor experiences while increasing visitor numbers and revenue.

Commenting on the announcement, Professor Andi Smart from the lead partner, the University of Exeter, said: *“This is a unique opportunity to capitalise on the wealth of cultural heritage assets found on both sides of the channel.*

“Innovation often occurs at the interfaces. This project combines Anglo-French expertise in technology, animation, augmented and virtual reality, and business to innovate both the visitor experience and the business models of cultural heritage sites. It provides cultural heritage stakeholders with the opportunity to explore ‘digital possibilities’ which are otherwise largely cost prohibitive.”

The project budget will total 7.8 million euros with 69% funded by the Interreg France (Channel) England programme, representing a European Regional Development Fund budget of 5.3 million euros. A total of 8 organisations from France and the UK will be involved in the project which will last 4 years.

-Ends-

For further information, please contact:

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Notes to Editors:

1. The Interreg FCE Programme is a European Territorial Cooperation programme that aims to fund high quality cooperation projects in the Channel border region between France and England. It focuses on a range of specific objectives including supporting innovation, improving the attractiveness of the FCE area and developing low carbon technologies. The programme is managed by Managing Authority Norfolk County Council.
2. The Programme operates within a clearly defined eligible area, covering the South and East Coasts of England from Cornwall to Norfolk, and the North Coast of France from Finistère to Pas-de-Calais. The programme area can be found [here](#).
3. Project Partners:
 - *Lead partner: University of Exeter (UK)*
 - Conseil Régional de Bretagne (France)
 - Commune de Fougères (France)
 - Bournemouth University (UK)
 - CESI (France)
 - NEOMA Business School (France)
 - ESSAB (France)
 - Exeter Cathedral (UK)
4. More information about the Programme can be found at <https://interreg5a-fce.eu/>.