A pioneering project that breaks down the barriers between science and technology and cultural heritage is transforming the way we view history.

How do you both bring history to life and change the boundaries of our knowledge about it? The University of Brighton led European Network of Excellence in Open Cultural Heritage (EPOCH) – has brought together over 600 technologists and heritage experts to create working methods and a common vocabulary and to set an agenda for future research. The network is also developing tools for recording and analysing cultural objects, and for strategic planning and socioeconomic impact evaluation within cultural organisations.

These tools were identified in the EU’s final review as making “ground breaking progress in impact evaluation within cultural organisations. Not only has the 3D-COFORM project raised their expectations. 3D brings history to life in a way that photos cannot and the internet can’t...

The multidisciplinary project, a collaboration between 19 partners, culminated in the Reshaping History exhibition held in Brighton in 2012. 3D-COFORM ran over 30 deployment experiments, combining tools to address curatorial challenges, test technologies and integration, raise awareness, and train a new generation of heritage professionals. The 2012 exhibition showed each stage of the integrated workflow in 3D artefacts, demonstrating innovative technologies applied to iconic heritage content. For example, Michaelangelo’s David, whose plans have developed to use 3D modelling to determine whether cracks in the statue are getting larger over time. The 3D-COFORM exhibition was designed to inspire and inform people working in cultural heritage and the public about the potential of 3D computing within the cultural heritage world. The exhibition has been shown around the world, and been translated into both Italian and Portuguese, attracting more than 10,000 visitors and considerable international media coverage. It arrived in Brazil in August 2014 for a two-month run in a new gallery opposite Sugarloaf Mountain and is planned to tour several locations. Stephanie Smith, Sussex Finds Liaison Officer, Portable Antiquities Scheme, called it “an absolutely brilliant undertaking explaining why 3D technology has the potential to completely change the way we create, incorporate and explore archaeological finds. An absolutely brilliant undertaking explaining why 3D technology has the potential to completely change the way we create, incorporate and explore architectural finds. The project has delivered breakthrough work on several aspects of the development of 3D technology for the cultural heritage sector. The 3D-COFORM project introduced heritage institutions and the public to the applicability of 3D within the sector.

Chris Vastenhoud, Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels

The 3D-COFORM project has also contributed to international standards in the interchange of cultural heritage information and has been instrumental in introducing 3D models to Europeana, formerly the European Digital Library. 3D-COFORM established a Virtual Competence Centre for 3D, which will provide independent advice on 3D technologies to cultural institutions and has widened public access to heritage information. Professor Arnold said: “Not only will 3D technological innovation transform working practices for cultural professionals, but the public are used to digital technology and this has raised their expectations. 3D brings history to life in a way that photos cannot and the internet opens up heritage material to a much wider community.”