

Introduction: The Humanities in a Digital World

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DH Benelux 2021 marks the eighth edition of the annual conference of Digital Humanities (DH) in the Benelux community. The conference started with the hope of being a hybrid event, although with limited participation onsite. At the end of November 2020 the first authorization requests for the approval of vaccines for COVID-19 had been submitted, and massive vaccination campaigns started in the EU in January 2021. Unfortunately, it soon became rather clear that, by the time of the conference (early June), the number of potential participants who had received their first dose would not be sufficient. Moreover, with travel restrictions mostly still in place, hosting an onsite conference was simply not feasible. Learning from the experience of the first wave of COVID-19, we therefore had no choice but to move the conference fully online.

After only one year in the pandemic, making sure to have a smooth online conference was still challenging. In coordination with the local organizers, we discussed and evaluated different solutions concerning the presentations and the online environments. We finally decided to keep the traditional distinction between oral and poster presentations and to have social events too.

We are very pleased to say that the conference was a very successful event, hosting two panel sessions and a total of 42 abstracts. In the tradition of DH Benelux conferences, after the event we invited authors to submit extended versions of their abstracts to the Special Issue of the DH Benelux journal. We received nine submissions, each reviewed by experts in a single-blind setup. We accepted seven papers after minor or major revisions. The results of this process can be found in this issue.

As usual, the contributions of this issue reflect a mix of articles, some directly addressing the theme of DH Benelux 2021 *The Humanities in a Digital World*, others presenting case studies within the broader spectrum of Digital Humanities.

The paper by Bleeker and colleagues “A Game of Persistence, Self-doubt, and Curiosity: Surveying Code Literacy in Digital Humanities” targets the thematic strand of *DH Practices and Didactics* from a new perspective. They investigate what *code literacy* means in the humanities. The paper describes the outcome of a survey that asks

members of the DH community how they define code literacy and how important it is for them. Using 399 definitions from their survey, they show that code literacy is a complex concepts where different kind of skills (reading, interpreting, writing, using, publishing, reviewing code), as well as the research or social context play a role.

The *DH Practices and Didactics* theme is also represented by the article by Cunning and colleagues “Introducing the DHARPA Project: An interdisciplinary lab to enable critical DH practice”. In this contribution the authors introduce a Virtual Research Environment (VRE) software under development by the Digital History Advanced Research Projects Accelerator (DHARPA), an interdisciplinary team of researchers and developers. The presented VRE comprises of a modular and data-centric backend and an interactive frontend capable of documenting scholarly processes. The main goal of the VRE is to “(re)build a critically-aware connection between scholar and sources in a digital world”.

Connected to the theme of *Data for a Digital Age*, the contribution by Zandhuis “Combining Tools with Linked Data: a social history example” highlights the challenge of working with a variety of tool sets. The author explains how different tasks in a typical research setting each involve their own (preferred) tool. The author describes the process of combining references stored in Zotero, photos from Tropy and digitized text from Recogito using Linked Data. The result is a highly accessible introduction to Linked Data and how this may be used, illustrated through a use case around 19th century print laborers.

The article by De Boer and colleagues, “Modeling Ontologies for Individual Artists: A Case Study of a Dutch Ceramic Glass Sculptor” focuses on the theme *Creativity through a Digital Lens*. The paper discusses the challenges and advantages related to the use of ontologies as a solution to better structure and enrich data for Cultural Heritage databases facilitating “both experts’ as well as the general public’s access to information”. They present a dedicated case study related to an ontology for a ceramic glass artist illustrating the methodology used to develop and evaluate it.

In the paper by Nielbo and colleagues “When no news is bad news - News-based change detection during COVID-19”, the authors illustrate the transformations of news media outlets into “*Corona-news*” where “the same news was repeated over and over” decreasing the novelty of the information presented to the readers. By using a Bayesian approach, the authors investigates whether a “change in novelty can be used to detect change in news media” when societies are affected by major negative events.

De Greve and colleagues’ article “Judging a Book by its Criticism: A Digital Analysis of the Professional and Community Driven Literary Criticism of the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis” offers a peek into a relationship between literary prizes and social media by examining the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis. The authors provide an in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis of differences between the Twitter, Instagram, Goodreads and jury corpora and between the evaluative literary criteria of professional and layperson critics surrounding the German Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis.

Lastly, Cuper’s paper “Examining a multi layered approach for classification of OCR quality without Ground Truth” proposes and describes a multi-layered approach for the classification of OCR quality called QuPipe. The contribution of the method, which is tested and evaluated on a data-set of sentences from 17th Century Newspapers, lies in its potential to be used without Ground Truth for OCR quality classification.

The last words of this editorial are for the Leiden local organizers: Angus Mol, Sjef Barbiere, Alison Carter, Jelena Prokic, Laurents Sesink, and Erik Weber. They have all played a key role in making DH Benelux 2021 possible. We also would like to

thank the editors of this journal for their support in the process of making this volume possible. A special thank goes to the reviewers: they have provided thorough and constructive comments to the submissions both for the conference programme and the Special Issue, crucially contributing to knowledge advancement. Last but not least, we want to thank the whole DH Benelux community: your participation and engagement were vital to the success of DH Benelux 2021.