

COST Action IS1310 Reassembling the Republic of Letters

Visualisation Meeting, COMO, IT (4-8 APRIL 2016).

Starting on Monday April 4th, 2016, under the form of a design sprint lasting five days, a heterogeneous group of people composed by humanists, information designers, computer scientists and data strategists arranged to meet in Como (IT). The aim of the meeting was to perform several exploration on data related to the *Respublica Litteraria* and its personalities and, when possible, to come up with a mock-up or a prototype of a new innovative digital tool.

The meeting represented an important opportunity to better understand how Information Design is able to contribute to the research of the scholar, especially through the exploration and the analysis of historical data.

The group of twenty five people who took part to the event was an heterogeneous one, some were scholars in the humanities (almost half of them) while the others were information design researchers, data strategists and developers. They teamed up into five different working groups, everyone focussed on a different topic depending on the project proposals that had been previously gathered during the period of organization.

Since the purpose of the week was to end up with some very practical concepts, after giving some talks and presentations, the participants immediately started working on their team project.¹

At the end of the week all teams have been asked to compile a final report describing their outcomes -which are all remarkable- and, drawing from those documents, it is possible to identify a number of interesting insight of the week.

Firstly, the collaboration between scholars in the humanities and design researchers, highlighted how the time spent together produced a meaningful and almost unexpected mutual learning: the formers learned how to better express their wishes and needs and the latters were able to better describe the contribution that they are able to bring. The mutual understanding that was in the focus of the week spent together, made it an eye opening experience and it appeared dramatically clear that the different figures should start working together from the very beginning of any project in order to produce interesting outcomes and further fresh research questions.

The challenges that emerged were the most disparate; some were ordinary issues related to the environment of data visualisation while some other were to be addressed in relation to the field of the humanities. Some questions are still open while for some others people identified a direction to follow. As data is not always clean or precise and, especially when it is rich of meanings and details, it presents a number of inconsistencies: it can present incongruence in language and place name as well as different geographical or temporal notations. Nevertheless, beside of all the well-known problems related to historiographical data, it emerged the need of producing a visual sense of the large corpora of information that is different from the traditional purely linear and descriptive fashion. Taking into account the outcomes of the week, a possible step forward seems to be combining traditional research methods and processes with design thinking, adopting new strategies for data communication and imagine ways to fill the gaps left by the absence of specific tools: sometimes what it is needed is a new tool able to address specific needs or issues, sometimes a

¹ If interested in more details regarding the single speeches, the timetable, the location or the organization, please read the Welcome Package provided to the participants: <https://goo.gl/019Uh0>

knowledge in the field of visualisation can resolve the gap between humanities and technologies, using for instance cartograms instead of regular geographical maps.

Those considerations connect directly to the finding that data is not just an amount of information to be blindly worked on, but that it is important to consider with care what this data means on a humanistic point of view.

After the meeting the participants expressed a number of possible further steps for their research. They are looking to a wider range of different aspects like practices related to the design and the importance of the iterative path connected to them, the development of a tailored visual language, the importance of a continuous redefinition of needs and research questions and the communication of findings to a broader audience.

Projects documentation

Project 1

Seeing Echoes: visualizing text reuse in correspondence

Team Members: Sinai Rusinek (Project Leader), Tommaso Elli, Giovanni Moretti, Ludovica Marinucci

Keywords: Correspondence network, Graphs, Text reuse, formulae in letters

Read the report: <https://goo.gl/jl9Y53>

Project 2

International Lives and National Biographies: Visualisation Against the Grain

Team Members: Christopher Warren (Project Leader), Meliha Handzic, Michele Mauri, Daniele Ciminieri

Keywords: Biography, internationalism, text-mining, life-writing, prosopography, geography, profession

Read the report: <https://goo.gl/mH9sdz>

Project 3

VIA - Virtual Itineraries of Academics: exploring early modern academic travel culture

Team Members: Mikkel Munthe Jensen, Gabriele Colombo, Marco Quaggiotto, Joëlle Weis

Keywords: Travels, Early Modern, Republic of Letters, Academic Culture, Academia, Universities, Scholars, Intellectual Geography, Intellectual History, History of Science

Read the report: <https://goo.gl/SWo8HS>

Project 4

PHILUS

Team Members: Guy Lazure (project leader), Ángeles Briones, Michele Invernizzi, Alex Butterworth, Cal Murgu, Margherita Parigini

Keywords: Republic of Letters, Spain, Books, Libraries, Correspondence, Prohibited, Inquisition, Index, Visualisation, Classification, Confessional, Publisher, Humanist, Iberia, Transnational, Index Librorum Prohibitorum, Hernando Colón, Benito Arias Montano, Juan de Mal Lara, Pedro Vélez de Guevara, Ambrosio de Morales

Read the report: <https://goo.gl/9AXwk2>

Project 5

Visualizing EMLO

Team Members: Howard Hotson (project leader), Glauco Mantegari, Carlo De Gaetano, Azzurra Pini

Keywords: Early-modern Letters Online, multidimensional data, exploratory analysis, interactive visualizations, DH innovation

Read the report: <https://goo.gl/7WSSoo>

Project 6

Visualizing the Distribution of Newton's First-Edition (1687) Principia Copies

Team Members: Andrej Svorenčik

Keywords: /

Read the report: <https://goo.gl/XeFhXG>

Project 7

Visualizing the Republic of Letters' epistolaries and calculating their contents

Team Members: Riccardo Bellingacci, Glauco Mantegari, Carlo Alessandro De Gaetano

Keywords: EROL, Posthumous publications, Zotero

Read the report: <https://goo.gl/xh4r5K>

N.B. During the week, team number 5 experienced some settlements, so their outcome is actually spread across the projects five, six and seven.

Notes prepared by Tommaso Elli.