

STSM Scientific Report:
*Digital prosopographies of religious orders in early modern
Europe*

COST Action IS1310
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Period 11/04/2016 to 19/04/2016
Reference code COST-STSM-ECOST-STSM-IS1310-110416-074425

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1 Purpose of the STSM

The main goal of the STSM was to compare and discuss methods concerned with prosopographical research on religious orders in the early modern period, namely the Benedictines (Thomas Wallnig's topic, the ProDomo project) and the Society of Jesus (my topic). In my PhD project, the so called Jesuit Science Network (or JSN for short), I study Jesuit activity in the early modern sciences by compiling a biographical database of the involved actors and implementing it in a project website, with the aim to allow other researchers access to the collected data. Due to the similarities in both content and methodology of our respective projects, Thomas and I particularly strove to find out how a direct collaboration might be possible, ideally even allowing for a future extension of the scope to other religious orders.

Thus, the following issues were to be examined during the STSM, based on a comparison between the ProDomo and JSN projects:

- Technical framework
- Data model
- Historical sources, quality of data
- Website implementation with feasible and/or desired visualizations, evaluations, and analyses
- Practical questions concerning digital preservation and legal issues

2 Description of the work carried out during the STSM

The work carried out during the STSM has also to be viewed against the backdrop of the workshop "Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Digital Humanities in Forschung und Lehre"¹ in Göttingen from April 7–9 where I participated with a talk on the current state of the JSN. In the course of those two and a half days, a total of 27 talks shed light on various topics surrounding both research and teaching in the digital history of science: digital prosopographies, digital editions, historical network analysis, digital collections, digital media competence, student projects surrounding research projects, etc. The presentations and conversations that I had with speakers directly benefited the STSM; the following two points were the biggest to carry over from Göttingen to Vienna:

¹The title can be translated as "History of science and digital humanities in research and teaching".

1. The Person Data Repository Project (PDR for short) at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities was one of the main matters of debate. The PDR provides the technical framework and data model for the JSN and I have been very happy to work with it; however, the project development has been stopped at the Academy and only minimal maintenance is currently being done. As there are also other research projects using the PDR (two examples are the Musici² and MusMig³ databases) and even others interested in starting to use it, this has caused some commotion in the community. A possible future collaboration between Thomas and I could very well have been based on the PDR, as well.
2. From a presentation on the Germania Sacra Online⁴, I learned about a way to automatically aggregate links to a number of specific information providers (including, but not limited to norm files like GND or VIAF and library catalogs); in addition, I also learned about an API to query the Germania Sacra Online itself. Both features are highly relevant to the JSN, ProDomo, and possible future cooperations.

Aside from that, the workshop gave ample opportunity to learn about smaller, yet equally important issues of digital work and workflow.

With these impressions still fresh on my mind, I started the STSM. On the first day, Monday, 11 April, Thomas' coworkers Manuela Mayer and Irene Rabl kindly gave me detailed introductions into ProDomo as well as their involvement with the digital edition of the letters of the brothers Pez⁵. Thomas additionally provided me with some literature that might be of interest for the JSN and my PhD thesis and so I spent the next day studying this literature and taking notes. On Wednesday, 13 April, most of the day was taken up by a ProDomo meeting and subsequent discussions on data models, the suitability of various database forms (Resource Description Framework, relational database, graph database, PDR) including the viability of specific visualizations based on the respective technical frameworks, as well as authority files. Particularly the choice of the database/framework is a difficult one and needs further discussion about the intended and desired aims and functionalities of ProDomo, especially with an eye toward to a possible cooperation with the JSN.

On Thursday, 14 April, I took the opportunity and attended day two of the conference "Entangled Worlds. Network analysis and complexity theory in historical and

²<http://www.musici.eu>

³<http://www.musmig.eu>

⁴<http://www.germania-sacra.de>

⁵http://www.univie.ac.at/monastische_aufklaerung/de/die-edition

archaeological research”⁶ at the Institut für Mittelalterforschung of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. With its focus on the application of network analysis on historical topics, the meeting was of immediate interest for the STSM. The presentations given discussed historical backgrounds, the formation of historically valid research questions, data models, network theory, applications to use for visualization, and analyses of the networks constructed. The talk by Andreas Kuczera on “Graphdatenbanken – neue Perspektiven für die semantische Erschließung” especially gave some insight on graph databases that can, should, and will be followed up on for the JSN, ProDomo, and any future cooperation.

With the exception of a meeting dealing with the nascent XML model for the earlier mentioned Pez letter edition at the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities on Friday, 15 April, the rest of the time was spent with deliberations on what exactly such a future cooperation might look like.

3 Description of the main results obtained

The general goal, a digital prosopography of members of religious orders in early modern Europe, is already part of the title of the STSM and this report. The STSM was hence used in order to tentatively sketch the way in which this goal can be achieved, and of what my involvement could consist in particular.

- As a first step, we agreed to study two aspects of Benedictine and Jesuit scholars and visualize them: the relation between the numbers of those, who only published scientific works, but never taught them, and those, who were also involved in teaching; and a mapping of the ways between the place of birth and the place of entry in the order. Thus drawing first comparisons based on our respective research data, we can provide examples of the utility of a common database and, at the same time, study historical questions only made possible to answer by the development of digital humanities.
- As I am working with the PDR and ProDomo’s first steps were also taken with the PDR, we will compare the classifications of the two projects, i.e. the internal structures each of us developed using the Berlin framework. First cursory looks over the files already revealed many overlaps.
- Further concerning the PDR, its recent and unexpected end gives rise to discussions on how to assure long-term preservation of any digital data in all projects

⁶<http://www.dasanderemittelalter.net/conference-entangled-worlds>

involved. A definite solution to this issue still has to be found, more than likely within a bigger framework than just the projects themselves.

- With the JSN already having an online website to access, display, and evaluate the collected data in an easy way,⁷ we will use the experiences gained from its implementation – concerning both the successfully built-in features and any problems that were and are encountered during programming – as a basis for future work.
- Directly tied in to this is the quality and quantity of the historical sources from which the data is taken. We have found that some of our sources are rather similar, thus allowing for comparative studies based on them, and some are quite different and cannot be used for analyses. While this might seem rather obvious, it is nonetheless an issue in digital humanities that sometimes tends to get overlooked for the sake of ‘pretty pictures’.
- And finally, Thomas invited me to participate in the Second Annual Conference of the COST-Action in Warsaw, 11–15 June. There we will present some of our findings from the STSM, focusing on the first comparative studies, and draw a picture of the future collaboration envisioned.

4 Confirmation of the host institution of the successful execution of the STSM

The confirmation is submitted in a separate file.

5 Other comments

The STSM was, without a doubt, one of the most useful things that I had the opportunity to do for my PhD. I learned a lot about my own project, saw possible future perspectives (not only with respect to the JSN), and also simply had a great time in Vienna. I am very grateful to Thomas and his team for hosting me and the COST-Action for making this stay financially possible.

⁷Due to practical and legal reasons, it is not open to the public yet.