

CegeSoma Taking the Lead in Sustainable Digital Publishing Project

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CegeSoma coordinates a project entitled "Open History" Workshops on sustainable digital publishing of archival catalogues of twentieth-century history archives in the context of the Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities (DARIAH-EU) Theme call 2015 on "Open Humanities". Together with four other initiative taking partner institutions, this project focusses on the current challenges of sustainable digital publishing of archival descriptions.

Digital humanities' need to engage with data providers

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As contemporary historians start to investigate the possibilities and opportunities offered by digital humanities, collection-holding institutions face a myriad of challenges to successfully participate and share their data and metadata with digital research infrastructures. Too often, attention is given to the development of methodologies and tools for the researcher, while very little is done to assure that the data-providing institutions can live up to the assumed expectations, (this can be developed in a micro-test environment). While many initiatives have been taken to set up digital humanities resource discovery services and virtual research environments (VREs), the access to, and sharing of, descriptive metadata has been held back. Often this is due to metadata having been created in bespoke systems for internal use only and not published in a machine-usable form to the outside digital world.

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Why the archives need assistance?

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Projects such as the Collaborative European Digital Archive Infrastructure (CENDARI) and the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) have been pioneers in merging metadata from repositories preserving Europe's twentieth century history, but they were also confronted with this problem. In many cases considerable manual work is required to prepare the data for integration into the research portals. Important bespoke adjustments to the metadata and/or its structure are required, and these methods of preparing and publishing metadata are not sustainable for data providers or aggregators. There is therefore a clear risk that this data will remain available only in institutional or static aggregations, where it will not be suitable for future research applications.

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What will this project do?

The project starts off with a workshop of the five initiative-taking institutions (DANS, The Hague, NIOD, Amsterdam, TCD, Dublin, the USTR and ABS, Prague and CegeSoma) in Brussels on 29 and 30 September 2015. The aim of this first meeting is to merge the knowledge on this subject from projects such as CENDARI and EHRI based on their experiences and on their (un-)published reports relating to this subject. This will result in a state-of-the-art overview of the current situation and offer possible scenarios and working points for archivists to take into account.

A second workshop will be organised later this year (on 9-10 December 2015) to test the report and its recommendations with a group of collection-holding institutions, and to raise the awareness of the collection-holding institutions and others in the field of the digital humanities of the urgent requirement to close this gap. The invited participants are interdisciplinary institutions (collections, memory, public history and research), dealing with European conflicts from twentieth century history. Results of the workshops will be shared via publications.

Veerle Vanden Daelen

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