Editorial Introduction to Biographical Data in a Digital World 2017

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Abstract

On 6 and 7 November 2017 researchers from all over the world gathered in Linz, Austria, for the second conference on Biographical Data in a Digital World. The conference included 16 oral presentations and 10 poster presentations. These proceedings contain 13 fully reviewed papers that are based on the presentations given during this event.

1   Introduction

Plutarch (46-120 AD) is considered to be the father of the genre of 'Biography'. For him writing a biography was almost a spiritual journey: 'For the result is like nothing else than daily living and associating together, when I receive and welcome each subject of my history in turn as my guest, [...] and select from his career what is most important and most beautiful to know'.[1]

Plutarch wrote about famous men, rulers like Alexander the Great, and compared them to other rulers. This focus on 'great men' remained dominant in biographers' works, arguably to this very day. Fortunately there have been many developments and initiatives that focus on other kinds of people as well. Scholars started to draw up group portraits, studied history through the eyes of the common person, and increasingly paid attention to women and minorities.

The rise of the computer in the twentieth century led to a further increase of biographies on a wider variety of people. Databases were used to store 'biographical data', statistical analyses became available through advanced programs, and charts and graphs on groups of people were created more easily. A lot of 'biographical data' on a wide variety of people became more easily available: famous people on Wikipedia, genealogical data on private websites, interviews, online biographical dictionaries, and scanned primary source material such as death registers and marriage certificates. Academics worldwide worked on how to mine, navigate, model and analyze all these biographical data, or how to extrapolate even more biographical data from digitized texts. The Biographical Data in a Digital World conference was created as a platform to showcase, discuss and publish the latest research on biographical data.

2   Biographical Data in a Digital World

The Biographical Data in a Digital World conference has taken us from Amsterdam (9 April 2015) to Linz (6-7 November 2017) for its second edition, organized by a team from the Austrian Academy of Sciences, in the framework of the APIS project.[2] Already it seems that a tight community has formed among people working on biographical data, as is evidenced by workshops on biographical data in Krakow (DH2016, 11 July), Amsterdam (22 May 2017) and Vienna (published in the *Europa baut auf Biographien* volume [3]) in between the two conferences. The collaboration has furthermore led to the creation of the DARIAH-EU working group "Analysing and Linking Biographical Data". Research on 'Biographical Data' is still very much alive. As long as this is the case we fully intend to continue the Biographical Data in a Digital World conference series, which is why we are pleased to announce that the organization of the 2019 edition is already on its way.

3   Proceedings

The *Proceedings* of the first Biographical Data in a Digital World conference followed shortly after the Amsterdam conference. For the 2017 edition we decided to take a slightly different approach. Instead of asking for papers *before* the Conference, we only asked for abstracts. Everyone who had something to say on the topic of biographical data would be welcome to give a (poster) presentation. After the conference, an invitation to submit a full paper was sent out to everyone who had given a presentation, which would undergo the regular procedure of a single blind peer review process. In the end we accepted 13 papers for the 2017 *Proceedings*.

We grouped these papers in four categories: (i) *Bringing Biographical Data Online* (3 papers), (ii) *Biographical Data and Historical Research* (3 papers), (iii) *Group Portraits and Networks* (4 papers) and (iv) *Visualization and Representation* (3 papers).

We believe these papers provide a rich panorama of research on biographical data: best practices to bring biographical data online; how to use these data to address biographical and historical research questions; how to visualize, model and store these data; and finally, more than in the previous edition, also how to work together efficiently on these topics.

We continue to hope that these proceedings will inspire more research on biographical data in a digital world.

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[1]Plutarch, The Life of Timoleon, introduction, translated by Bernadotte Perrin

[2]https://www.oeaw.ac.at/de/acdh/projects/apis/

[3]http://www.newacademicpress.at/gesamtverzeichnis/unkategorisiert/europa-baut-auf-biographien/

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