

Invited Talk

Linked Data for Digital History

Victor de Boer
Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam

Abstract :

With the increasing popularity of digital humanities, researchers seek more (international and cross-domain) collaboration. Integrating humanities datasets becomes more important to these researchers. This is very much prevalent in historical research and to further the digital history agenda, sharing data and knowledge is key. Semantic Web technologies present good opportunities to support historians in this aspect.

I will argue that in order for digital history to become a lasting multidisciplinary field of research rather than a popular buzzword, we need to stop building specific tools and visualizations based on requirements provided by historians. Rather, we should develop generic methodologies for modelling, linking and providing access to historical data. Properly represented and accessible data becomes more valuable over time, whereas specific analysis tools are hard to develop, combine maintain.

This means that historians will need to be able to 1) browse heterogeneous datasets in a convenient way to get an intuition of the character and anomalies of the (linked) data; 2) perform arbitrary queries to retrieve results relevant to their research questions; 3) verify the veracity of query results, by following provenance links to original material and 4) analyze the data with their tool of preference.

For historical researchers and computer scientist to successfully co-develop these methodologies computer scientists will need to understand the historical science methods and historians will need to learn how to perform these queries. Under those conditions, the use of Semantic Web technologies presents a real next step for historical research.

I will discuss a number of recent collaborations between computer scientists and historians to investigate their value for digital history. I will present projects that tackle different aspects of the historical science agenda, including the Dutch Ships and Sailors and BiographyNet projects on representing and linking heterogeneous datasets and the DIVE project on browsing linked media collections.

