

Virtualization of the Digital Humanities in the Nordic Countries 5th Conference

The Preface to the Post-Proceedings

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Abstract. The paper recounts the process of organizing and running the virtual Digital Humanities in the Nordic Countries Conference (DHN2020) after the original conference was rescheduled due to the Covid-19 pandemic and provides an overview of the papers published in the second volume of the proceedings of the conference.

Keywords: Digital Humanities, Nordic and Baltic Countries, Virtual Conference.

1 Introduction

Digital Humanities in the Nordic Countries is an international organization that has been holding annual conferences since 2015 [see 2, 3, 4]. After the DHN2020 conference, the organization was renamed to include the Baltic region in the title: Digital Humanities in the Nordic and Baltic Countries (DHNB). In March 2020, the conference should have taken place in Riga, Latvia co-organized by the National Library of Latvia, Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, and Institute of Mathematics and Computer Sciences (both affiliated with the University of Latvia). Following the introduction of restrictions on travel and gatherings in Latvia and across Europe due to the growing concerns over the Covid-19 pandemic, the conference was suspended and postponed just a few days before the conference was to have begun on March 17 [4]. The conference was immediately rescheduled to take place from October 21–23, 2020, at the same location. Due to the interruption of the established schedule of the conference, the 6th DHNB conference has been pushed forward to the spring of 2022, in Uppsala, Sweden.

2 The Virtualization of DHN2020

After the postponement of the DHN2020 conference, a survey was carried out asking participants about their views on how would they prefer the conference to be organized later in October. Feedback was received from more than 50% (106) of registered

participants. The majority of the respondents strongly indicated that they would prefer to attend the conference in person; therefore, it was once again hopefully intended to be held as a physical conference. Since the grip of the pandemic eased during the summer, the outlook remained positive. Still, it was clear that travel restrictions and the global pandemic situation might have an impact on in-person attendance. On June 11, the participants were notified that the organizers were contemplating an on-site conference with a strong virtual component. By the end of August, it was decided to virtualize all presentations (excluding the one poster session that was presented live) while retaining the possibility to visit the conference in person. However, throughout September and October, it gradually became clear that travel would not be possible, and only the team of the organizers would be present on site at the time of the conference.

From the onset, it was of utmost importance for the organizers to preserve the content of the conference. As a first step towards that goal, the authors and presenters were assured that the event would take place according to the new schedule and asked attendees to reserve the date. Nevertheless, reimbursements were provided to everyone who decided not to attend. Strategies for replenishing the missing segments of the programme were discussed during the summer; however, a new call for presentations was eventually not issued since a relatively small number of contributions was lost: 7 contributions or approximately 2 hours of content (31.5 hours remained in the programme) [1]. A few more hours were lost due to the shortening of the sessions of the pre-conference workshops. For further information on the participants and topics presented at the conference see the preface of the first volume of the conference proceedings [4].

The second step towards ensuring the continuation of the conference was the virtualization of the content. At the end of August, all presenters of keynotes as well as long and short presentations were asked to create video recordings of their speeches, regardless of whether they were planning to visit the conference in person or not. Since the prospects of travelling in October remained uncertain, the option of virtual or physical participation remained open for everyone until the beginning of October. At the same time, the content of the sessions was collected and preserved in video format. The pre-recorded content served as a safety net that guaranteed that there would be no unexpected changes in the programme due to poor internet connections of participants, no-shows, or other unforeseen circumstances.

The online conference was organized in three parallel sessions as originally planned. Zoom was selected for video communication as the platform for the virtual conference based on the assumption that it was time-tested and familiar to the majority of participants. A team of three moderators was allocated for each session (a content moderator, technical moderator, and assistant). The video recordings were played by technical moderators followed by live discussions curated by content moderators. The only completely live Zoom session was the poster slam where twenty posters were presented. To provide additional support for communication during the conference, Slack, Twitter, and Facebook platforms were used; in addition, Google tools were utilized for commenting on the posters and creating surveys. The management of the papers and presentations continued to be carried out by using ConfTool, a conference and event management software platform.

The sessions were not broadcast publicly, since the format of the conference was still not sufficiently tested and there was not enough time to resolve all issues related to the safety or reliability of the solutions. Moreover, there were copyright concerns about presentation materials. After the conference, upon agreement with the authors, a selection of keynote speeches and long paper presentations were made available on YouTube [6]. Eventually, only four presentations out of 130 encountered technical difficulties, and these were resolved in a relatively short period of time. A few participants were not present during their presentations, though session moderators were informed about this, and questions and comments, if they arose, were sent to them afterwards. In general, participants of the conference were active in providing their views and suggestions during the planning of the postponed conference and were remarkably supportive about sudden changes and any additional commitments as needed.

3 The Post-Proceedings

This volume contains papers submitted by authors and research groups that participated in the 5th conference of Digital Humanities in the Nordic Countries. This edition follows the proceedings of DHN2020 which were published after the conference in June 2020 [5]. The call for submissions was open to all presenting authors at the DHN2020 conference, including those who presented in pre-conference workshops and whose papers were published in DHN2020 proceedings. In the call for papers, it was stated that papers should reflect the topic presented at the conference and provide a minimum of 50% new content if the author(s) had already published their paper in DHN2020 proceedings.

Submission types have been preserved as they were in the conference programme: academic posters (up to 6 pages), short papers (up to 9 pages) and long papers (up to 12 pages). All the papers have undergone a peer-review process by three or, as an exception, two reviewers, and the authors subsequently revised their manuscripts according to the reviewers' comments and suggestions.

In total, 26 papers have been published in the volume – 7 academic poster papers, 12 short papers, and 7 long papers. The authors represent academic and cultural heritage institutions in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Sweden, the UK and the USA.

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