
The 7th Digital Humanities in the Nordic and Baltic Countries Conference

Annika Rockenberger¹, Sofie Gilbert¹, Juliane Tiemann² and Maria Elisa Pierfederici¹

¹University of Oslo Library, Oslo, Norway
²University of Bergen Library, Bergen, Norway

Abstract

Editorial of the seventh annual DHNB Conference Proceedings. DHNB2023 was held online and jointly organized by the University of Oslo Library, The University of Bergen Library, and the Greenhouse Center for Environmental Humanities at the University of Stavanger, Norway from March 8th to 10th, 2023. The conference was shaped by its theme of Sustainability, highlighting and dividing the contributions’ sub-themes of Environment, Community, and Data. This preface provides insight into the planning process and the execution of the online conference. In doing so, it offers insight into the choices made regarding the Conference theme and format and visualizations depicting an overview and analysis of conference participants and conference contributions.

Keywords

Digital Humanities, Conference Proceedings, Nordic Countries, Baltic Countries, Participation Analysis, Contribution Analysis

1. Introduction

Foreword from the editors

It is with great pleasure that we present the Proceedings of the Seventh Digital Humanities in the Nordic and Baltic Countries Conference (DHNB2023), held online and hosted by the University of Oslo Library, the University of Bergen Library, and the Greenhouse Center for Environmental Humanities at the University of Stavanger, from March 8th to 10th, 2023. The DHNB2023 conference explored the many facets of “Sustainability in the Digital Humanities,” focusing on Environment, Community, and Data.
At the 2022 Annual Members’ Meeting (held in conjunction with DHNB2022), we first announced the plans for the DHNB 2023 conference. We had just received confirmation from all partners that they were willing to collaborate and organize a fully online event. A condition for our partnership was to agree on a topic that would span widely across the Digital Humanities and Social Sciences, be of concrete relevance to our diverse institutions, attract many actors in the Nordic and Baltic countries, and serve as an essential and timely contribution to the current discourse in academe. We soon found that ‘Sustainability’ was that topic, with the sub-topics representing particular focus areas of our three partnering institutions: The Greenhouse Center for Environmental Humanities with its expertise in the sustainability aspect ‘Environment’; The University of Oslo Library and its Digital Scholarship Center’s dedication to building and sustaining communities, and the University of Bergen Library’s decade-long investment in humanities and social sciences data collection, curation, and dissemination.

These proceedings cover the three sustainability aspects guiding the conference under the three thematic tracks – Environment, Community, and Data – and include the full versions of long papers submitted after the conference.

Environment

The Digital Humanities do not stand at a distance from the environmental challenges facing the planet. In 2015, Bethany Nowviske challenged DH scholars and practitioners to consider the field’s role in the Anthropocene (Nowviske, 2015). What responsibilities do we have as the world around us burns, dries, drowns, and changes before our eyes? How do DH projects and practices depend on unsustainable systems and mindsets? How do the unequal consequences of environmental challenges influence what research is conducted in DH, and who can contribute? How can the field of DH contribute to a more sustainable world?

Community

Since its inception, Digital Humanities has been a community-driven effort. We can see this not least in the many regional and linguistic organizations all over the globe. The Digital Humanities have been described as grassroots communities, sprouting from small local research groups or gathering around digital research support centers and labs at universities and libraries. DHNB is a young and prosperous community spanning eight countries and speaking many languages. However, is it a sustainable one? Sustainable communities are places where people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives feel welcome and safe, where every group and member has a say in decision-making, and where intellectual prosperity is shared. What does this mean for DHNB now and in the future? Lastly, how can the community continue to be successful together?

Data

The primary source material for humanists has many data formats; meanwhile, research is becoming increasingly digital and, in many cases, is only available in digital formats. As increasing digitization leads to a large volume of data, Digital Humanities must implement affordable ways to access, store, and archive these data. The efforts of doing so can be seen in developing large data repositories, both collectively and within specialized fields. When it comes
to making the collected data of repositories, but also of single examinations, accessible – and as such also visible – Open Data/Open Science has become a well-known term and a requirement in many funding evaluations. Nevertheless, what does this mean in terms of sustainability? How does the growing amount of digital data available for research within Digital Humanities go together regarding long-term storage, communal access, and the restrictions of sensible data? What aspects of collaborative software development concerning future accessibility could help with the environmental footprint of this data volume?

2. Planning DHNB2023

The planning of the DHNB2023 conference started early in 2022 and was, as the conference itself, done online. Even though post-corona times have prepared us well for organizing and realizing digital events, conference planning is challenging. And as accustomed as we all have become to participating in conferences in front of a screen, we still wanted to give participants who were in Norway at the time of the conference the possibility to celebrate this event on-site with the local organizers, even if it was just for one evening. The planning thus ended up being one for an online conference, while the three keynotes and receptions were held on-site in Stavanger, Bergen, and Oslo. We were happy to greet everyone who joined us for these local events, which were live-streamed.

During the conference, we were lucky enough that many colleagues within the digital humanities community were willing to chair the various parallel sessions during the three days. With local Zoom hosts from Oslo, the sessions were divided between a host and a chair, smoothly implementing the sessions with each two to three papers. We divided contributions into long papers and show-and-tell presentations. While long papers were presented live, followed by a discussion with the participants, the show-and-tell presentations were pre-recorded and ran in reels throughout the conference. They were also made available online on the DHNB Youtube channel for DHNB2023. The three keynotes reflected the three aspects of Sustainability chosen for this conference (Environment, Community, and Data) and were held as hybrid events.

Lisa Swanstrom, associate professor at the Department of English at the University of Utah, presented the thematic track of environment and talked about “Forecasting sustainability. Speculative ecologies at work in DH, EH, and AI”. She identified a familiar yet misleading story circulating within AI to outline an alternative aesthetic genealogy. Swanstrom further discussed the importance of re-framing AI within literary studies and the Digital Humanities in a way that confronted its statistical underpinnings. She offered a different approach to Natural Language Processing within literary scholarship committed to a broad, material, and environmentally responsible concept of intelligence—artificial or otherwise. The Greenhouse hosted this keynote at the University of Stavanger.

Malvika Sharan, senior researcher at the Alan Turing Institute, was the representative for the thematic track of community and talked about “Open Science for enabling reproducible, ethical and collaborative research.” She discussed open science as a framework to ensure others can easily access, openly examine, and build upon research components. In her talk, she shared best practices researchers should integrate from the start of their projects to maintain the highest reproducible and ethical standards to guarantee that their research is easy to reuse and
reproduce at all stages of development. The University of Oslo Library hosted the keynote, with a reception beforehand.

Scott Rettberg, professor of digital culture at the Department for Linguistic, Literary, and Aesthetic Studies at the University of Bergen, was the representative for the thematic track of data and talked about “Building a sustainable research infrastructure. The ELMCIP electronic literature knowledge base”. He described the process and challenges of developing and maintaining the project “Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice” until today. He also discussed the changes to the database planned for new uses in the Center for Digital Narrative, a Norwegian Center of Research Excellence that is launching in August 2023. The University of Bergen Library hosted the keynote, with a reception beforehand.

3. DHNB2023 in numbers

The initial Call for Submissions received 85 proposals for the formats of Long Papers, Show-and-Tell Presentations, Panels, and Workshops. The Program Committee selected 68 submissions for the conference after a single-anonymized peer-review process: 44 Long Papers, 20 Show-and-Tell Presentations, and six workshops. The submissions spanned various topics within Digital Humanities, from 3D modelling to web research. We have gathered the presentations for the program into three thematic tracks – Environment, Community, and Data – and two open tracks, focusing on specific DH methods or research objects. The keynotes featured each day’s central theme and concluded the day.

![Figure 1: World map of conference participant locations](image)

DHNB conferences attract an international academic community. DHNB2023 received proposals from 19 countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, China, Denmark, Great Britain, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Israel, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America.
The benefits of an online conference were clear when examining our participants’ and authors’ locations. Two hundred fourteen participants participated in the event worldwide, spanning 28 countries, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Norway had the highest number of participants at 39, followed by Sweden and Denmark with 36 and 34 participants, respectively.

![Figure 2: Histogram depicting the ten most common participant locations](image)

Most authors’ institutions are in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Aalto University in Finland had 16 authors contribute, while Aarhus University in Denmark had eight, and Uppsala University in Sweden had five. Meanwhile, the following institutions had four authors contribute: Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria; UiT Arctic University of Norway, Norway; University of Gothenburg, Sweden; University of Helsinki, Finland; and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands, as shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 3: Histogram depicting the ten most common author affiliations](image)
4. Conference Proceedings

For the proceedings of DHNB2023, we wanted to produce the proceedings shortly after the conference concluded. Authors with accepted papers were given information about the publishing plan at the end of 2022, including an intended timeline for the submissions we planned to publish with CEUR workshop series, which had been the DHNB conference outlet since 2018. Regrettably, in July 2023, our Digital Humanities proceedings were denied by CEUR as they no longer fit their newly revised topic requirements. The DHNB Board and the University of Oslo Library stepped up and decided to create a conference and workshop proceedings outlet that would meet our needs and those of future conference organizers by establishing DHNB Publications as part of the University of Oslo’s FRITT Diamond Open Access Platform for serial publications. We publish all articles under a CC-BY 4.0 Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license, and all authors retain the copyright to their work. Each article will be assigned a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) and enhanced with bibliographic metadata.

The articles of these proceedings take up 10–15 pages each. All articles underwent single-anonymized peer review by at least two reviewers from the digital humanities community. After a revision round, the final versions are presented in these proceedings.

5. Review Process

For DHNB2023, the organizers and the Program Committee decided on a different approach for the reviews than we so far followed for previous conferences. For the first time in the history of the DHNB conference, reviewers received instructions about the concrete parameters for evaluation and how to provide feedback to authors. We first had a round of single-anonymized reviews of abstracts. These were done by the members of the program committee, who reviewed 20+ submissions each. The quality of submissions was generally high, and we were happy to accept all workshop proposals. The acceptance rate of long papers was 65%; three long papers and one panel were suggested to be turned into show-and-tell presentations. We accepted 80% of show-and-tell presentations. We then invited accepted long papers to submit a full version for the conference proceedings. We also sent a call for reviewers to the community, to which we received 43 responses. These peers received instructions on the parameters for evaluating full papers and the feedback to authors. Of the 30 submissions we received, we were able to accept and publish 25 in these proceedings.

The three most common topics chosen by authors were computational text and literary analysis, computational text processing, and cultural heritage collections. However, the number of topics selected by DHNB authors varied and covered a broad range of topics within the theme, as shown in Figure 4 below.

We proudly present these high-quality papers to the Nordic, Baltic, and international Digital Humanities community, and on this note would like to thank the community reviewers for their excellent work: Emma Aadland, Maria Akritidou, Nikolay Atanasov, Daniel Brodén, Bastiaan Bruinsma, Gimena del Rio Rieande, Senka Drobac, Elena Fernandez Fernandez, Mats Fridlund, Béatrice Gauvain, Elizabete Grinblate, Raphaela Heil, Aliz Horváth, William Illsley, Heidi Jauhiainen, Tommi Jauhiainen, Mica Jorgenson, Maija Kåle, Ernesta Kazakėnaitė, Anders Klindt.
Figure 4: Most popular topics by country

Myrvoll, Ross Deans Kristensen-McLachlan, Natalia Lazebna, Ying-Hsang Liu, Kateryna Lut, Elisabeth Maria Magin, Daniele Metilli, Liisa Nāpārā, Seraina Nett, Kristoffer Nielbo, Sebastian Lundsteen Nielsen, Dalia Ortiz Pablo, Federico Pianzola, Anna Kristiina Ristilä, Torsten Roeder, John Charles Ryan, Maria Skeppstedt, Karina Škirmante, Pál Steiner, Jon Carlstedt Tønnessen, Jurgita Vaičenoniene, and Andrew Wareham.

6. Outlook

DHNB will again hold its annual conference on-site after three years of online and hybrid conferences. From the 27th to 31st of May 2024, the community will gather in Reykjavík, Iceland, where the Centre for Digital Humanities and Arts (CDHA) / Miðstöð stafrænna hugvísinda og lista (MSHL) at the University of Iceland will organize the 8th conference. CDHA is a collaboration between 11 institutions: Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, Iceland University of the Arts, Icelandic National Broadcasting Service, National and University Library of Iceland, National Archives of Iceland, National Gallery of Iceland, National Museum, Rekstrafélag Sarps, Reykjavík Art Museum, University of Iceland – School of Humanities and University of Reykjavík. It is the first time a DHNB event will be held in Iceland, one of our most remote regions.

We are also in the fortunate situation to already have a host for the DHNB2025 conference. This time, Estonia will be the hosting country, with the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum, the University of Tartu, and the Estonian Society of Digital Humanities jointly organizing the 2025 conference.
References