

Humanities going Digital – a Conference Report

Report

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Abstract: This paper aims to report on a conference held on February 18, 2022, within the project HUGOD – “Humanities going digital”. The main objective of the article is to acquaint the reader with the project, its motivations and goals, and above all, with the content of the first conference within this project. It will introduce participating partner institutions, individual speakers, and the topics presented at this conference.

Keywords: HUGOD project, Digital Humanities, covid-19, digital shift, online teaching, international partnership.

INTRODUCTION

When rumors of the covid-19 disease, which spread in China, began to appear in the news at the end of 2019, many of us had no idea that this pandemic would affect us to such an extent. However, it did not take long, and in mid-March 2020, Europe became the epidemic’s epicenter (World Health Organization 2022). As part of emergency measures to prevent the spread of the epidemic, social contacts were curtailed, including closing educational establishments during the lockdown. No one knew how long these restrictions would last. We did not have any contingency plans, but it was necessary to develop new methods and approaches as soon as possible to effectively conduct teaching in the online environment. We faced a massively growing epidemic that revealed shortcomings in teaching approaches and digital skills but also new, yet untapped opportunities.

ABOUT THE PROJECT “HUMANITIES GOING DIGITAL”

In response to the pandemic and its impact on university education, a project 2020-1-CZ01-KA226-HE-094363 entitled “*Humanities going digital*” was created under the auspices of the Centre for International Cooperation in Education (Dům zahraniční spolupráce), funded under the ERASMUS+ program. The partner institutions of

this project are Palacký University (Czech Republic), University of Pécs (Hungary), and NOVA University Lisbon (Portugal). The project’s primary goal is to solve the problems in higher education that arose in connection with the covid-19 epidemic. In these challenging times, we have been able to join forces with other educational institutions abroad to address the challenges of the epidemic and its impact on teaching together.

Even though the epidemic brought many problems, at the same time, it enabled us to respond quickly to the rise of digital technologies and implement them into teaching. Due to the significant limitations of education, it was no longer possible to use standard methods. It was necessary to develop new teaching methods and approaches for students—less classical full-time teaching, new teaching methods and courses, and motivation for independent study and research. The project’s output is, among other things, an electronic publication, and students can actively participate in its content. They research a particular topic, discuss it in a group, and create teaching materials. Then, these materials are shared with the partner institution, and other students can also benefit from it; they can broaden their knowledge, discuss the topic, and make some revisions to the material in collaboration with the partner institution. In this way, the students benefit from an in-depth understanding of the

topic, establish international cooperation, and improve their language skills, which are essential today.

THE CONFERENCE

Several conferences will take place within this project. The first was held on February 18, 2022, online through the Zoom platform, due to the persistence of extraordinary measures in connection with the covid-19 pandemic. In total, 17 speakers prepared their speeches on various topics relevant to the theme of the whole project. The general public also joined the conference.

Even though the conference was held on a single day, the schedule was overloaded with many interesting speakers and their presentations. In three blocks, speakers from three partner institutions of our project presented their research—Ludmila Lacková (Palacký University), Viktor Glied (University of Pécs), Tyler J. Bennett (Palacký University) & Israel Chávez (University of Tartu), Kivanç Gördü (Palacký University), Libuše Kormaníková (Palacký University), Martina Benešová (Palacký University), Rute Costa (NOVA University Lisbon), Margarida Ramos (NOVA University Lisbon), Ana Salgado (NOVA University Lisbon, Academia das Ciências de Lisboa), Bruno Almeida (NOVA University Lisbon, Campus de Campolide da NOVA), Raquel Amaro (NOVA University Lisbon), Chiara Barbero (NOVA University Lisbon) & Rita Ochoa (University Beira Interior), Peter Kacziba (University of Pécs), Deák Máté (University of Pécs), Vörös Zoltán (University of Pécs), Claudio Rodríguez Higuera (Palacký University).

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

SESSION 1

The conference opening was attended by the vice-dean Pavlína Flajšarová (Palacký University), who welcomed all conference participants. The first session was chaired by Zdeněk Joukl (Palacký University). He talked about the schedule of the conference and introduced the first speaker.

The introductory speaker was Ludmila Lacková (Palacký University). In her speech, she talked about the goals and motivations of the project; she also introduced the institutions and people who participated in the project. She then spoke about the impact of the pandemic on society and how it changed interpersonal communication. Digital technologies have become a part of everyday life; communication has been digitalized. She gave examples of recent works and highlighted the new media research area and how the traditional communication model has transformed. She described what university teaching looked like during the pandemic and what specific teaching tools and methods emerged within the program.

Viktor Glied (University of Pécs) made a presentation on his courses about global environmental challenges

and political answers. He described these courses, their structure, teaching methods, and strategies for introducing games into teaching. He also talked about digital gamification for the future.

The conference continued with the speech of Tyler J. Bennet (Palacký University) and E. Israel Chávez Barreto (Tartu University). They talked about semiotics, its classes, and courses at Palacký University, but mainly about the Semiosalong project. They mentioned that the origins of Semiosalong are in Tartu University (Estonia), where doctoral students have been involved for more than ten years. Firstly, students started to meet at the local student bar; however, due to the pandemic, the project has been transformed into an online environment—a YouTube channel—in cooperation with Palacký University as a part of the HUGOD project. They also highlighted its primary aim: to take semiotics outside the university and present it to the broad public.

Kivanç Gördü (Palacký University) introduced his recent paper about digital communication. He mentioned the courses which influenced him in further research. He talked about social media platforms and online lectures. Also, he described the university and the department projects in which he participated during a pandemic—Winter school on Digital Humanities, Gatherings in Biosemiotics, Semiosalong and HUGOD, various lectures, Linguistic Traineeship or Linguistics from the living room.

Libuše Kormaníková (Palacký University) talked about human communication and the signs in everyday interaction. She presented the specifics of digital communication and talked about images in communication and their purpose. In her research, she focused on the features of modern technologies—emoticons, GIFs, and memes. She stressed that these types of signs could have various forms, but they are understood the same regardless of the cultural background.

The next speaker, Martina Benešová (Palacký University), prepared a presentation on the collaboration of linguistics and mathematics. She stressed the importance of quantitative methods in linguistics. She talked about their significance and integration into linguistics from a historical point of view. She recognized this in research that uses quantitative methods to study sign languages. Its primary purpose is to explore sign languages more, improve teaching methodology, and test the validity of quantitative linguistic laws. She also talked about some obstacles and problems in research and proposed further research.

The first session ended with a round-table discussion followed by a lunch break.

SESSION 2

After a short break, the conference continued. Four presentations were prepared for the second session, which was chaired by Ludmila Lacková (Palacký University).

The next speaker, Rute Costa (NOVA University Lisbon), prepared a presentation about the terminology

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for a conference. She introduced the team at the NOVA University Lisbon and many ongoing financed projects, including Humanities Going Digital. Then she talked about terminology science and its interdisciplinarity. At the end of her speech, she mentioned the Lisbon Summer School.

Margarita Ramos (NOVA University Lisbon), Ana Salgado (NOVA University Lisbon, Academia das Ciências de Lisboa), and Bruno Almeida (NOVA University Lisbon, Campus de Campolide da NOVA) spoke on digitalization of traditional humanities in connection with terminology and lexicography. They focused on lexicographic reference works. The various projects on which the university works were presented—e.g. MORDigital (a digital version of the *Diccionario fa Lingua Portugeza* by António de Moraes Silva), a digital edition of the *Vocabulário Ortográfico da Língua Portuguesa*, a Covid-19 Collaborative Glossary, etc. They talked also about resources and several tools used in these projects.

A presentation about the research on corpus linguistics was introduced by Raquel Amaro (NOVA University Lisbon). She talked about the theoretical concepts, methodologies, tools, and resources for extracting a vast amount of linguistic data. Also, she mentioned the use of corpus linguistics in machine learning, language studies, language learning purposes, literature, or social studies.

Chiara Barbero (NOVA University Lisbon) & Rita Ochoa (University Beira Interior) prepared a presentation regarding linguistic analysis of the Public Art domain. She introduced the field of digital humanities, then talked about the academic project ArtNet, its motivations and main goals, the workflow, and hybrid methodology. They also defined public art and its interdisciplinarity and presented the ongoing results of the project.

After that, a short coffee break followed.

SESSION 3

The third session was chaired by Lenka Pivoňková (Palacký University), and four presentations were introduced.

Peter Kacziba (University of Pécs) outlined their new integrative course in the presentation entitled “Security and peace in an uncertain world”. He introduced the aims of the course, its structure, methodologies, requirements, and possible outcomes. He presented ideas for how to reinvent some courses. According to him, besides the theoretical part, the courses should also include case studies, which require the active participation of students. Then he explained why the course structure should change—he highlighted that it is not only because of the pandemic, but there are also many other reasons—e.g. new expectations, internationalization, or reforms in the local education system.

Deák Máté (University of Pécs) also talked about one of their new courses—Security Challenges of the Latin American-Hispanic World in the 21st Century. He spoke about online teaching in connection with the generation which is currently studying. He mentioned that it is ineffective for this generation to use traditional teaching

methods; he talked about hybrid, in-person, and online teaching. He showed ideas and tools for teaching this class and presented a couple of case studies.

Vörös Zoltán (University of Pécs) presented how their university dealt with the shift to online teaching—problems they faced, but also solutions which they found. He talked about the blending of learning methodologies in connection to the pandemic, and how he personally had to change his lectures. He introduced a multi-faceted approach to teaching, blended learning, and techniques—flipped classroom, digital assessment and group work, short teaching units, project-based learning, and social media blending. He also emphasized that the approach of the university management had a significant influence on these changes.

Claudio Rodríguez Higuera (Palacký University) was the last speaker at the conference. He talked about the conceptual tension in forms of meaning. He reflected on how they deal with digital humanities and cultural data. He explained the sciences of meaning and talked about importing methods.

After a short discussion, Ludmila Lacková (Palacký University) thanked all participants and those who participated in the conference. The conference was officially closed.

SUMMARY

All participants were able to broaden their horizons in the field of digital humanities, share their experiences, and debate various issues related to higher education. The conference was a great success, thanks to the engaging and very current topic of digital humanities. Undoubtedly, the perfect organization and commitment of the entire project team contributed to this.

Although the epidemic repeatedly tested our strengths, skills, and abilities to adapt to the current situation, we were able to face it. What's more, we were able to make the most of the situation despite the 'unfortunate' situation. Thanks to the project, it was possible to gain new knowledge and create new, strong international partnerships. We have acquired partners with whom we want to cooperate and share our expertise in the future. Another conference within the same project will take place in September 2022, organized by the University of Pécs in Hungary.

REFERENCES

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