

# Building Relations and Enhanced Relationality as the Backbone of Methodologies in the Digital and Public Humanities

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## **1      Sharing and Caring as a Driver for Better Humanistic          Knowledge**

With still no end in sight to the catastrophic conflict in Ukraine, its possible solution hinges on the creation of a new world order, hence pointing at the necessary improvement or, at least, at the development of different international relations: among the traditional East-West divide, as well as between the hyper-industrialised North and the global South. It may seem pretentious that a scholarly enterprise in the Digital and Public Humanities can act upon such superior forces, but in our understanding the contribution of academics working in

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this field is showing how open participation is a principle leading to a more stable and shared balance, in knowledge building as well as in democratic consent. When we set out to determine this year's topic, we were indeed convinced that the concept of "Relations" constituted an intrinsic characteristic of Digital and Public Humanities that we should highlight and thematise in a global discourse (Fiormonte, Chaudhuri, Ricaurte 2022). Our intention for the present issue was to draw particular attention to the public aspects of research endeavours in this field, given that successful projects hold firm to the principle of audience involvement from their very inception, rather than having public interaction just as a late side-effect of scholarly work.

Hence, the present issue focuses on the concept of "Relations" and how they are implemented, operationalised, and analysed as interdependencies, links, and connections in the various practices of Digital and Public Humanities scholarship. Be it through the construction of simple relational databases or by means of complex correlations of data, materials, immaterial aspects, and publics, the interdisciplinary field of Digital and Public Humanities truly strives on building relationships. Far from shutting themselves up in a lonesome ivory tower, scholars in this domain are prone to bridging experiences between different disciplines, interconnecting with diverse audiences for research and dissemination purposes, and linking computational models to cultural manifestations (Marty 2010). Relations maintain a very humanistic character, as they form the immaterial structure onto which human societies are based. Indeed, transferred into a technological setting, the principle of relationship-building can be found as the core feature of interconnected data, authority files, user-centred design, usability, user-experience, audience interaction, and many more aspects that rapidly became an integral part of Digital and Public Humanities (King, Stark, Cooke 2016).

## **2 Successful Relationships as the Result of Broad and Novel Collaborations**

The very act of building relations or putting things into relationship - be they technology and culture, scholars and audiences, data and materials - thus form the backbone of scholarly projects that came to define this research field. In Digital Textual Scholarship, scholars can see the text as a hub, whose relations point in many directions (Drucker 2003). They can explore, formalise, visualise, and process its connections with paratexts, other texts, physical documents, places, people, concepts as well as with readers. In Digital and Public History, it is possible to establish connections between sources, events, places, dates, or people, through a database, a network analysis map, or more generally the semantic web (Sternfeld 2011).

In Public History, also the relationship between the research and its public is crucial: the active or passive participation of the audience affects questions, methodology and research outcomes in many different ways. Relations between archaeological contexts and spaces are key factors to decipher and investigate stratigraphic sequences and past landscapes in virtual reconstructions (extended matrix approach, archeoBIM, etc.) and GIS studies (viewshed analysis, least-cost path analysis, etc.) (Dell'Unto, Landeschi 2022). At the same time, the integration of different remote sensing techniques and expertises often provide significant results. In Digital and Public Art History, subjects may address the connection between GLAM studies and the creative industries sector as well as the artistic productions, considering: the relation between public space and art historical environment, including different techniques of virtual reconstruction (3D modelling, gaming, VR360), the implementation of digital collections adopting the IIF framework (iconography, diagnosis, descriptions), and multimedia solutions for data collection and accessibility (Barranha, Henriques 2021). The implication of digital technologies in the preservation, management and interpretation of historical, cultural, and archaeological contexts is a way to make knowledge more accessible for different audiences. The engagement of society in participatory ways highlights the importance of creating and cherishing dialogue, cohesion, identity, sustainable development, and - hopefully - peace.

### **3 Of the Many Modes of Building and Presenting Relational Resources**

The authors chosen for this first issue interpret the topic of “Relations” at different levels, from the scholarly practice of creating internal and external references across a digital research project (Stonayova, Pizzirusso), to the necessity of connecting digital resources and audiences from different domains (Venuti et al.), to the more theoretical reflection on relations between resources and users in the web (Scanagatta, Charlesworth et al.). What emerges from all papers is the on-going effort to build platforms and resources that aim to become collaborative workspaces for sharing research results and the essential precondition of building digital communities of scholars and practitioners to achieve this goal.

Our first contributor, Silvia Stonayova, presents the digital edition of the *Zibaldone* by Giacomo Leopardi as exemplary case of creating such relational resources; she underlines the necessity to relate all the different fragments of this iconic text and ultimately stresses the need to establish semantic relationships in the text, in order to allow researchers to generate new information and to conduct text analysis with digital methods.

Manfredi Scanagatta in the second contribution, analyses the role of metadata within information digitisation processes with attention to the issue of accessibility and the possible use of historical sources by the general public. He supports his discussion with an in-depth analysis of three case studies, observing how participatory processes in creating digital archives and metadata favour a renewed relationship between historical sources and the public.

The third article by Martina Venuti, Angelo Mario Del Grosso, Federico Boschetti, Luigi Tessarolo, Alessia Prontera, Dylan Bovet, Gianmario Cattaneo and Valeria Melis offers a discussion on the latest developments of the so-called “*Musisque Deoque Galaxy*” (MQDQ) both from the point of view of the tools created to allow the integration of new texts and to enable new analyses and from the point of view of sustainability of the technological framework for a digital ecosystem of knowledge. MQDQ aims at serving as a reference model within the national and European landscape for the creation of relationships and synergies between digital text corpora offering ideal opportunities for philological and literary studies.

The fourth author of this issue, Igor Pizzirusso, presents the database *Ultime lettere di condannati a morte e di deportati della Resistenza italiana* (Last Letters of Death Row Inmates and Deportees of the Italian Resistance) and its constant growth over time. Among its merits he highlights the possibility of faithfully reconstructing the original state of these autographs in their social and cultural context.

The final paper by Ellen Charlesworth, Claire Warwick, Leonardo Impett and Andrew M. Beresford discusses two UK-based online responses to the national lockdowns in 2020, namely by the British Museum and the Linen Hall Library. The authors investigate the discrepancy between the data and the narrative, examining how institutional aims inform the way audiences are incorporated in online metrics such as ‘views’, ‘likes’, and ‘shares’. The two case studies show how cultural heritage organisations can engage with online audiences, and how a proper contextualisation of these metrics is essential to better understand how people relate to digital content from the GLAM sector and how the COVID pandemic affected their practices of public engagement.

## 4 Of Hard Work and Entering Global Classification Systems

As this issue opens the fourth year in a row of our scientific venture, we are pleased to announce that the international relations, hard work, and novel collaborations inaugurated along this editorial path already bore considerable fruits. Indeed, *magazén* has just been accepted for SCOPUS, since the Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board (CSAB) approved our application for coverage. The reviewers attested that “this is a well organised journal publishing material that is likely to interest SCOPUS users”, as it “consistently includes articles that are academically sound and relevant to an international academic or professional audience in the field”.

We cannot but share our satisfaction and pride with the many scholars working to make *magazén* possible, but the SCOPUS classification also encourages us to dig deeper in the domain of Digital and Public Humanities, as well as making some changes to our editorial project. At this point we feel that we have reached a novel phase and broader audience, which allows us to completely open the journal to our scholarly community. In the first four years, by publishing thematic issues we were trying to establish our journal as a new platform that fosters an international and open debate about the fundamentals of our scholarly field. From now on, however, we believe we can move past specific subjects and methodological topics, thus truly highlighting recent challenges and cutting-edge experiences in our interdisciplinary domain. In order to do so, together with the Editorial Board we resolved to stay open for single paper proposals from international scholars as well as for covering entire issues with guest editors. Thus, *magazén* will look even more like a place for sharing and arguing such as in the public house at the time of the Venetian Republic, from which we derived our journal title *magazén* (Tassini 1970, 364-5).

Given our recent SCOPUS classification, we particularly wish to express our gratitude to all scholars and experts involved over the last four years in the making of this *magazén*: our Advisory Board members, all published authors, the uncountable peer reviewers, the strenuous members of the editorial board, as well as our publisher’s team. We will cherish this splendid relationship.

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