

DARIAH-BE: Towards an ecosystem of Digital Humanities Research Centres in Belgium

Sally Chambers and Katrien Deroo

Ghent Centre for Digital Humanities, Ghent University

Björn-Olav Dozo

Centre Informatique de Philosophie et Lettres, University of Liège

Tom Gheldof

Leuven Centre for Digital Humanities, KU Leuven

Abstract

Digital Humanities is flourishing in Belgium. There are Virtual Research Environments (VRE) for studying [transnational intellectual collaborations in the area of social reform](#) and the [political and social history of the Belgian justice system](#). Tools being developed to [digitally uncover the genetics of manuscripts](#) or create a linked data structure to [map networks across the ancient world](#). Furthermore, [Electronic Literature across Europe is being mapped](#) and [video games are being studied using humanities research methods](#). The digitisation of artistic, historic and scientific collections is also a key priority in Belgium. With the [Belgian Art Links and Tools platform, BALaT](#), the development of a [Data Hub for Museums](#) and Belgium's digitised newspapers in [Belgica Press](#) being flagship examples.

Alongside this rich tapestry of activities, Belgium is a Founding Member of [DARIAH-EU](#), the Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities. The aim of [DARIAH in Belgium](#) is to develop and offer a sustainable portfolio of services enabling digital scholarship in the arts and humanities in Belgium and beyond. To realise this, partner institutions within Belgium are in the process of establishing *Digital Humanities Research Centres* which together will form a humanities-specific digital ecosystem, offering services both within their own institutions and to other institutions in Belgium. Additionally, selected services will be scaled-up for use within the European DARIAH community, and offered as in-kind contributions to DARIAH-EU.

In this paper we will explore both the intra- and inter-institutional context of digital humanities centres in Belgium. Starting at the **intra-institutional level**, we will introduce two existing digital humanities research centres: the [Centre Informatique de Philosophie et Lettres](#) (CIPL, Université de Liège) in the French-speaking part of Belgium and the [Ghent Centre for Digital Humanities](#) (GhentCDH, Ghent University) in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. We will examine both the organisational goals of these centres and how they support digital humanities research within the university, with a particular focus on the collaborations they set up on an institutional level (for example with IT services and the library as well as between research groups). Furthermore, we compare these existing centres, with the newest digital

humanities centre in Belgium, the *Leuven Centre for Digital Humanities* (LCDH) which is currently in the process of being established in the Dutch-speaking university and DARIAH partner institution, KU Leuven.

Finally, we will analyse the opportunities and challenges in the **inter-institutional context**. While challenges such as the complex funding landscape¹ and multilingual research environment should not be underestimated, there are many opportunities that can be celebrated. For example, collaborative training initiatives, such as [Research Community Digital Humanities Flanders](#), which is open to [members](#) beyond Flanders, the annual [DH Benelux](#) conference which offers a platform for collaboration between digital humanities projects in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg and joint-funding opportunities such as the [Belgian Research Action through Interdisciplinary Networks \(BRAIN\)](#) programme. Additionally, activities for participation in DARIAH-EU, including preparing Belgian in-kind contributions and establishing DARIAH Working Groups not only addresses these challenges, but contributes to ensuring that digital humanities activities in Belgium thrive.

Further information

The *Centre Informatique de Philosophie et Lettres* (CIPL, Université de Liège, <http://web.philo.ulg.ac.be/cipl/>), founded in 1983, has two main missions: one of “technical support” for the whole Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, and the other, which is the more interesting for this paper, of development of databases and software for research purposes. Since its creation, the CIPL has strong links with the LASLA (*Laboratoire d’analyse statistique des langues anciennes*, founded in 1961, <http://web.philo.ulg.ac.be/lasla/>), which gives it a large expertise in corpus-orientated linguistics. The CIPL and the LASLA develop unique databases in Latin and Ancient Greek.

The CIPL has also had an important editorial activity in complex typography writings, like Ancient Egyptian. With the LASLA, they published the journal *RISSH (Revue Informatique et Statistique dans les Sciences humaines)*, created in 1965, <http://web.philo.ulg.ac.be/rissh/>), one of the first journals in French about humanities computing, which has now ceased publication. The Centre had contacts with the editors of LLC (Literary and Linguistic Computing) since the beginning (1986), is a member of CenterNet and Humanistica and will organize the 2018 DH Benelux conference.

The Centre is in a phase of transition: a new director, a redefinition of its missions (with more links with teaching), development of its visibility, connections to the Cléo (founders of

¹ Scientific activities in Belgium are financed by three key funding agencies: the [Research Foundation Flanders \(FWO\)](#) for the Dutch-speaking community, the [Fund for Scientific Research \(FNRS\)](#) for the French-speaking community and the [Belgian Science Policy Office \(BELSPO\)](#) for the Federal Scientific Institutions such as the National museums, archive and library.

OpenEdition.org), etc. In the future, it would like to reinforce connections with the Liège Game Lab (a group of humanities researchers studying video games, <http://thema.ulg.ac.be/jeuxvideo/>) and the IFRES (Institut de Formation et de Recherche en Enseignement supérieur, <http://www.ifres.ulg.ac.be/portail/>), in particular about questions of teaching in a digital age, with possible connections with DARIAH.

The **Ghent Centre for Digital Humanities** (GhentCDH, <http://www.ghentcdh.ugent.be>) is an inter-disciplinary research centre facilitating digitally-enabled research in the arts and humanities at Ghent University and beyond. The core areas of our work are: 1) **digital research infrastructures**, 2) **training and education** and 3) **research support and coordination**.

GhentCDH was a key initiator in the establishment of DARIAH, the Digital Research Infrastructure in the Arts and Humanities in Belgium and is currently the National Coordinating Institution for [DARIAH-BE](#). In this context, GhentCDH is leading the development of the [Virtual Research Environment Service Infrastructure \(VRE-SI\)](#), funded by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO). The aim of the DARIAH VRE-SI is to offer a sustainable portfolio of services enabling digital scholarship in the arts and humanities in Flanders, Belgium and beyond.

To ensure that services offered via the DARIAH infrastructure are used, training and education is essential. For this, GhentCDH works closely with the [Library Lab](#) of the [Faculty Library of Arts and Philosophy](#). We have recently been awarded funding from the Ghent University Doctoral Schools Programme to provide a specialist course to help early career researchers become fully aware of the opportunities that digital humanities offers. Finally, a core strength of the GhentCDH is initiating and guiding funding applications in the area of digital humanities and digital research infrastructures; internally within Ghent University, in Flanders (FWO), in Belgium (Belspo) and at European level (H2020).

The **Leuven Centre for Digital Humanities** (LCDH) will serve as a new hub for DH researchers at KU Leuven, alongside the current [Task Force Digital Humanities](#). The Task Force, based at the Faculty of Arts, was set up in 2015 with the aim to group DH researchers and to organise the yearly DH Summer School at KU Leuven. From 2017 onwards, the LCDH will try to bring together DH researchers from the Humanities (e.g. History, Musicology, Philosophy,...) in order to enable them to work together even more closely, for example in collaborative projects applications; the LCDH will support the sharing of knowledge and digital tools (in close collaboration with DARIAH, in which KU Leuven also participates). Initiatives such as DH workshops, lectures, summers schools and conferences will be further organised under the auspices of the LCDH. Finally, the recently founded [ARTES library](#), has engaged itself to get involved in the LCDH and to serve as a meeting point for its members, co-organise training initiatives and lectures as well as to develop a long-term preservation strategy for data from DH projects at KU Leuven.