Twin Talks: Understanding and Facilitating Collaboration in Digital Humanities

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Keywords: digital humanities, collaboration, education

Preface

This volume brings together the proceedings of two workshops in the Twin Talks series: Twin Talks 2 at DHN 2020 and Twin Talks 3 at DH 2020. Both workshops have as their full title "Understanding Collaboration in Digital Humanities". The first workshop in the series took place at DHN 2019 in Copenhagen, followed by a panel session dedicated to the same topic at DHBenelux 2019 in Liege. Twin Talks 2 was scheduled for March 2020 in Riga, but was first postponed to October and then also virtualized due to Covid-19. Twin Talks 3 was scheduled to take place in Ottawa in July 2020, but was virtualized. Both on-line workshops were run live from the CLARIN headquarters in Utrecht.

The main objective of the Twin Talks series is to get a better understanding of the dynamics on the digital humanities work floor where humanities scholars and digital experts meet and work in tandem to solve humanities research questions. The insights gained should help those involved in the education of humanities scholars, professionals and technical experts alike to develop better training programmes. The authors are instructed to start from a humanities research problem (and not a technical problem), to describe how it was solved, and – as the most relevant part of the paper for the topic this workshop – to address the way the humanities researcher and the digital expert have collaborated or still collaborate. As can be seen in some of the papers included in this volume it was not always easy for the authors to completely live up to these requirements. Especially the humanities research question is not always spelled out, which seems to be fully in line with the international Digital Humanities conferences where most of the papers focus on tools, platforms, or data collections, and hardly ever start from a clearly formulated humanities research question.

In this 143-page volume you will find 8 papers accepted for Twin Talks 2, and six papers for Twin Talks 3. They were submitted by a total of 53 authors from 15 countries. They cover a very broad variety of topics, from many different sub-disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. The papers are presented in the following order:

first the papers of the Twin Talks 2 workshop, followed by Twin Talks 3. For both workshops, the papers appear in the order they appeared in the workshop programme.

It is interesting to see that going through the papers many of the obstacles encountered by the authors are recurring, such as the lack of a common vocabulary, mismatch of expectations from both sides, and the lack of a shared understanding of the problem. Many of the recommendations refer to these issues, such as preparing projects in dialogue between the parties, having frequent project meetings, developing a common language and vocabulary, including specially tailored courses in the fundamentals of computer science in humanities curricula, managing expectations and being prepared to compromise.

A unique feature of TwinTalks workshop series is that the papers are submitted and presented in tandems of a humanities researcher and a digital expert. Due to the special circumstances created by the Covid-19, both our workshop editions had to be virtualized which required additional organizational effort but made it easier for the tandems as well as other participants to attend the events. The virtual workshops attracted 104 participants from 29 countries, who contributed to lively and rich discussions on a broad range of topics. One of the most prominent ones was the limited opportunities for the publication of the results of the collaboration that would ensure both parties to get proper academic credit for the paper. Humanities scholars may find it hard to get their digitally driven paper published in a traditional humanities journal if it is too technical for reviewers with no digital background or interest, while many computer science journals may find the solutions to humanities problems not attractive and advanced enough for publication. Fortunately, the number of national and international Digital Humanities conferences and journals is growing but, being interdisciplinary and relatively new, they may not be as highly rated as more traditional acclaimed publications from a narrow discipline. We hope that despite the special circumstances they were held in, the two new editions of the Twin Talks workshop series continue to contribute to creating the conditions where humanities scholars and technical experts can fruitfully collaborate in answering humanities research questions.

We would like to thank the members of the Programme Committee for both workshops (see below) for helping us to prepare the workshop and review the submissions.

We would also like to thank the organisers of the DHN and DH 2020 conferences for the effort they put in the preparations for the physical conference and its transformation into a very successful virtual event, and also the presenters at the workshops for adapting so eagerly to the new format.

Steven Krauwer and Darja Fišer
Utrecht and Ljubljana, 25 October 2020

Programme committee

The Twin Talks workshops are a joint initiative between CLARIN ERIC (http://www.clarin.eu), DARIAH ERIC (http://www.dariah.eu), with support from the SSHOC project (https://sshopencloud.eu/).

Programme chairs and main organisers

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