

DIGITAL HUMANITIES 2012 HOW TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER AND ATTEND A CONFERENCE

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1. Introduction

In front of me is an assignment of describing one great student experience. Although I would put myself in a category of library and information students more orientated towards the informational part of our subject, a academic studies I didn't even dream that I would have the opportunity to take part in organization, how it would turn out, one of the finest international professional event, as a conference dedicated to digital humanities, a discipline closely related to librarianship.

Conference Digital Humanities is an annual conference which is organized and sponsored by community-based Alliance of Digital Humanities Organization (ADHO). ADHO is an "umbrella" organization which promotes digital research in all arts and humanities, acting as an

advisory organization and supporting excellence in research, publishing, cooperation and learning. The first Conference took place in 1989 at the University of Toronto, as 16th annual meeting of Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing (ALLC) and 9th gathering of International Conference on Computers and the Humanities (ICCH). Since then, some other organizations related to the Conference have taken part in it. The practice is that every year the host country shifts, according to the rule that the European and American continents shift alternatively. This year conference was hosted in Germany, at the University of Hamburg, while the next one, in 2013, will be held in America, at the University of Nebraska, and in 2014 in Switzerland.

What is the most interesting for this occasion is the call for student bursaries for assisting in the organization of the Conference, of which I was informed by Professor Cvetana Krstev. They required 12 students from all over the world, of which 3 from Europe, 3 from North America and Great Britain, 3 from Central and South America and 3 from Australia, Asia and Africa. The amount of bursary depends on the continent the student comes from, but it's completely enough to cover costs of travel and accommodation. Main conditions were that students are older than 21, desirable to be on master studies, to have good knowledge of English plus one other language, to have basic technical knowledge (computer, the Internet, projector), and the previous experience in journalism, blogging, tweeting, or in recording and editing for video blogs.¹

And so, realizing that I mostly fulfill requests, I applied for that bursary using ControlTool system for registration, I sent CV and motivation letter in which I explained what would that experience mean to me. I have to admit that I didn't hope so much to be the one of three chosen European students, especially when I saw that identification number of my application was a three digit. The organization board should examine our applications and select the chosen ones until 20th of April. My hopes were so feeble that I even forgot that I was waiting for the answer. So, in the next days at the very peak of the exam period, I received an e-mail with announcement that I am the bursary winner for this year and that I have the deadline of several days to confirm it and accept it. Of course I couldn't believe it, I read the e-mail several times and asked my roommates to read it, for every case. So we concluded that I actually got the scholarship. In the next several days my haunting feeling was a mixture of a lot

of happiness, fear and excitement with the impression that I'm dreaming.

Incredibly fast came the 14th of July, the day of starting of the adventure. Adventure was even bigger, considering the fact that in the meantime I was accepted for one more scholarship to take part in the Summer school of digital humanities in Leipzig, which was, by sheer coincidence, chronologically continuing to the Conference in Hamburg and that this was my first independent international travel, to a country the language of which I didn't know at all. Actually, two months before leaving I enrolled myself in a course of German language, but for sure it wasn't enough for a basic communication. In the evening, after quite tiring flights, I was in Hamburg, and there started the unforgettable experience. The first impressions, apart from getting acquainted with a beautiful city, were definitely day light at 11 in the evening, and also like for every summer hater, wonderful change from 38 degrees to 20 degrees. Of course, about a month before the travel I had made a reservation in one hostel nearby Central station, on recommendation from a friend from Hamburg. Quality of accommodation turned out to be decent, although I was in the room with six beds, and in the next very active days I spent there time only for sleeping.

2. Meeting

Several days before starting we got our assignments. First meeting was appointed for Sunday, 15th July in the main building of the University of Hamburg, where the Conference was held. So, being exited like everybody else, I came a little bit before the time of meeting. There the main organizer, or the 'good soul' of the Conference, Katrin Schonertand professor Chris Meister, were waiting for us together with supervisors Imke, Veronica and Lena. We all spontaneously started getting to know each other, preparing material for participants. I was nervous, like many others, because 24 of us (12 international and 12

¹ More info: <http://www.dh2012.uni-hamburg.de/conference/archive-calls/call-for-student-assistant-bursaries/>

local, German students) were in a way responsible for the Conference with over 500 participants. I would use this occasion to name my dear colleague friends, so to speak part of a great international family: Dagmara from Poland, Peter from Ireland, Yoshimi from Japan, Jieli Kwok from Taiwan, Jose from Mexico, Tai and Rosa (Rosa with a very particular name Rosa Rosa Souza Rosa Gomez) from Brazil, Elena and Ali from Canada, Gurpreet from India and Alex from USA, and also our German colleagues: Peer, two Michaels (Michael D. and Michael R.), Marelke, Janina, Daniel, Stefani, Kristine, Anne-Marie, Marlene, Savita and Regina. I have to say that all chosen students had relations with librarianship, translating, language corpora or media.

Everything was so German-precise and perfectly organized. We got acquainted with the building of the University, got precise instructions, schedules, were shown how the technique works (connection between camera and projector didn't function that day due to unknown reasons, but that is technique), we checked schedule, signed the contracts, got the scholarships, also the invitation for a reception at City Hall as guests of senator for culture of Hamburg and uncertainly concluded that we were ready for all the challenges.

Schedules were so organized that we worked one shift per day (in the morning or in the afternoon) with a local student. Therefore, there were two students charged for one room, i.e. auditorium. Apart from practical things we also had student blog with events and Tweeter profile which we used to upload photos, information about eventual changes in the schedule and links to new articles on blog.

It was very interesting that one student took care of participants' children in the Conference. According to the plan (which was put into practice) the morning race around the lake Alster was held. Fascinating professor Meister, with the most hard-working participants, was running every morning at 7 o'clock around that lake, nearby University.

3. Pre-conference

First two days (16 and 17.th of July) were dedicated for workshops. On the first day I was responsible for welcome and registration of participants. It was very interesting meeting all those people coming from all over the world. What was more demanding was spelling their names. On the second day I was charged for all day workshop dedicated to digital projection of time and space. In the evening there was ceremonial, official opening of the Conference with the very interesting introductory lesson of the Professor Claudine Moulin, from the University of Trier, related to Digital Humanities from international perspective. We had our five minutes of glory in the introduction of Professor Chris Meister. With the applause support by participants we felt that we are on the good way to finish everything right.



4. Conference

On the third day started the main part of the Conference dedicated to a panel discussions, long paper and short paper sessions. Also a poster session was held on that day. My colleague and I put, according to the schedule, about 70 signed posters and took care that all the participants have good conditions for their presentations. For me this experience was priceless because I had never attended a poster session before. For younger colleagues who don't know what is that, a poster presentation consists of exposure of all relevant facts related to a presentation of own

project on the poster which dimensions were defined by propositions of the Conference. Session lasted 2 hours in this case. During that time presenters stand next to their posters and answer directly to the questions of interested visitors. It was a really enjoyable sight, so many people in interaction, especially because of the lovely space in which this session was held. All of this was taking place in the lobby of the East Wing of the main building of the University, which is in the modern style, with glass roof and wall from the side to main university building, and an alley in it. That was very smart idea when we consider unstable weather in Hamburg. In the evening a party was planned, which was sponsored by Google.



On the fourth day my colleague and I got the assignment to organize work in one of the auditoriums. Therefore, we recorded presentations and, more interesting part for me, because of differences with practice in Serbia, as the most normal thing we asked participants for assignment to be recorded and to make presentations available in public². In the first part the chairman was PhD Tanya Clement from the University of Texas, while other presenters were: Adam Bradley, Amy Earhart and Doug Reside. Adam Bradley, from the University Waterloo in Canada, was

² Lectures available on web site: <http://www.dh2012.uni-hamburg.de/conference/video-lectures/>.

talking about “violence over digital humanistic texts”. Amy Earhart from the University of Texas was talking about digitalization of old literature texts in the lecture “Recovering of the recovered text: differences, building the canon, and digital studies.” Dag Reside from the New York public library for performing arts was talking about the project Bamboo³ in the lecture headlined as “Cod spirits and infrastructure”. In the second part of the session the chairman was Professor Elisabeth Burr from the University of Leipzig. Sebastian Drude gave a lecture on documentation of language and digital humanistic on the example DoBeS of the language archive. Alexander Nakhimovsky, from Colgate University in USA, was talking about tools for language documentation, while Lise Dobrin from the University Virginia presented digital language archives.

This day was for remembering, mostly because of the following content. In the evening a reception was organized by the senator of culture of city of Hamburg, in the magnificent City Hall. After that there was a banquet dinner and unforgettable party on the boat “Rikmer Rikmers” which is a museum and a restaurant anchored in Hamburg harbor.

The last day of the Conference went into panel discussions, long paper sessions and short paper sessions. As I didn't have any work to do, I attended long paper presentation of Toma Tasovac, director of Belgrade center of digital humanistic. He was telling about linguistic changes in Serbian digital texts from the 18th century, that is, about the project which enables two interfaces for showing those changes. In the afternoon there was the official closing of the Conference with finishing lecture of the Professor Masahiro Shimoda, from the University in Tokyo, who was talking about the future of Digital Humanities. Annual Fortier Prize was given for the most interesting presentation. The thing that will make

³ <http://www.projectbamboo.org/>

this Conference enter into history is foundation of the German organization Digital Humanities Deutschland⁴, the national branch of ALLC, with the aim of gathering digital humanists for the purpose of professional unification and exchanging ideas. It is also interesting that this year Conference, according to the number of participants (over 500) has been the largest until now. While the organizer of the next conference was presenting the University of Nebraska, we were looking each other with sad faces, realizing that it is coming to an end.

5. Activities out of the conference

It was the priceless experience to participate in the perfect organization of such an immense event, and students' participation in it was acknowledged - the last day one young lady, participant of the conference, came to me just to tell me how fascinated she was with the organization and that we students were wonderful. I also have some other impressions from Hamburg. Every day we were meeting spontaneously and together were visiting many places in the city. Our German colleagues were the best guides and hosts. Apart from visiting different authentic parts of the city, as Sent Pauli with famous Reeperbahn, Altona, walking in Japanese garden, driving the ferry boat on Elba, through Hamburg harbor, chatting on the coast of Alster, there was an informal visit to a modern, cheerful, main University Library and canteen in a similar fashion. I can say that it was enjoyable living as a German student. Other international colleagues felt the same. We were on the Conference to present spirits of different cultures, and we took the maximum advantage of that. It was endlessly fun comparing living in different cultures and it's too bad it didn't last longer than those completely fulfilled 6 days.

Adventure continued in Leipzig, where I

went with two other colleagues, Gurpit and Jose. Other colleagues unfortunately had to leave home or, the lucky ones, to stay longer and get to know better Germany and Europe. I have to emphasize that the meeting with my colleague Gordana Nedeljkov in Leipzig, in which many participants moved from Hamburg as students or professors made me extremely happy.



6. Nothing is impossible

Therefore, with sadness for not being student myself anymore, I advise my younger colleagues to try to take part in similar calls. The experience which you get is priceless in every sense. I have to say that it's extraordinary feeling to be the part of the community of colleagues who understand challenges and demands of our profession. I have the impression that I was in the "nursery garden" of ideas and I hope I will carry out some of them. As I have already mentioned, the next conference Digital Humanities 2013 will be organized in Nebraska at the University in Nebraska, in Lincoln. Web site of the Conference⁵ is already available, take a look at it, from January you could apply for the call for student-helpers bursary, you won't regret if you apply, I repeat that you have nothing to lose. And for those even younger, during next years google the term Digital Humanities in the combination with ongoing year and follow the calls.

4 <http://www.dig-hum.de/>

5 <http://dh2013.unl.edu/>

References

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