Popularisation of knowledge in digital humanities with help of UX – project Historical Atlas of Poland 2.0

Katarzyna Słomska-Przech[a,*], Adrian Bajer [a], Dawid Maciuszek[a] , Tomasz Panecki[a]

[a] Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences - kslomska@ihpan.edu.pl, bajeradr@gmail.com, dawidjanmaciuszek@gmail.com, tpanecki@ihpan.edu.pl

* Corresponding author

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Abstract:

Research data should be FAIR: findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable (Wilkinson, Dumontier, et al. 2016). Therefore, at the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History (Polish Academy of Sciences), we wanted to create a data repository that enables data visualization on a map and is adjusted with FAIR rules. For this purpose, the project Historical Atlas of Poland 2.0 (AHP 2.0) aims at developing digital tools, popularisation of datasets and knowledge, and creating research community.

Up to this point, the biggest problem with the efficient dissemination and reuse of our data was the relatively low quality of the website, which has a high number of visits, yet 80% of them take less than 30 seconds. It was necessary to adjust it to the users' needs – both scholars, people interested in local history, and teachers using historical portals in education.

We decided to conduct the formative evaluation as a mix of UX workshops and expert reviews. Due to COVID-19, all workshops are online, which has its downsides. Despite recording the meeting, not everyone has the option of using webcams, and if many people use them, some delays may affect the perception of other participants (Schoenenberg et al. 2014). Online meetings do not allow sufficient interaction with participants, proper registration of their reactions and needs. Difficulties may also arise while observing what obstacles users have while using the tested tools, which could be simple to verify in an one-to-one session with screen sharing but could not be easily analysed and discussed in a larger group.

In the first phase, we decided to conduct workshops with a group of people who already cooperated on the development of the institute's spatial data. The main reasons were their knowledge of the issue, active use of the current website, not to mention the possibility to define the future needs of history researchers. Therefore, the first workshop in October 2020 aimed at prioritization of the needs of professional users – determining what the website should look like and what possibilities it should give. Ten days before the event participants were asked to brainstorm and report their needs via an online shared document. That facilitated the exchange of ideas and improved communication during the workshop. Then, the proposed issues were discussed at the online event, and solutions to develop were chosen. During the second workshop in March 2021, we plan to verify the functionality of these solutions with the same group.

The workshops in the AHP 2.0 project have two equally important goals – testing the AHP 2.0 website to improve it and direct promotion of the project. Hence, for the following phases we have planned workshops with researchers from universities in Poland, and high-school and university students. As it is difficult to predict the epidemic situation, future workshops will probably also have to take place online. As a result of the expansion of the study group, new challenges will certainly arise in interaction with participants, for example in encouraging them to actively engage in testing and express their opinions openly.

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