

RESAW

Session 2 | Trans-national access and service Activities, Networking Activities, Joint Research Activities | September 2013

Summary of the discussion

The following is a short summary of the most important themes debated in the second web discussion session within the RESAW project (September 2013). No comments have been added to the points, and focus is on the issues we have to keep in mind when taking the next steps. The themes are placed in no prioritized order.

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Transnational access

The issue of getting access to web archives in other EU member states was addressed in Topic 1. The discussion revolved around what could actually be

understood by ‘access’. On the one hand, access can be understood as getting access to information about what can be found in the archive (but not seeing the content), and, on the other hand access can be understood as actually getting access to see and interact with the content of the web archive. These two ways of understanding ‘access’ were discussed in terms of technology as well as related to legal issues.

Overview

It was suggested (Valérie) that an overview website was established as to inform scholars about the different possibilities of getting access to the material in the web archives (where to get access? which legal framework applies? people to approach when coming from abroad?). In addition, the question was raised how one could study whatever topic on a European scale without having to physically visit each of the countries relevant to the study.

Technology and access

It was suggested that from a technical point of view common gateways should be established to European web archives (Bjarne); the Memento project which builds a global index of web archives was mentioned as a possible solution (Memento is currently being tested within the IIPC). It was suggested (Niels) that RESAW could constitute a possible framework for the testing of Memento because actual cross-boarder research projects are to be established. A test could include such questions as the pros/cons, how useful it is, legal issues, and documentation. The question was raised as to which institution could hold a possible European Memento time gate (Birgit).

Full text search

Full text search was also mentioned as a possibility (if copyright permits), possibly only for researchers since many countries only give researcher access. This could also be tested within the RESAW community, for instance how search results should be presented (Niels).

Access to aggregated material

The aim of ensuring seamless cross-boarder access to national web archives was stressed (Bjarne). It was stressed that seamless cross-boarder access must be seamless cross-boarder locating of relevant sources (Birgit). But getting

access may be made impossible due to legal frameworks (Helen); a possible solution was suggested, namely to work on aggregated material.

Workspace

Finally, a number of extra services for a trans-national gateway was suggested (Ditte):

- which researchers have worked on which archives with which projects
- access or link to metadata about the different collections
- help pages: how to work with archived web material in the archive
- display cases
- discussion forum
- market place: looking for researchers in other countries for a cross-national project

Transnational corpora

It was noted that locating a specific URL in another archive is one thing, but getting access to it and creating a corpus across web archives is another thing, especially because the web archives are very different regarding archiving strategies, technical settings, deficiencies, and documentation (Niels).

Archiving to web archives with access for all researchers

It was suggested that Zotero could be used for having material archived to one or more European web archives with access for all researchers (Birgit). And that web archives could use a future version of INA's LiveArchivingProxy to be able to archive a resource for study as closely as possible to the one on the web (Birgit).

Networking activities

It was mentioned that among web archives the IIPC is already a very strong network (Bjarne), and that RESAW can build upon this (Niels).

The European Library was presented as an organisation with all the national libraries of Europe as members, and it may contribute with networking activities on web archiving in the library domain (Nuno)

It was suggested that the relevant groups to network with was mapped (Helen).

And, finally, it was put forward that establishing an overview of funding possibilities, academic conferences and journals within RESAW's area would be usefull (Helen).

Use cases and joint research projects

In the opening of the discussion topic about 'Joint Research Activities' three criteria for the joint research projects were suggested: 1) they should involve archived web, 2) they should be cross-national, and 3) they should test existing national web archives and their collaboration with a view to identifying possible new developments (Niels).

Mapping the field

It was suggested that the state of the art within the use of web archives was mapped, among others web historiography (scholars, books, departments, universities) (Valérie).

Test of web archives

As part of a research project (or a research project in its own right) 3-4 teams from different countries (archival professionals and scholars) could search the same subjects in web archives, using the same analytical grid (search results, possibilities, tools, access conditions, copyright...) with a view to writing a commun synthesis and 'recommendations' (Valérie).

Conference and training/education

It was suggested to make:

- an annual European summerschool on web archives for scholars
- an annual conference on web archives, gathering scholars and archival professionals (Valérie)

Concrete joint research projects

A number of joint research projects were suggested, and as a general comment it was noted that the idea of having both a cross-national and maybe a longitudinal analysis is a great idea, since it will open fruitful collaboration between different disciplines (Fabienne).

The following joint research projects were mentioned:

1) Book on web histories

A collective book about web histories in Europe (Valérie).

2) National domains on the web

A study of what a number of national domains has looked like through the years, based on a number of shared measuring points: average size of a website, update frequency of websites, top 100 most linked to websites, number of images/videos/written text, etc., etc. And studies of a more qualitative nature could also be made (Niels).

3) The web in planned transnational events

A study of the web as it is used in relation to transnational events, within each nation state, and on web domains which are not related to a nation (for instance .eu). Two events were suggested: EU Parliamentary elections, and the Olympics. Both events are of great political and cultural importance to many people, they are national as well as transnational, they are recurrent every fifth/fourth year which makes historical studies possible, and they have been archived in many national web archives, and even across web archives with the 2012 London Olympics where a transnational web archiving was initiated, but apparently this material has never been studied. These studies could use the same measure points as in relation to the project 'National domains on the web', but any other kind of study of life on the web in relation to these events could be imagined, from almost all disciplines within the humanities and the social sciences (Niels).

Regarding the EU Parliamentary elections it was added that these elections would be an ideal joint research project since they are a repeated event, they take place in all countries at the same time, and they can be studied in a longitudinal way (2004 if there are archives-2009-2014). In addition, in relation to this event social media such as Facebook and Twitter will become very important in 2014. However, it has to be taken into consideration that the status of the election varies from country to country, and it must be established if most countries have archived or plan to archive a number of websites/social media in 2014 (Fabienne).

It was added that the longitudinal/historical perspective is very important since it highlights what we as scholars can actually do with existing web archives where we cannot go back and change the archiving since the material is gone. And if the project runs until the next elections in 2019 web archives and scholars can together plan archiving in relation to these elections. This would give a nice test and development of the nexus between web archives and scholars: a) web archiving done in the past without scholars involved, b) web archiving done with scholars semi-involved (2014), and c) web archiving done based on close collaboration (2019) (Niels).

4) The web in unplanned transnational events

In addition to a planned event such as EU elections or Olympics it was suggested to try to establish a kind of ‘contingency plan’ to be used when an unexpected event happens (9/11, tsunami...). Such a contingency plan could be established as a collaboration between web archiving institutions and scholars, and it should set up a number of procedures to secure as much being archived of the event as possible – content disappears or changes rapidly during events; some web archives already have some kind of plans, but a more systematic approach as well as collaborations with scholars could be developed (Niels).

5) The period before national web archives were established

The question was raised if joint research projects could begin before the national web archives were established, that is going back to 1996 when the Internet Archive was founded (Valérie).

It was noted that this would require an agreement with the Internet Archive allowing scholars to get – or to get access to – national domains in their archive. This is probably doable – more of the web archives in RESAW have experience with this (Niels).

6) Contextual studies

Within a historical approach it was suggested that contextual issues that web archives cannot inform us explicitly about are included in web studies, that is such things as traffic, speed, users and uses, technical history and web

technology. This kind of contextual information could be of great help to anyone studying web archives, especially those who are not familiar with the historical context of the web, its use, etc. (Valérie).

It was added that the combination of web archived material and contextual information constitutes a very interesting new research issue (Niels).

7) A country's 'presence' in other national web archives

One could examine the 'presence' of other countries in each national web archive (Anat).

Distributed data-infrastructure and research interface

It was noted that comparative analyses requires distributed data-infrastructure in order to index the different collections, just as a (re)search interface on top of them must be established (Anat).

The importance of establishing a research interface and research tools on top of the datainfrastructure was stressed (Niels).

Enriching the web archives

It was mentioned that the various research activities may also enrich the web archives (Helen).

A joint research theme based collection

Since many IIPC member archives in Europe are having curators focusing on how to make 'event based' or 'theme based' collections making a joint research theme based collection could be a joint research networking activity.

A theoretical framework for web archive studies

It was stressed that RESAW could contribute use cases which in turn could help establish a theoretical framework for web archive studies from various disciplinary perspectives (Helen).

Niels Brügger, November 2013