

Jakob Jung and Volker Michel

***avldigital.de*: A Web Portal for Comparative Literature**

Abstract: *avldigital.de* is a Web portal designed specifically for scholars and institutions in the field of comparative literature. The project aims to supply researchers in the discipline with a means of finding the academic literature and information they need for their research, to support them in open-access publishing, and to establish a communication platform for the comparative literature research community, in Germany as well as worldwide. This contribution aims to give an overview of the services available, and details how scholars and institutions active in comparative literature research can benefit from and participate in using the platform for their research and for communicating their work. Additionally, some context is given on the project the portal is part of, what aims the project has, and what the future might look like.

Keywords: *avldigital.de*, comparative literature, *Fachinformationsdienste*, research communication, research infrastructure, Web portal

1 Introduction: A lone table in Vienna University's arcaded courtyard

The 2016 ICLA congress took place at the beautiful downtown campus of Vienna University. The conference participants enjoyed the lovely central European summer weather, sipping the many shades of Viennese coffee and lounging in deck-chairs spread all over the arcaded courtyard at the centre of the university building. Seeking shelter from the sun, the comparatists strolled along the rows of busts of famous Viennese scholars and the tables laid with the newest publications of academic publishing houses, large and small.

One table, however, at the very back of the left-hand arcade, stood out. What was being advertised here? There was nothing more than a poster, a stack of leaflets, and a laptop displaying a *PowerPoint* presentation. Literary scholars muttered the mysterious product's name under their breath – missing vowels in critical places, was it simple proof for the weirdness of the German language, or an acronym? What was *avldigital.de*, and what did it have to do with the ICLA?

Asked for an explanation, the two people staffing the table stated that they were there advertising something that did not yet exist: an online portal for the

comparative literature community. The acronym “AVL” stands for *Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* (general and comparative literary studies), the common German-language title for the discipline of comparative literature. The remainder of the not-yet-existent platform’s name referred to the digital nature of the services to be offered.

This article aims to give an overview of what *avldigital.de* is: *is* in the present tense, because by late 2019, *avldigital.de* has become real. The portal was finally released at the end of 2018 after a three-year development period. This article will give an introduction to the platform. Some context will be given on the project, of which the portal is part, what aims the project has, and what the future might look like. Then, the article will detail how scholars and institutions active in comparative literature research can benefit from and participate in our activities by using the platform for their research and for communicating their work.

2 What is *avldigital.de*?

In a nutshell, *avldigital.de* is a Web portal designed specifically for scholars and institutions in the field of comparative literature. The project aims to supply researchers in the discipline with a means of finding the academic literature and information they need for their research; to support them in open-access publishing; and to establish a communication platform for the comparative literature research community, in Germany, as well as worldwide.

The Web portal is the core service offered by the Specialized Information Service Comparative Literature (Ger.: *Fachinformationsdienst Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*, or FID AVL). The FID AVL is a non-commercial information infrastructure project for the German research community. It is funded by the German Research Foundation and is physically based at the University Library of Frankfurt, and it provides freely accessible services. An infrastructure project for the benefit of scholars based at German academic institutions, the FID AVL nevertheless invites comparatists from all countries to use the platform *avldigital.de*. The portal is available in both German (<https://www.avldigital.de/>) and English (<https://www.avldigital.de/en/>).

The infrastructural context of *avldigital.de* merits more detailed explanation. Its historical and organizational background is specific to the German academic framework. In the following sections, we will outline this background to highlight what *avldigital.de* is at its core: a service provided by specialist librarians for scholars in the field of comparative literature.

2.1 A library for comparative literature: The universal and the virtual

For a discipline such as comparative literature, the idea of a universal library is of particular appeal. Comparative literature constantly blurs the boundaries of not only methodology but also the objects of research and the definition of what counts as “literature.” *Anything* could become the object of comparative literature research, so a universal library that would contain all the knowledge in the world would be the discipline’s ideal instrument.

Now, anybody who has ever read a single text by Borges knows what problems this idea brings with it – and they will scoff at real-world attempts to create a universal library. Nevertheless, there do exist actual libraries that act following this very directive: “be universal.” The best-known example is the Library of Congress in Washington, whose acquisition policy covers basically everything. In theory, any publication that could at any time become the object of personal interest or any kind of research – be it in the field of science, or in the field of the humanities – would be available there.

In Germany, the concept of a universal library has, for historical reasons, always been interlinked with that of a virtual library. “Virtual” in this context does not necessarily mean digital or computerized (though the emergence of online and internet-based library catalogues has helped in bringing the concept to fruition), but rather decentralized. Funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (German Research Foundation, or DFG),¹ the system of *Sondersammelgebiete* (Specialized Subject Collections, or SSGs) persisted from the early 1950s until 2013. Following the concept of a *verteilte Nationalbibliothek*, meaning a distributed or decentralized national library, the basic idea was to make sure that any academic publication, from anywhere in the world, which might one day become relevant to research at German universities, should exist at least once on German soil – a virtual universal library.

The organizing principle was that of identifying academic disciplines and assigning the duty of collecting as many publications as possible to various university and other specialized libraries all over Germany. Since these acquisitions were an added workload, and were only indirectly benefiting the researchers and

¹ The DFG is one of the largest public funding institutions for research in Germany. Born out of the *Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft* to rebuild academia in Germany after World War II, it consists of an association of almost all academic institutions in Germany and is an integral part of their autonomous self-organization in terms of freedom of research and teaching. Although mainly responsible for funding research projects, the DFG also funds infrastructure projects.

students of the individual universities, the libraries were granted funding by the DFG. The SSGs were an integral part of the German research infrastructure system.

All publications bought by libraries out of the funding assigned to them were to follow certain guidelines and definitions of what the subject of the SSG comprised.² The introduction of computerized and online catalogues in the 1980s and 1990s made this system remarkably efficient. Scholars in Germany could be relatively sure that if their home university library did not stock a specific publication needed for their research, there was at least one other library, the one with the SSG for their subject, that had it. All they needed to do was to log into the interlibrary loan portal of their local library and order the book. This system of a virtual and decentralized national library found international recognition, not only among librarians but also among academic communities.

However, times and technologies progressed. Worldwide, the output of academic publications grew exponentially. Publishing houses editing core journals in numerous academic disciplines started raising subscription fees. New forms of publication emerged: electronic books and online journals, bringing with them the necessity of new metadata and quality standards as well as new challenges in licensing and access-rights management. The SSGs' principle of *vorsorgender Bestandsaufbau* (best translated as the "proactive acquisition of literature") was seen ever more critically. Its merits for research and education were at odds with the (not only financial) reality. The goal of building a virtual universal library grew more unattainable than ever: not only did the number of publications that were to be acquired become more unwieldy, but the new forms of publication – those that were *sui generis* virtual, this time meaning digital – were not covered and could not be included satisfactorily in the existing systems.

After several attempts to adapt the SSG system (such as the introduction of specialized online portals dubbed *Virtuelle Fachbibliotheken* [Virtual Subject Libraries]), in 2013 the DFG decided to abolish it completely and to replace it with a new program the *Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft* (Specialized Information Services for Scholarship). This step – which was not without its share of criticism from the German librarian and academic communities – transformed the nationwide information infrastructure in Germany into a more service-oriented, demand-driven system.

² Some guidelines were purely practical, but some were the result of a somewhat dated definition of the field. Publications bought for the SSG for Comparative Literature, for example, had to compare literary texts from at least three languages. Otherwise, they were not deemed comparative.

Fachinformationsdienste (FIDs) develop their service and content profiles based on continual exchange with their respective scholarly communities. This is true both for the acquisition of research literature – if the research community in a particular field is content with the overall situation, no additional acquisition by the FID is required – and for supplementary services which the community might need. Whereas SSGs were funded almost automatically, with funding renewed each year, FIDs need to apply for new funding every three years, presenting concepts for new services and content based on feedback from their respective communities.

2.2 The Specialized Information Service Comparative Literature: Background and profile

The FID AVL is an example of one of these. It is situated at the University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg in Frankfurt am Main, where the *SSG Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* had been situated for sixty years, having built up an extensive collection of comparative literature research publications. For the first application within the new framework in 2015, extensive efforts were undertaken to include the German comparative literature community in the development of the service. Focus-group meetings took place and letters of intent from renowned institutions were obtained. A survey was sent to all members of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* (German General and Comparative Literary Studies Association, or DGAVL), asking for their opinion on what content and services an FID should include.

One of the results was a clear identification of the basic services, of which the FID was to be comprised. These were services for finding research publications and information needed for comparative research; services and information concerning open-access publishing; as well a communication platform to facilitate networking among comparatists in Germany, but also between them and their colleagues in other countries. These services were to be offered through a centralized platform on the Internet. Similar platforms already existed for many other scholarly fields in Germany.

Establishing an online portal specifically for comparative literature not only benefits comparatists in Germany in a practical way; it also means that the discipline as such becomes more visible within the wider scholarly community. Even though comparative literature had been established at modern academic institutions in Germany by literary scholars such as Ernst Robert Curtius or Peter Szondi, it was, and still is, often seen as an adjunct of one of the larger national philologies, such as German or Romance studies. Autonomous departments or in-

stitutes of comparative literature only exist at four German universities (Berlin, Frankfurt, Mainz, and Munich); all other sites of research in, and teaching on, the subject are usually limited to single chairs or sub-departments that are considered part of a greater “parent” discipline.

This in part influences one other, very important finding from the community feedback on which the FID’s services are based, namely what the content profile of an information infrastructure service that aims to benefit all comparatists should be comprised of. It needs to take into consideration not only what comparatists are currently working on, but also what publications, information, and material they *might* require for their research. These considerations not only inform what media, publications, and bibliographical references should be included in an information portal, but also whether additional publications (and of what kind) should be acquired, and how the information, as well as the portal, should be structured.

Addressing these considerations needs to take three factors into account. Firstly, that comparative literature is a discipline with a very disparate community. Secondly, that, even if trends in research can be identified, research interests and methodology are similarly varied. Thirdly, that objects of research in the discipline can be genuinely comparative, but can also pertain to those of national philologies, of art, of media and cultural studies, or of similar fields.

The disparity of the community, methodology, and research areas is inherent to the field, but in Germany it is also caused by the same structures as those described above: location and institutional situation influence comparatists’ research interests, methods, or even organizational affiliations. The third factor, that of the interdisciplinary approach and requirements of comparatists, needs no further explanation. An information service for comparatists needs to take all these factors into account. As a profile for the FID AVL, a twofold definition of comparative literature has been derived: a “narrow” and a “broad” definition.

The “narrow” definition tries to respect the discipline’s distinct identity. It is highly specialized, with an emphasis on comparison and theory. Within the FID AVL’s services, it is the basis both for a continued specialized acquisition of research publications and for making available information resources that are of special interest to the comparative literature community.

The “broad” definition takes into consideration the wide array of comparative literature research interests. This is of key importance for the definition of the target group of the FID AVL. This can include researchers that are affiliated with an institute or chair of comparative literature, as well as a scholar in media or cultural studies whose work is of a particularly comparative nature or whose methodology is characterized by concepts of inter- or transrelationality, be it between languages, media, cultures, genres, or times (to name but a few). Of course,

the “broad” definition is the basis for the selection of information and data made available in the catalogue module of the FID AVL’s portal, *avldigital.de*: the selection aims to cover all philologies, art, media and cultural studies, aesthetics, and neighbouring disciplines. Furthermore, the platform’s “Networking” module invites the input of information relevant to research in all fields of this “broad” definition.³

3 Finding literature, publishing, and networking: The three modules of *avldigital.de*

The service portfolio of the FID AVL emerged from the requirements comparatists have with regards to an information service that caters to their research needs. Frankfurt University Library successfully applied for funding from the DFG in 2015. The project, supported by a board of advisers representing various fields of research in comparative literature, started in mid-2016. Aiming to establish an on-line platform where all services are available, *avldigital.de* was officially launched in December 2018 (a beta version had previously been published in 2017). By then, a new application had been made for three more years of funding. This application, too, was successful, resulting in an additional funding period until mid-2022, in which the existing portal will be optimized, new data sources integrated, and the services opened to the international community.

The platform *avldigital.de* is designed to provide services that have been identified as desiderata by the comparative literature community. These are represented in *avldigital.de*’s three modules: “Finding literature,” “Publishing,” and “Networking.”

3.1 Finding literature

The “Finding literature” module is basically a specialized catalogue of digital and printed research literature and information resources relevant to the field. The catalogue comprises references to books, articles, journals, e-books, and current

³ The idea of a universal library has been mentioned earlier. A “broad” definition in terms of content profiles for a comparative literature library catalogue could simply stop here and “just make everything available.” But the idea of a juxtaposed “narrow” definition that describes comparative literature as a distinct, autonomous discipline – as well as purely practical reasons – does not allow for this.

news. The content profile covers what has been described above as the “broad” definition of comparative literature. The “narrow” definition is catered for as well: the FID AVL’s funding includes a budget for the acquisition of publications in the field of literary studies with a specifically comparative focus; these are included in the “Finding literature” catalogue.

The “Finding literature” module’s aim is to provide researchers with a comprehensive selection of bibliographical references that are relevant to their work. The advantage in comparison to a “regular” library catalogue is evident: “Finding literature” comprises a carefully curated selection of specialist publications and information that no other platform – at least in Germany – can provide. Even though all catalogues of academic libraries are searchable by (standardized) keywords and classifications, often assigned with meticulous care and by librarians with a degree in a relevant discipline, a selection covering the requirements of comparatists is usually difficult to find. Too often, existing classifications are either too exclusive (e.g. classifying literary theory and general literary studies, but not taking the comparative view into account) or too broad (such as the very common, broadly philological pairing “language and literary studies,” which could encompass anything from post-structural poetics to neurolinguistics – to nobody’s benefit). Therefore, a catalogue that provides comparatists specifically with the information and resources they need has been identified as a desideratum.

The *avldigital.de* catalogue includes, among other things, references to the specialized literature collected at Frankfurt University Library during the sixty-year SSG period and to open-access publications, and a bibliographical database of tables of contents from two hundred scholarly journals in the field of literary studies. Furthermore, an exclusive selection of e-books is available to a group of eight hundred scholars who are affiliated with institutes, departments, and research institutions in Germany, or with the DGAVL (thus not limiting access to affiliates of German institutions).

3.2 Publishing

Open-access publishing, originating in the sciences, is becoming increasingly significant in the humanities. “Open access” means free digital access to scholarly literature and other material such as research data. Recently, academic and political institutions have begun to promote open-access publishing with strategy papers and legislative proposals.

By now, the transition to open-access publishing is widely recognized as a question, not of if, but of when. Depending on the needs and wishes of the target group in question, FIDs provide an infrastructure for subject-related open-access

endeavours. The FID AVL, via *avldigital.de*'s "Publishing" module, supports the open-access transformation as a subject-specific and free-of-charge service provider for open access publishing in comparative literature.

The core of this service is the open access repository dubbed "CompaRe" (*Comparative Literature Repository*). "CompaRe" is available to scholars, research institutions, and publishers. It serves primarily as a platform for what is known as the "green road" to open access – the freely accessible republication of material which has already been published. However, first publications on "CompaRe" are possible as well.

Documents published on "CompaRe" are catalogued according to librarians' and subject-specific standards, and are archived on a freely accessible publication repository. They are included in the "Finding literature" module's catalogue, but also find their way into national and international catalogues and bibliographies. All documents are assigned a URN – a persistent identifier that, similarly to a DOI or HANDLE, allows the document to be cited and accessed continually.

The service is available to individual scholars, to research institutions, and to publishing houses alike. Scholars who would like to make more of their work freely accessible online (thus increasing its citation rate) can do so on "CompaRe." "CompaRe" is available to research institutions as a partner for systematically making their publication outputs available through open access. Journals, series, or other publications can be archived on the repository if permitted by the publishing houses, where they were first published. A good example of a collaboration between the FID AVL and a research institution is the *Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung* (ZfL) in Berlin, whose edited volumes are successively archived on "CompaRe." A so-called "moving wall" has been negotiated with the two publishing houses of the ZfL's edited volumes, allowing for republication after a period of three years has expired since the original publication.

A number of further collaborations with publishing houses have been established. The FID AVL offers a number of collaboration options according to the publishing house's needs: apart from the "moving wall" principle, a publication can appear in print and simultaneously on "CompaRe," or the repository can be used to publish supplemental material to a publication, or to publish part of it, such as a chapter or a single contribution to an edited volume as a "teaser" for the print or closed-access publication.

The collaboration partners of "CompaRe" are mentioned by name on *avldigital.de*. Research institutions and their work are thus made more visible, and publishing houses are presented as experts in the field whose content is foremost in a subject-specific environment – and who are actively supporting the transition to open-access.

Furthermore, the “Publishing module” contains a hosting service for open-access journals and other regular digital publications such as papers or monograph series. The hosting service uses “Open Journal Systems” (OJS), a Web-based platform for online journals. OJS is developed by the Public Knowledge Project as open-source software. More than 10,000 journals worldwide are published using this software.

This e-journal hosting service is aimed at the editorial boards of existing e-journals, as well as universities and research institutes, research groups, and projects that would like to start a new journal. With OJS, it is even possible to create a browser-based version of the entire editorial review and publication process of an electronic journal, including the peer-review process, proofreading, and correction loops. Editorial boards who do not want to abandon their tried and tested routines and workflows can simply use it to give their journal a make-over. The service is, again, free of charge, and journals published through OJS are eligible for inclusion in *avldigital.de*’s catalogue and other library catalogues.

3.3 Networking

The “Networking” module is the most dynamic part of *avldigital.de*: it is a community-driven communication platform for comparative literature. The idea is to offer a central platform for announcements and notifications concerning research in the field. Particularly in Germany, comparatists are used to browsing numerous sources of information, such as mailing lists, message boards, blogs, and social media, to find news and announcements relevant to their work. *avldigital.de*, thanks to the “Networking” module, now offers a place where these communication channels can be aggregated and communication can take place in an environment specific to the discipline.

The “Networking” module consists of six categories:

- “Calls for papers,” including both calls for contributions to conferences and publications.
- “Events,” including all sorts of academic gatherings, from conferences to summer schools.
- “Vacancies and scholarships,” including professorships, academic and administrative positions, fellowships, doctoral positions, or scholarship programmes.
- “Institutions,” including university institutes and non-university public research institutions.
- “Projects and research,” including any sort of currently active funded research, from single-person research projects to large, institutionalized graduate programmes.

- “Websites,” meaning all sorts of scholarly Web resources that might be of interest to comparatists.

Thus, both a message board for current news and announcements as well as a database of institutions, research activities, and online resources relevant to the field is created.

Additionally, a directory – the “Index of researchers” – allows scholars to create a profile and thus announce themselves as part of the comparative literature community. The streamlined profile contains relevant information such as institutional affiliation and research interests. The directory, as well as the “Networking” module as a whole, though designed to be actively supplied with content by the community, is purposely not designed to be a full-blown academic social network, but rather a simplified message board and database that feeds into a specialist information resource, *avldigital.de*.

When one has registered for the directory of researchers, announcements can be submitted in all six categories mentioned above. These are then approved by the FID AVL team and made available as a resource on *avldigital.de*. Resources can be linked to each other: for example, the announcement of a conference can be linked to the institution where it takes place, or to the call for papers that has been issued beforehand. Persons in the directory of researchers can be linked to their institutions or to research projects they work on or are participating in, and so on. Anybody is allowed to submit announcements, scholars, for instance, who are organizing a conference or who want to communicate information regarding their newly funded research project, but also people in charge of communicating the work of research institutions to the outside world or systematically distributing calls for papers or vacancies and scholarship announcements.

The “Networking” module would not be a communication platform if it did not communicate with the outside world. Firstly, all contents of the “Networking” database can be found via the “Finding literature” search. To keep up to date, there is a subscription service that notifies subscribers of new additions to the “Networking” database. The options include an e-mail newsletter that is sent out two to three times a week, containing all of the newest submissions to the platform. The FID AVL’s *Twitter* channel also posts all new announcements. Another option is the RSS Web feed for the more technically minded members of the community, which makes it possible to integrate the information stream into feed readers, Web widgets, and more.

As mentioned, the “Networking” platform is designed to be community-driven. The long-term aim is to establish it as the primary source of information that comparatists from the German-speaking world turn to in order to keep up to date on new developments in their field – and that they use to distribute their

own scholarly communications, knowing that their German and international colleagues will find them here. Currently, the content found here is still mostly gathered by the FID AVL team, but the number of submissions from the community is continually rising, as is the number of subscribers to the various subscription channels *avldigital.de* offers.⁴

4 Why we went to Macau: Services for the international community

Of course, *avldigital.de* does not cater only to the German comparative literature community: the “Networking” module in particular is open to an international community of comparatists. How they can benefit from the FID AVL’s services will be illustrated in this section.

Presenting the FID’s services to the community beyond Germany was the aim of its presence at the ICLA congresses in 2016 and in 2019. As shown at the beginning of this contribution, there was not yet much to show in 2016. By 2019, after establishing *avldigital.de* as a communication platform within the German comparative literature community, the next step was to make it a nexus of global communication in the field: communication from the ICLA, its research committees, and its national member associations, but of course also from scholars, research institutions, and communities all over the world, to the German comparative literature community, and vice versa.

As part of the second phase of funding that began in mid-2019, the FID AVL seeks to increase and support international exchange both between German and international scholars and in the discipline as a whole. Another goal is to render the diverse fields of research in comparative literature more visible within this scholarly community and adjacent ones. By connecting organizations, institutions, projects, and associations – and, most importantly, information and access points to their work – on a single Web portal, the many facets of the discipline are made visible, all over the world.

It was to this end that the DFG funded the FID AVL’s trip to Macau in the summer of 2019. As a funding body for research in Germany, the DFG’s main interest is how scholars in Germany benefit from such an international network. How-

⁴ By October 2019, the newsletter had 209 active subscribers, and 456 people were following *avldigital.de* on Twitter.

ever, the comparative literature community itself is an (if anything, increasingly) international community for which internal exchange is regular and vital.

The FID AVL's presence in Macau served as an invitation to the ICLA community to participate in and benefit from the services offered on *avldigital.de*. Apart from a central presentation in Macau University's main auditorium (made possible thanks to the then-ICLA president, Zhang Longxi, kindly offering some of the time reserved for his keynote lecture to the FID), meetings were held with a number of research committees. During the conference, the invitation to participate was extended to individual comparatists, as well as to organizations. The present paper repeats this invitation in the following sections by detailing how both individuals and institutions can participate.

4.1 How international researchers can participate in *avldigital.de*

avldigital.de is, foremost, a platform designed to be used by individual scholars as an information resource for their daily work. "Information" is defined here as not only current news and notifications, but also as research literature, databases, and other media that could be useful for comparatist research.

The catalogue search is of course available anywhere in the world. It can thus be used as a bibliographical source with a specialized content profile for comparative literature. The print media referenced is stocked at German libraries, and closed-access electronic publications may or may not be licensed for a researcher's country or home institution. Searching in the catalogue can, however, lead to the discovery of publications that can then be obtained within the regional structures of the user.

The FID AVL welcomes suggestions for publications that are not yet included in the catalogue index. These may be single books, but also journals, series, or even a research area that is under-represented in the catalogue's profile. International scholars are particularly invited to suggest these sorts of additions, helping to better cover current and emerging areas of research in global comparative literature.

Of course, scholars are free to make use of the service "CompaRe" to make their publications openly accessible worldwide. Documents are not only referenced in the "Finding literature" catalogue, but can also become instantly accessible using the services provided via the "Publishing" module. The FID AVL team offers advice on how this republication can be realized and what legal implications need to be considered (although no legally binding advice can be given).

This also extends to the e-journal hosting service for individual groups of scholars who want to start a new journal, series, or other serial publication.

Individual use of the services offered via the “Networking” module has the most immediate effect. Firstly, scholars who register for the directory of researchers can make sure that their work is considered relevant for comparative literature research. Secondly, using the “Networking” module to make announcements is a good way to promote one’s own work.⁵ Thirdly, subscribing to the module’s communication channels (e-mail newsletter, *Twitter*, RSS feeds) helps to keep up to date with the community.

From the perspective of international comparatists, since *avldigital.de* is a German portal, this will mean staying up to date with what colleagues in Germany are doing, but also letting them know about the work being done in one’s own country. Given enough time, this two-way information flow – from Germany to the international community, and from the international community to Germany – may become more generalized, creating a truly international exchange platform.

4.2 How international institutions and organizations can participate

As mentioned, the FID AVL team met with a number of ICLA research committees in Macau in order to discuss possible collaboration options. What was offered to the committees and their members also applies to all kinds of institutions, organizations, or associations with a focus on research in comparative literature. As with individual scholars, the benefit of interacting with *avldigital.de* for institutions and organizations consists of visibility and accessibility.

Although the FID AVL carefully monitors new publications in the field, a guarantee to cover all publications cannot be made. So, the input of collaborating institutions can be very valuable in terms of completing the “Finding literature” catalogue. If not yet covered in its entirety, their publication output can be systematically indexed in the catalogue, thus making sure their work can be found on *avldigital.de*. This helps to cover current fields of research and increases the visibility of the work done at the respective institutions. For collaborating institutions, this service can be expanded to more platforms than just *avldigital.de* – the FID AVL, being a library infrastructure project, will make sure that research out-

5 Both these benefits are of special interest for early career researchers.

puts such as online databases developed by an institution will be referenced in the right places.⁶

The “Publishing” module offers ways to make work not only visible but also accessible. In theory, the whole body of work edited by an institution or published by its members could be made available open access on “CompaRe,” or via the e-journal hosting service. This is a particularly effective way for international research organizations and institutions to gain visibility and accessibility for their work in the German, as well as the global, communities. Of course, legal questions need to be taken into account. However, as examples such as the above-mentioned ZfL in Berlin show, research institutions and infrastructure service providers such as the FID AVL can, working hand-in-hand, achieve progress in the open-access transformation of comparative literature.

Again, the “Networking” module is the most immediate way institutions and organizations can interact with and benefit from a collaboration. In many cases, they will already be present with a profile in the “Institutions” or “Projects and research” categories. These profiles can be edited according to the institution’s wishes. Then, institutions and organizations can use the “Networking module” to announce news concerning their activities, such as calls for papers or programmes for a conference, or new projects started in the context of their work. Furthermore, the institution’s members can join the directory of researchers and can be linked to the institution’s profile, as can all announcements made by the institution.

5 Outlook: The future of *avldigital.de*

In short, individual scholars as well as institutions and organizations from all over the world can make use of *avldigital.de* and the services offered to reach out to the German, but also the global, comparative literature community.

This internationalization was one of the central concepts proposed for the funding phase until mid-2022. The hope is that the contacts established in Macau and through future collaborations will make it possible to form a network that

⁶ A good example is the *Estonian Writers Online Dictionary (EWOD)*, which is edited at the University of Tartu. Its editors, who are members of the Estonian Comparative Literature Association, mentioned this project to the FID AVL while discussing possible collaboration between *avldigital.de* and the Estonian Association. Not only was the dictionary included in the *avldigital.de* catalogue by adding a reference to it to the “Websites” section of the “Networking” module, but a recommendation was also sent to the editing board of DBIS. DBIS is a German registry of scientific databases that is widely used by scholars in Germany and is a reference point for academic libraries. The *EWOD* was subsequently added to the DBIS meta-database.

helps disseminate the information on *avldigital.de*. These “multipliers” can work in the context of a specific field of research, within the ICLA or individual universities and institutions, or within the comparative literature communities of different countries. Scholars or institutions are more than welcome to act in this role and spread the information and news from their respective contexts or directly refer their colleagues to the FID.

Apart from these internationalization efforts, the near future will see a number of changes, additions, and optimizations to *avldigital.de*. For example, the catalogue of the “Finding literature” module will be drastically increased in size and the methods and strategies for selecting research publications that are included will be refined. This – and hopefully the input of individual comparatists and international institutions eager to have their publications referenced in the catalogue, or accessible via “CompaRe” – will help to develop the information offered on *avldigital.de* so as to have the desired universality.

A new feature will also be contributed to the “Networking” module: the profiles of scholars in the directory of researchers, as well as institutions or organizations or research projects, will be upgraded with publication lists comprising all publications that have been authored or edited by the person or institution. This list will be generated dynamically from the “Finding literature” catalogue index, turning *avldigital.de* into a concise and interlinked information resource.

Another new development will be the “thematic portals” within *avldigital.de*. These will focus on important research areas in comparative literature. The portals proposed to be established in the course of the second funding period will focus on literary theory, on translation, and on the introduction of digital methods to literary studies, with additional suggestions being welcome. A number of collaboration partners from the first two research areas have already been identified that will co-edit the contents of the relevant themed portals. The aim here will be to give an overview of research and of important institutions, projects, and Web resources in both fields.

The portal on digital methods will act as a form of introduction to, and reflection on, what they might mean for comparative literature. Outlining “hardcore” digital humanities (DH) projects, their methods and outlook on literature studies, the portal aims to help comparatists decide whether, and what, digital methods can be of use for their work. The FID AVL is collaborating with another DFG-funded project called “forTEXT.” Based at Hamburg University, “forTEXT” develops easy-to-use digital tools for literary scholars, as well as an interactive guide to help decide which DH-related tools might be of help for a given research project. Thus, a no-strings-attached DH sandbox will be created for comparatists to test new methods and tools and to evaluate their usefulness in their everyday work.

Additionally, the digital methods portal will give information and advice on how to work, collaborate, and publish in the digital age.

This is how the FID AVL and *avldigital.de* will grow and evolve over the next three years. Of course, all this talk about funding periods will raise the question: what happens then? Will all the platforms and services simply be switched off after the funding period has expired?

They will not. Firstly, after a second funding period, a third one will most likely come. The DFG is re-evaluating the *Fachinformationsdienste* funding programme, aiming to solidify funding for what are deemed the core tasks of the specialized infrastructure system. The general expectation is that the funding periods will be increased, providing the FIDs with a steadier framework for developing their services.

Secondly, even now, part of the funding principles is that all results of the projects will be kept available for perpetuity. That is why *avldigital.de* and its services are hosted at the University Library of Frankfurt. One of the largest academic libraries in Germany, this institution will keep the platform running and active. The selection strategies and updating procedures for the “Finding literature” catalogue will be optimized to run in an efficient and reliable automated way. Collaborations in terms of the open-access services offered in the “Publishing” module are contractually regulated, so the archiving of on-going publication series or the hosting of an e-journal will continue. Furthermore, in the coming years, the FID AVL team hopes to build up enough community support and engagement to ensure a steady flow of announcements and information in the “Networking” module.

From a lonely table, a poster, and some flyers to a working online platform powered by exchange and the ideas of the comparative literature community – it was, and still is, a long way to go for *avldigital.de*. But that way will be followed in the true spirit of comparative literature: crossing borders, finding interconnections, and making visible the literature of the world and the many languages of comparative literature.

Jakob Jung, MA, MLIS, studied Comparative Literature in Frankfurt and Cardiff, and Library and Information Science in Cologne. From 2016 to 2020, he worked on the project staff of the Specialized Information Service (SIS) Comparative Literature at the University Library Frankfurt am Main. Since 2020, he is on the library's Open Access department staff.

Dr. Volker Michel is a member of staff at the University Library Frankfurt am Main. He is head of the departments of German Studies and General and Comparative Literary Studies, and of the SIS German Studies and the SIS Comparative Literature. He is in charge of the “Sammlung Deutscher Drucke 1801–1870”, and is the editor of the *Bibliographie der deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* (BDSL).

