

16. From the Field to the Database: Combining Methods in Film Festival Research

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Abstract: Framed in the intersection of Digital Humanities and New Cinema History, the chapter focuses on ontology and practice of building databases and designing websites for cultural mapping. We focus on two research projects that created festival cartographies of the Chilean and Basque regions, respectively. The first, describes methodological decisions behind the construction of a database and digital archive of Chilean film festivals, and its visualisation in a public web page. The second, reflects on the methodological tools used to collect and display data, and the possibilities and limitations brought about by new technologies. We argue that the design of these research and knowledge-transfer tools must be conceived as an all-encompassing strategy that implies a deep reflection about categorisation and its negotiation with the actors involved in the festivals' field.

Keywords: digital humanities, data visualization, festivals database, mapping, archives

This chapter focuses on the challenges and possibilities of data collection, archiving, and visualization for film festival research. Framed in the intersection between Digital Humanities (DH) and New Cinema History, it offers a key insight into the ontological, but also technical, possibilities of building databases and designing websites to increase the impact of film festival research.

The study is based on the analysis of research practices conducted by the authors for more than a decade at film festivals in Latin America and Europe,

combining different methodologies (including ethnographic methods, archival practices, and content analysis). It focuses on two case studies of research projects conducted by the authors in their own regions in recent years, which mapped Chilean and Basque film festivals, respectively. This mapping provided a much needed overview for the festivals' landscape in these contexts, which facilitated further academic research in these areas. We discuss how previously scattered qualitative data was collected, stored, and made public through datasets, databases, and/or online interactive maps.

This mapping has particular importance in local and regional contexts of low production capacity or "small cinemas" (Hjort and Petrie 2007) for three reasons. The first is that the local film industry may profit from a better knowledge of the main players and opportunities of their local context. This can allow for more efficient fundraising, production, promotion, and distribution strategies by local filmmakers. The second refers to institutional frames. In the age of festival proliferation, there is a need for reliable datasets about cultural events to design cultural policies. These datasets may allow public institutions and sponsors to make informed decisions about where to allocate their funding. Finally, there is a need to raise public awareness of the number of cultural events that occur in a given territory, since many of the youngest specialized festivals from the last two decades are barely known (even among local audiences). These events can help protect local culture (with its own linguistic or socio-political particularities) and foster cultural diversity (as they provide the audience with alternatives to mainstream global audiovisual products).

We argue that the design of the aforementioned research and knowledge-transfer tools must be conceived as an all-encompassing strategy. This involves considering from the very beginning of the study design not only which data will be collected and how, but also how our research output will be displayed on a website.¹ It also implies a deep reflection about festival classification and its negotiation with the actors involved.

Between Digital Humanities and New Film History: On Festival Data Collection, Storage, and Visualization

The use of digital tools for the study of cultural practices has been at the core of the Digital Humanities project from its beginnings (see, for example, Burdick et al. 2012; Warwick, Terras, and Nyhan 2012). The possibilities

¹ This is key for the design of Data Management Plans (DMP), which are a requirement when applying for research funds.

opened up by new technologies has provided a ground for the development of four different levels of digital data management pertinent to the study of various disciplines within the Humanities:

1. Creation of multimedia digital archives. This includes digitization of all types of existing cultural artifacts (such as films, photographs, texts, or paintings); recording of material and immaterial culture (such as sculpture and architectural works in photographic images, oral testimonies in sound-files, or socio-cultural practices in video); and keeping record of social media networks and interaction online.
2. Creation of new datasets, from very basic spreadsheets to complex relational databases.
3. Usage of analytical software to create relationships between data and to answer quantitative and qualitative research questions.
4. Design of visual materials to communicate research results (from static graphs to complex interactive multimedia websites). This involves the publication of research output in new formats that go beyond the written text, making it available (and more easily understandable) for the wider audience.

At this stage, the two research projects explored below answer to levels two and four (by creating datasets about all the festivals in Chile and the Basque context, respectively, and by visualizing it through online interactive festival maps). Nevertheless, in the long term they may be further integrated into levels one and three (by uploading to the website further multimedia materials—such as festivals' catalogs—or by creating database queries to answer new research questions). They follow the path of previous festival mapping projects, such as Skadi Loist's "LGBT/Q Film Festivals Global (1977–2015) NEW MAP," integrated on Google Maps²; the web-based Netherlands' Festival Atlas (van Vliet 2018)³; as well as other cartographies of film festivals developed in classic textual formats (Leal and Mattos 2009, 2011).

One of the most important research lines within DH, "the spatial humanities" (Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Harris 2010), focuses on spatial

² <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1m-UV5Kpw39u-eLn--Dj6RALd4ks&ll=30.356214535922109%2C-62.20190211041435&z=3>. Last Accessed October 3, 2024.

³ The website includes graphics and interactive maps and other data visualization devices developed in Digital Humanities, including infographics: <https://www.festivalatlas.nl/>. Other similar projects of different scope have been created outside academia by public institutions, such as the government of Valencia, Spain:

<https://ivc.gva.es/es/audiovisuales/industria-promocion/festimapp-cas/mapa-de-festivales>.

analysis, by using GIS technologies and digital cartographies. Within film studies, recent research projects focus on film distribution and exhibition, using datasets and spatial visualization. These include the Kinomatics project⁴ (Coate et al. 2017a; Coate, Verhoeven, and Davidson 2017b; Zemaitytė, Coate, and Verhoeven 2018; Verhoeven et al. 2019) as well as studies developed within the New Cinema History (Biltiereyst and Meers 2016; Treveri-Gennari et al. 2020; van Oort et al. 2020), a line of research that considers film contexts, circulation, distribution, and consumption, and examines cinemas as sites of social and cultural exchange (Maltby, Walker, and Walsh 2014). These studies often rely on DH given that “[d]igitization brings the promise of continuous access to cultural heritage collections because it eliminates physical preconditions for access with respect to time and place” (van Vliet, Dibbets, and Gras 2009). This allows for a further comparative analysis and enables access to results. Thus, some studies, included those linked to research networks like HOMER (History of Moviegoing, Exhibition, and Reception)⁵, focus on creating large databases of film theaters, mapping historical cinema-going practices, distribution, and exhibition circuits, as well as analyzing film reception in diverse geographical contexts, such as Australia, Italy, Scotland, the Netherlands, and United Kingdom.⁶

It is worth noting that these projects are mostly descriptive in an initial phase, as the main goal is to map out the festival landscape and collect basic information about several events, which can be later used to answer various research questions. The first step then focuses on creating an infrastructure for further research. This does not mean that the theoretical standpoint or conceptual framework are not relevant to these projects. Quite the opposite, the design of categories and structures for data collection involves deep theoretical reflection.⁷ Indeed, our training in anthropology has played a

4 <https://kinomatics.com>. Last Accessed October 3, 2024.

5 For more information about this research, check “Homer projects” at <https://homernetwork.org/homer-projects/>. Last Accessed October 3, 2024.

6 See for example, “Cinema and Audiences Research Project (CAARP); “Early Cinema in Scotland” <https://earlycinema.gla.ac.uk/>; “Cinema Context” (www.cinemacontext.nl); “Italian Cinema Audiences” <https://italiancinemaaudiences.org/>; “Cultural Memory and British Cinemagoing” (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/library/digital-collections/collections/cinema>). Other projects’ digital tools are still under construction, for example in Mexico (Pantallas latinas), Chile (Salas y butacas), and Argentina (Historia de los públicos de cine en Argentina).

7 This was precisely the topic of the workshop on festival categorization organized by Skadi Loist in 2021, in which several scholars, including the authors of this chapter collectively reflected on how to create categories that can apply to any kind of festival-related data gathering (Loist and Samoilova 2021).

very important role in our understanding of categorizations for two main reasons. The first relates to the very nature of anthropology as a scientific discipline that tries to understand how human beings categorize their cultural contexts.⁸ Secondly, the etic/emic dichotomy refers to how the categorizations created by the researcher, from an “outsider” point of view (etic) can differ from those that belong to the particular social group that is the object of study (emic) (see Vallejo 2017).

DH projects involve collaborative research that is committed to public knowledge, creating a model “[c]rafted for a heterogeneous audience with crisscrossing and even contradictory interests and needs, [which] is meant as a porous multiple construct [...]” (Burdick et al. 2016, vii). As we see below, when creating knowledge-transference tools such as interactive websites open to the public, this confrontation can serve to test (and contest) categories between researchers and professionals and enrich or even rearticulate analytical concepts at stake.

On the other hand, DH is changing the way we understand the publication process of research results and its temporal logics. The publication of datasets allows the publishing of raw data long before academic articles are publicly available, making information accessible for researchers and professionals alike. The FAIR data Principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) established by Data Science scholars (Wilkinson et al. 2016) set the guidelines to publish datasets. The publication of festival lists in open access research repositories serves to grant academic recognition to information already published on websites (which are not considered academic publications). Moreover, academic repositories grant access to our data in the future, which partly solves the problem of data availability on websites, which tend to disappear due to technical changes and/or lack of funding in the long term. Another advantage is the recognition of authorship of the festival lists’ collectors and editors. Finally, it is relevant to work with standard formats that grant interoperability and reusability of data. For example, .csv can be imported in different programs, from simple spreadsheet editors (e.g., Excel or Libreoffice), or more complex database managers (e.g., DB browser or MySQL), and PDF lists are easily readable by the general audience. In this context, DH open new possibilities for a collective and global development of film festival studies, where these datasets, such as those created by the

8 Sub-disciplines like the anthropology of language or the anthropology of kinship, for example, deepen on how different words (and therefore categories) in different cultures and languages do condition the articulation of family relationships or the interpretation of and relation to their environments.

projects explained below (Vallejo et al. 2022; Peirano and Ramírez 2022a), can serve as templates for future festival lists.

In terms of qualitative methodology, the use of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) and/or ethno-methodologies based on participant observation, in-depth and semi-structured interviews, content analysis, and in-depth case studies also poses questions of how to collect and manage all these data, as well as the way the data are used to represent or visualize a socio-cultural phenomenon. Ethnographic approaches look to combine multiple data sources, relying on the design of diverse tools to collect, organize, and compare these data, in order to construct a more accurate image of the object of study. This problem of data “representation” is a long-standing problem for ethnography (Jackson 1991), looking for more responsible ways of communicating the data collected (and its interpretation) to make it truthful to the object of study as well as accessible to wider audiences. The ethnographic approach also assumes various questions of “positionality” (Burgess and Kredell 2016) that emerge in qualitative research. Data gathered and processed through ethnographic methods heavily rely on the subjectivity of the researcher (as the “primary tool” of research), as well as their social relationships in the field and both the advantages and limitations of their position. Reticence towards the subjective nature of ethnographic methods and researchers’ biases can be compensated for by the accuracy in ethnographic registry (through fieldnotes, website screenshots, photos and/or videos created by the researcher), hence the need for clear management and careful storage of research materials for future analysis, as well as reflective self-awareness of the selected methods and their implications (Davies 2012). Additionally, not all data available from ethnographic research is suitable for storage and publication, considering the privacy of these materials and consent by the people who collaborate in the field, as well as the potential harm to the subjects involved.

On the other hand, Social Network Analysis (SNA), a research line widely developed within DH, focuses on the study of social networks, using software such as Gephi to analyze and visualize connections. Film festival scholars are starting to use this software to reconstruct links between filmmakers (Vanhaelemeesch 2021), and paths of film circulation through festivals (Loist and Samoilova 2022).

In what follows, we will reflect on the specific methods developed by the authors in two research projects. The first, by María Paz Peirano, analyzes the process behind a study that mapped the Chilean festival landscape. The author describes methodological decisions behind the construction of a database and digital archive of Chilean film festivals, and its visualization in

a public website. The second, by Aida Vallejo, describes the research process for building a cartography of film festivals in the Basque context. The author establishes connections between methodological tools developed in her previous research, and the technical possibilities and limitations brought about by new technologies applied in the new project.

Mapping Film Festivals in Chile

The first case study focuses on the mapping of Chilean film festivals, a project funded by the National Council for Art and Culture (now Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage) in Chile. The project aimed to build a website that compiled systematized information about Chilean film festivals, which at the time was highly scattered, in order to trace their location and historical development. The research looked to map the Chilean film festival landscape and provide a reliable overview of the most common trends among local events. Despite the proliferation of film festivals since 2010, at the time of the research (2017–18) some basic information regarding film festivals remained unclear (González 2017), such as the total number of film festivals, geographical location, and the year. They were founded. It was necessary to gather key information that was still missing or was contradictory, considering the different sources available, thus providing a first descriptive approach to the Chilean festivals' landscape prior to subsequent and more detailed analysis of specific cases and particularities.

The first stage of the research involved the construction of a database of film festivals taking place in Chile, including those that were not originally created in the country and that were not relegated solely to a “national” scope. The database was meant to include all film festivals in the country, either active or inactive (that had not occurred for more than three years). The database's starting point recorded fifty-two festivals in Chile, previously listed by the Council of Audiovisual Art and Industry. Then, we looked for events omitted from this record, mentioned on alternative listings (such as Gutiérrez 2017) or found via further online research and personal interviews, which led us to a final number of ninety-five film festivals (although we are monitoring and updating this number every year).

In doing so, we disregarded previous preconceptions about defining a “festival” that had left smaller events out, and use only a broad operational concept of film festivals, defined in the project as “every regular (annual or biannual) film and/or audiovisual exhibition taking place in Chile for two or more days that, in addition to showing films, includes activities

that extend the experience of collective viewing, such as talks with the filmmakers and master classes" (Peirano 2020, 173). We considered film festivals' both competitive and non-competitive events, with regional, national, and international scope.

The database was made in an Excel spreadsheet and encompasses the official name, short name, and other names the festival is known for (or a previous name); founding year, place (city and region), periodicity, month (considering its latest edition), type of event (competitive, non-competitive), type of films programmed (feature, documentary, shorts, animation), specialization, and latest reported edition. We also added the name of festivals' industry sections to the database, and in its latest upgrade (2019), their training and audience development activities. Other relevant data for further research includes festivals' websites, social media, and contact details (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Email). To facilitate the research process, we provided a "nomenclature" or internal code for a quick identification of each event. During 2020, we updated the information regarding festivals' response to the COVID-19 pandemic and added an "online" or "offline" code (Peirano and Ramírez 2022b). This database has been published open access as a dataset in .csv and .pdf formats (Peirano and Ramírez 2022a).

Additionally, we created a digital archive from the available materials of these events. As film festivals did not usually keep and/or preserve these materials—which are mostly ephemera—collecting them seemed relevant not only to build the database and identify the profile of these events for our project, but also for future research and analysis. The research team⁹ collected physical and digital materials later compiled on files for each event, such as official catalogs, programmes, and other related sources (official posters, flyers, photographs, images, and videos created by the festival for self-promotion). These materials were mostly retrieved online using festivals' websites, although this proved to be more complicated than we had expected (several were missing, not working, or incomplete). In some instances, we used instead social media as the main source for online research, particularly Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. Physical materials, on the other hand, were collected during fieldwork, thanks to the generosity of some festival organizers and fellow researchers.¹⁰ They were

⁹ The team was led by María Paz Peirano, who was assisted by Gonzalo Ramírez, Sebastián González-Itier, Javiera Navarrete, and Marcela Valdovinos.

¹⁰ We acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Elizabeth Ramírez, Alicia Herrera (MUCIVI film festival), Marcelo Morales (FIDOCs, Cineteca Nacional de Chile), and Antonella Estévez (FEMCINE), among others who collaborated in this task.

digitized to include them in the same electronic files, and we originally thought of uploading them to the project's website. However, we ended up doing it only with a sample, due to the server's limited storage capacity. Our plan is to make this available for the public in future website updates.

Fieldwork took place between 2017 and 2018, consisting of multi-sited ethnography that included participant observation and in-depth interviews with festival organizers. As has been explained in more detail elsewhere (Peirano 2020), undertaking fieldwork was vital to access some of the festivals' archival materials and put them into context, as well as facilitating a better understanding of festivals' developments through oral history. The information retrieved via ethnographic research was also used to define the festival's profile and write a short history of the events, based on the triangulation of all sources available. Ethnography allowed us to understand festivals' aims, curatorial decisions, and institutional frameworks, and qualitative data also contributed to contrast and complete the information we had in our database, helping to cover information gaps and tackle contradictory data, such as some festivals' elusive founding years.¹¹

Based on the research findings, we established an online platform (www.festivalesdecine.cl) that was created by an external programmer and web designer. The website gives access to festivals' profiles and the main results of the project to broader audiences, and provides an introduction to the field of film festivals' studies in Chile, including the existing academic bibliography on Chilean festivals and links to related websites such as Cine Chile (www.cinechile.cl, the Chilean cinema encyclopedia) and RED (redfestivalesdecine.cl, the professional network of Chilean film festivals). The website also shows systematized information on each festival, each of them with its own section. This section includes a datasheet with the updated database's information, some images of the festival, its logo, and a short history for each event that encompasses (when available) other data such as festivals' funding, the nature of their competition, industry sections, and its audience development strategies. There is a link to the festival official website and social media for further detail.

The festival profiles were organized by type of festival and region. Searching by type of festival on the website leads to an "etic" classification system created by researchers to organize Chilean festivals. These are divided into six "types," combining festival's specialization, local "trajectory" (years active), and position within the global circuit (number of premieres exhibited):

¹¹ For a more detailed analysis of the use of ethnographic tools and its limitations for mapping film festivals, see Peirano (2020).

1. International festivals with a recognized historical trajectory (with the largest number of premieres).
2. Long-standing generalist festivals (six or more editions).
3. Long-standing specialized and thematic festivals (according to a type of film, a specific audience, or a particular theme).
4. Emerging generalist festivals (less than six editions).
5. Emerging specialized festivals.
6. Inactive festivals.

This festivals' categorization adapted some categories from the international scholarship available, based on FIAPF's accreditation and elaborated both by Turan (2002) and Peranson (2013), Chilean festivals do not seem to fit those categories (see Peirano 2020; Peirano and González 2018).

Over time it has become more evident that the categories we created are quite problematic. Even when we did not want hierarchical categories to prevail, the combination of trajectory and positioning in the global circuit continues to endorse festivals' hierarchies, and it is debatable the extent to which these are useful to better understand local festivals, as they do not always correspond to festivals' self-perception. As these categories could also end up being more useful to academics than to practitioners (filmmakers and/or festival organizers), we are currently assessing the possibility of changing the search criteria to more practical ones for film professionals, such as focus and specialization, which currently are only accessible using the webpage's open search engine.

To search by regions, the website also includes an interactive map of Chile with its administrative regions, which allows users to navigate through the country and visualize the geographical distribution of the events. By clicking over each area, it displays the list of festivals taking place there, linked to their individual profiles. The map helps to easily visualize an overview of the country's festival landscape and some of its particularities. For example, it shows how every region has at least two active festivals a year, and how they mostly concentrate in the Metropolitan region (Santiago) and in the Valparaíso Region, highlighting the centralization of cultural events in Chile.¹²

¹² The centralization of cultural events is a longstanding problem for Chile's cultural development. Not only is the country's population unevenly distributed, but also political administration is highly centralized. In addition, most educational and cultural institutions are based in the Metropolitan region, and core agents in the field are often based in this area.

Even when we hoped to have the most interactive display possible, we were limited by time and budget restrictions, so we ended up with a simple website in WordPress that would make frequent updates easier and faster. At the beginning, we made the mistake of not controlling the codes to access the page ourselves, leaving it to the external programmer and designer, since it required more advanced web design skills and high maintenance—hence permanent funding. This slowed down the whole process and it became difficult to translate the information into a useful web design both for scholars and practitioners, and at the end we decided to retake control and start changing some elements of the webpage directly.

Managing Data in Longitudinal Festival Research: From European Documentary Festivals to Film Festivals in the Basque Context

Our second case study focuses on IkerFESTS, a research project started in 2017 and funded by the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU).¹³ The project aimed to map and identify the profiles of film festivals¹⁴ in the Basque context (a territory that extends to both sides of the Spanish-French border), as a response to the lack of either official or informal data about the growing number of cultural events operating in this region. The approach was therefore highly descriptive, trying to answer basic research questions, such as how many festivals operated within this territory, or which was their specialization in terms of topic, film genre, or format. The idea was to initially provide a dataset that could be used to develop more analytical research lines in the future. These lines would include festivals' operational logics and historical evolution (Vallejo 2020); the circulation of Basque-language films through this circuit (Vallejo and Nerekan 2019); or the historical role of some of these festivals in promoting Latin American cinema, including San Sebastián International Film Festival (Nerekan and Vallejo 2017) or Zinebi: Documentary and Short Film Festival of Bilbao (Vallejo 2017).

Methodological tools developed for this study were based on those created for a PhD project that mapped documentary film festivals in

¹³ The grant by the University of the Basque Country covered the 2017–18 period. The research team who collected festival data included Amaia Nerekan, Begoña Vicario, Iratxe Fresnedo, Itxaso Castillo, as well as the principal investigator Aida Vallejo.

¹⁴ These would include festivals devoted to other audiovisual forms, including those focused on television and/or hybrid formats, such as video-art.

Europe (Vallejo 2012). The doctoral thesis looked at the operational logic of this festival ecosystem with a multi-dimensional approach (including its historical, social, cultural, and economic dimensions) and thus required an intensive data-gathering strategy, which materialized in a database created ad hoc. This tool was key for three main reasons. The first was the limited time to access data. When the research started in 2007 some festivals in the sample didn't even have a website, or digitized versions of their catalogs.¹⁵ The database was therefore a key tool to collect information that could be impossible to get in the future, either because it wouldn't be available or because of the research costs involved in international travel. The second referred to the long-term strategy of the project. The database was created in the view of a longitudinal project to enable the collection of as much information as possible (including items that were not necessarily relevant for this particular study) as well as to retrieve information later on (what would allow to analyze new aspects of the data collected). For example, the thesis didn't focus on film analysis, but information about films' contents (main topics, synopsis, watching notes, etc.) was collected with the aim of analyzing them as case studies in the future. The third reason has to do with the interdisciplinary nature of the study, as it looked at very different festival practices through various events. Thus, it required the identification of defined categories and types of data that then were translated into different tables and fields in the database.

The resulting (amateur) database, created by the researcher using Microsoft Access,¹⁶ served as a tool for qualitative data gathering through the whole research period (from 2007 until 2012). Its structure's design was highly conditioned by the interdisciplinary approach of the study, navigating between film studies and anthropology. Firstly, it offered the possibility of gathering relevant data for content analysis of festival programs (including sections and their contents) and textual and contextual analysis of films (including basic information like title or duration, plus topics, languages, synopsis, or even watching notes, as well as participating people and companies, countries of production and shooting location, and so on). Secondly, it provided a framework to collect information about the ethnographic

15 For a reflection about research data and festivals see Barnes (2020).

16 The database was created by Aida Vallejo (with informal technical support and advice by a database developer, Fernando Maza). The database developed for the project was subject to the limitations of IT knowledge and availability of software, which in this case was Microsoft Access.

fieldwork conducted at several festivals over six years (including attending professionals and their practices, interviews and informal conversations, and field diary notes about audience behavior, public ceremonies, or social gatherings). The database offered the opportunity to collect and retrieve data from all the festival editions, including participating films and professionals, as well as festival organizers. This allowed for the possibility of retracing professional careers and film circulation through the festival network, and collecting information in real time not only about the ethnographic experiences witnessed by the researcher (the performative aspects of festivals), but also about printed materials found in the festival archives or at the event (see Dayan 2000; de Valck 2007, 131).

When the ikerFESTS project started in 2017, the challenge was to adapt this previous database structure for the creation of a cartography of film festivals in the Basque context. This opportunity was conceived as a key moment for a qualitative improvement of the research tool. This change had ontological implications as well, as the methodological logic behind the database structure would influence both the research work and the output of the project. Technical aspects were key for the development of the new structure. The use of the previous Access structure was no longer an option as it presented several limitations, including: outdated software (and the removal of Access program from the Microsoft pack); the limitation of the database for collective use (the database was created to work individually/locally, therefore in a single computer); and the lack of tools for data visualization (including maps). The new database would need to overcome these limitations, and therefore a new infrastructure was needed. Moreover, the strategy of knowledge-transference and outreach was very relevant for the IkerFESTS project since its inception in 2017. The goal of the study was not only to collect data for further analysis, but also to create a visual tool (an interactive map) that could be used by Basque audiovisual industry professionals and society as a whole, taking María Paz Peirano's *festivalesdecine.cl* website as a reference.

Aware of the time needed to develop a tailor-made professional database, two parallel strategies were developed. The first consisted of the creation of a basic database on a spreadsheet with basic information about festivals in the region, plus the publication of a project blog.¹⁷ Given the interest of industry professionals in our results, we published the festival dataset to grant both immediate open access and protection of our authors' rights (Vallejo et al. 2022). Additionally, we imported this festival list to Google

¹⁷ <https://www.ehu.eus/ehusfera/ikerfests/>. Last Accessed October 3, 2024.

Maps¹⁸ to make it available to the wider audience. The second strategy consisted of a more complex endeavor that would lead to the creation of an online database and search engine of film festivals in the Basque region.

An IT company was contracted to achieve these goals. It developed a new server-based database that could be used by different researchers, and from any computer. In order to make the data about film festivals open access for the wider audience, it was necessary to create an interactive website connected to the database, which would include a map and a search engine to offer users the possibility of searching information about festivals in the region, applying different filters according to different categories (e.g., month and location, or specialization according to film type, format, genre, or theme). A positive aspect of designing a dedicated website from scratch (instead of using existing software for data visualization), was that it allowed us to apply the corporate image guidelines of the University of the Basque Country.¹⁹

It is important to note that the data displayed on the website is only a small part of the information actually gathered on the database. It includes basic information about the festival name, location, year of first edition, and general profile, plus more detailed information about the festival, its history, and a list of academic publications about that particular festival. The remaining data (information about all editions of the festivals, people involved, and films included in their programs) is only accessible by the researchers. This responds to the long-term strategy of the database design, as it allows the researcher to collect data which is still partial or not relevant for the wider audience yet. In addition, it offers the possibility of creating new sections on the website in the future, where these data can be displayed. For example, a new page about films could be created, where users can see the circulation of a specific film through this regional festival network.

This strategy also responds to the funding scheme of the research project, as it officially ended in 2018. The database allows for a future project to work on this previous structure and steadily include new data. The existence of different user profiles also provides a tool for data mining that can mobilize further interaction with users, in which festival organizers themselves,

¹⁸ https://www.google.com/maps/d/embed?mid=1ThWCNX--ULcrSGa_kfLYtH-g8uA&ehbc=2E312F. Last Accessed October 3, 2024.

¹⁹ A corporate branding renewal was recently implemented by the university, establishing the guidelines for the production of all types of visual materials: <https://www.ehu.eus/es/web/marka/>.

industry professionals, or audience members could insert information about festivals and films in the database. This could be then double-checked by researchers before publication. Similarly, a feedback form could be created to allow users to report errors or inaccurate information.

A positive aspect is that researchers retain autonomy to include and update information in the database without having to rely on external IT developers, as the database provides for input of data directly to the website once it is uploaded to a server. Moreover, the structure itself is created in a way that new categories can be included by researchers themselves if, for example, new festival themes or categories appear in the future (for example festivals including VR formats, or festivals specializing on new topics such as work, architecture, and so on). On the other hand, although the database is primarily focused on text-based data gathering (plus the possibility of uploading images of the festival logos and each editions' posters), it would be desirable and technically possible to include multimedia information in the future, including video and images of recorded events and interviews, sound, or any other content that could be registered during fieldwork and then stored for further analysis.²⁰

Conclusion

The outputs we have shown highlight the possibilities of database creation and publication and how they can make academic knowledge more accessible to the public. This is key for the social and economic impact strategy of our research projects, which have benefited from new technologies that allow for building and using databases in an online server-based system that is open to wider audiences. In addition, new sources of funding for this type of research in the public sector enhance the possibilities of creating new databases and platforms that are open and can have an impact on wider audiences.

Website implementation, however, has also proved to be challenging. Both projects created dedicated websites instead of (or in addition to) adding their maps to other pre-existing platforms, such as Google Maps,

²⁰ To date these materials are being collected in private hard drives. The university repository can be also used to publish these materials, but this is a possibility which is still to be explored, as there are legal issues of authorship involved. While research materials can be uploaded without problem, the creation of an online festival catalog archive, for example, would require legal consent of the festivals, which are the official publishers and owners of that content.

or using existing GIS spatial mapping software. This has proven to have some limitations but also has some positive aspects. On the negative side, the data stays isolated within the database and cannot be linked to widely used platforms. This of course also affects the positioning of our websites within search engines such as Google, and therefore the potential to reach a wider audience. On the positive side, we keep full control of the structure, categorization system, and design, which in our case is also important for image branding purposes.

Moreover, we have shown how poorly funded projects have to rely on technologies and skills that are totally dependent on the capacities of the researcher herself and that require acquiring new skills such as those developed within Digital Humanities. Another key issue is the autonomy of the researchers to update information that would be directly published online, not relying on IT developers to act as intermediaries, with the subsequent delay and necessity to keep contracts even once the funding for the project is over. In the specific film festival realm, collaborative research also poses questions about the limits for sharing information while also respecting the privacy of the subjects involved in the research. For example, how do we deal with private institutions such as submission platforms and other festival list providers that are also building databases on film festivals but might not be willing to work together on an open access platform? What ethical constraints need to be addressed in the selection, presentation, and publication of the festivals' data?

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the use of web scraping tools within DH is revolutionizing the way we understand data collection, as it allows to automate the importation of data from public online sources and databases. These and other possibilities, such as the use of academic repositories for the preservation and publication of festival research materials, have not yet been implemented in the projects analyzed above. Nevertheless, they will be key for the development of festival research in the future.

Finally, we want to stress the importance of knowledge transfer throughout this research process and the emerging possibilities of using more accessible platforms to communicate our research. Not only can wider audiences access research results, but also research benefits by the ongoing feedback provided by industry practitioners and festival organizers. This results in updating our information and frequent testing of the platforms' usability, helping to revise our interpretations and conceptual frameworks. Even when using DH tools has several limitations and does not immediately solve all the problems related to systematization, representation, and access to the

data available on film festivals, it contributes to enhancing collaborative research and the sharing of knowledge in this area of studies.

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