

A Digital Library on National Movements: Relaunching the DILINAME-project

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Introduction

In the very first volume of *Studies on National Movements* (exactly 10 years ago), Xabier Macías and Manoel Santos published a short article on a project that had recently been launched by the European-funded organization, the Coppieters Foundation. As Macías and Santos explained, the ‘Digital Library on National Movements in Europe’ (DILINAME in short), wanted to ‘[gather] and [provide] relevant documents, historical and current alike, relating to the creation of, evolution, ideas behind and contribution by socio-political proposals on the part of the movements of stateless nations’ that formed a part of the network of the Coppieters Foundation.¹

The goal of the DILINAME-project was, from its onset, twofold: on the one hand provide a general entry for a broad public to understand the historical and socio-political evolution of different (sub)national movements across Europe, whilst simultaneously, by gathering relevant historical sources of different national movements, encourage and facilitate (historical) comparative research. By combining these two goals, the project, as Macías and Santos stated, aimed to establish a ‘networked library’,² forming a bridge between on the one hand members, institutions and historical sources of numerous (sub)national



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movements, and scholars interested in the study of nationalism and national movements on the other hand.

Rebuilding the Library

Unfortunately, despite its initial launch, the project has laid dormant until 2021, when NISE – because of the project’s emphasis on both comparative methodology and digital humanities – agreed to cooperate with the Coppieters Foundation to spearhead the project, relaunching and rebuilding the digital library.

Since its relaunch, the project has been divided into three separate phases to assist the construction of the digital ‘networked library’. The first phase consisted of a migration of the existing material that had been gathered to a new platform that could both facilitate the overall presentation of the material on the frontend, and induce a further exploration of the networks behind the publication of the socio-political sources on the backend. Consequently, it was decided to move the sources to the existing NISE platform ‘DIANE’ (Digital Infrastructure for the Analysis of National movements in Europe), with a slight modification of both the sources that are gathered – with more of an emphasis on historical socio-political documents related to national movements – and the data model to accommodate the possibility of future network analyses.

The second phase consisted in focusing on one case in particular to test the specifics of the data model and the sources relevant to the project, whilst simultaneously acting as a template for further cases to develop in the library. Because of its wide arrange and availability of historical sources, it was decided to use the case of the Flemish national movement as an alpha template to further develop the model and the project. A total

of 14 sources across two centuries were selected, which subsequently were added to the DIANE database along with relevant metadata and keywords and an English translation (in addition to the original source). The preliminary results of the first phase and the Flemish case can be viewed at <https://db.diane.nise.eu/viewer.p/020>.

Future Challenges

As the second phase is near completion, it is beneficial to take a step back and overlook the project in its totality and assess certain risks or problems that may arise when the project moves to its third phase, which is the expansion of the library by including different cases across Europe and increasing the number of sources included in the library.

The first notion is to recognize the (current) limits of both the data model and the sources being collected. As the focus is on a limited set of socio-political sources and themes that function as a gateway into a particular national movement, there is a constant risk of reducing or essentializing themes and key historiographical debates of a national movement, its history and evolution. Consequently, there is a risk in the data model of falling in the trap of methodological nationalism,³ reproducing certain tropes and narratives that were produced by the actors of the national movements themselves. Moreover, as the focus is currently on key socio-political documents of a national movement, it limits the possibility of discovering (now) unknown actors and voices that may have proven influential at a certain point for a national movement, instead once again focusing on well-known actors – who usually are the authors of key political documents. This however can be addressed by two future developments: gradually expanding the source material on the one hand – incorporating a wider variety of socio-political sources and documents

– and promoting a comparative perspective – so as to reduce the risk of essentializing one particular national movement – on the other hand.

The emphasis on the comparative aspect brings us to the second notion to take into account when further expanding the library: while constructing the data model, an emphasis has been put on the use of keywords and themes to facilitate a comparative analysis of the different national movements. Two further aspects have to be taken into consideration however: one is the difficulty of the translatability of certain concepts or notions that have proven fundamental to a specific national movement. Translating these notions into English runs the risk of losing a part of the nuanced (and historiographical) connotations that are essential to understand a specific national movement. Secondly, if the choice is made to not translate these notions – instead opting to include all the different concepts that are relevant to one national movement – there is the risk of widening the scope of analysis too much, thereby failing to facilitate any comparative analysis from a digital humanities perspective, as there is no possibility to relate the different national movements. To counter this, it is necessary to constantly reflect on the use of keywords to make a comparative analysis possible, setting up a network of experts of different national movements to provide feedback on the data model and to critically engage with both the database and the sources that are being included.

This brings us to our final consideration: the expansion of the ‘networked library’ is above all premised on the consolidation of a durable network of experts and archival institutions of various regions and national movements across Europe. Consequently, steps have to be taken to facilitate the construction of this network, both by relying on existing contacts – in the networks of both NISE and the Coppieters Foundation – and on means to encourage both institutions and researchers to critically engage and be involved in the further evolution of the digital

library. This can include the development of a user-friendly template to simplify the inclusion of sources into the database and the organization of workshops to present the result and induce further comparative research using the digital library.

All these reflections and considerations illustrate, above all, the extensive possibilities of the DILINAME project, and how it can become a useful tool in the further study of national movements. We can only hope that 10 years from now, as we once again reflect on the project, we can look at an extensive digital library.

Endnotes

¹ X. Macías & M. Santos, 'DILINAME – Digital Library of National Movements in Europe. Democracy and Sovereignty in all Languages', *Studies on National Movements* 1 (2013), 224-233.

² Ibid.

³ For an extensive analysis of the risks of methodological nationalism, see for example E. Storm, 'Nationalism studies between methodological nationalism and orientalism: an alternative approach illustrated with the case of El Greco in Toledo, Spain', *Nations and Nationalism* 24/4 (2015), 786-804.