KU Leuven Open Science Day

Why provide open data before you publish your research results? Some thought on learning curves

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Abstract

In the research team www.transregionalhistory.eu, we examine early modern books as vectors of border transfers during the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Over the past five years, we have built together datasets within ODIS, provided by KADOC, and shared our data in the back office of that research framework. It has been a wonderful experience and a great way to make fast progress in historical research.

Even so, early [releases of our data](#) often led to discussions within the team: should we go ahead already now? Will others not profit from our painstaking research? Should we make parts of datasets available before or after the dissertation is defended, or only when the ‘real book’ comes out? This presentation will reflect upon some of the learning curves with regard to open data in our team, and although we have not found the one-fits-all solution, we have changed initial mindsets. Sharing our story is part of our commitment to open science.

Synopsis

My research team www.transregionalhistory.eu is fascinated by questions of religious war and peace in early modern Europe, especially in its borderlands where many exiles migrated and met across borders. We seek to write a transregional history of persons, books, and ideas crossing borders in the early modern era. The book historical data gathered are stored in the research infrastructure www.odis.be, hosted by KADOC. This relational database allows us to present data online upon own choice. One can opt to release only some records, or whole datasets at the same time. Currently, one dataset [Impressa Catholica Cameracensis](#) is fully online with more than 7.000 entries, and [other projects](#) are on their way with partial releases.

Our team has faced the major challenge to find the right moment to release these data. In the beginning, we considered this only necessary when the corresponding book of the doctoral project was finished. In other words, we only thought about publication of data at the very end of research projects. Through the open science movement, while campaigning for citizen science in Flanders, we became convinced that there is a real advantage in releasing data during the project. This can serve to create awareness of ongoing research, a wider research community, and most often, it is a great way of enriching your data with feedback from users. One of the disadvantages is that open science is totally different for the doctoral students involved, who rightly fear that

their hard work can be 'stolen'. One should find the right equilibrium, taking into account benefits and disadvantages, as well as the personalities of the researchers who are responsible for the data retrieval. Even so, open science can invite scholars to rethink how to design their research questions, data retrieval, and presentation of research results, at least when the movement strives to be as open and as inclusive as possible.

Author biography

[Violet Soen](#) (KU Leuven) is associate professor of Early Modern History. She has been active in the fields of science communication and citizen science, especially as co-author of the second Position Paper of the Young Academy Flanders, [Citizen Science: Can we count on you?](#) (2016). As a follow-up, she now helps to bring the worldwide movement towards more [Applied History](#) to Leuven and Flanders. With a generous FWO-SBO grant, the [Corvus](#) team develops new tools to help in their work and to increase the presence of historians in the public debate. This team works closely together with media services, policymakers, governmental agencies, and entrepreneurs, bringing together academic historians and other professionals.