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Digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi information source and tool for academic research

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This presentation is based in responses (n=128) to a survey realised in digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi -the portal for digitised and digital newspapers, journals and ephemera of the National Library of Finland, between May and September 2016. This survey was realised in the framework of the Aviisi project that aims to discover actual and potential uses in research and education of these materials. I will focus in this presentation in the comments and suggestions done by a group of 23 academic researchers among respondents.

This survey had two motivations, first to evaluate the user interface of Digi, which has recently changed and secondly, to learn as much as possible about situations in education or research in which it has been used. Among the most important findings, some corroborate previous research on Digi (Höltkä, Rautiainen) or other digital platforms (Terras), new findings convey new knowledge that complements the literature on the subject and is sketched in this document.

What research questions do academic researchers have?

When comparing researchers to other kind of users of Digi, similarities are found between academics and family researchers. This kind of researchers are driven by very specific questions and are as well systematic with their methods (*“Haen tiettyihin sirkusperheisiin liittyviä lehti-ilmoituksia, jotka kerään omaan leikekirjaani ja prosessoin sitä kautta eteenpäin.”*). They are likely to have higher expectations of what materials they will find; and this contrasts with other users, such as hobbyists or people browsing, not looking for anything in particular, or looking something somehow related to a town, a person, an institution or event.

What materials are most important for research?

Due to the specificity that characterises academic research, to provide a comprehensive answer to this question would require acknowledging each single researcher (e.g. *“Tein hakuja 1700-luvun aineistoon 1700-luvun ruotsalaisen (Ruotsin puolella valtakuntaa laaditun) historiankirjoituksen mahdollisen vastaanoton*

tutkimukseen”). Nevertheless, among respondents there are similarities in the kind of materials on demand that could be arranged in datasets. Newspapers of the 1910s and the war periods are in high demand; product pamphlets, industry-related materials and images found both in newspapers, magazines and other material are popular as well. Knowing the interests of researchers allows to sketch ideas for facilitating access to “hidden treasures”, to establish links with materials found elsewhere. This information that comes from historical and academic research is the first step towards developing new tools in digital humanities projects that can serve so called digital humanists, as the average humanities researcher.

Dialogue between researchers and data providers

In the responses from academic researchers there is an interest in Digi, beyond interest in materials. “[M]iten “*sumea haku*” käytännössä toimii? mitä tutkimusartikkeleita sanomalehtikorpukseen liittyy on jo julkaistu? onko mahdollista ladata kotikoneelle koko korpus?” These remarks raise another question that this presentation would like to pose to cultural heritage content providers, what can be done for opening more the dialogue between (digital) humanities researchers and data providers?

References

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