13. Workshop Historical Network Researchv

Networks Across Time and Space

Methodological Challenges and Theoretical Concerns of Network Research in the Humanities

From the trade networks of the bronze age to the kinship ties of medieval ruling houses, from the exchange of scientific knowledge through letters to the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases, people throughout the ages have been acutely aware of how their integration or exclusion from networks could impact their lives. Yet only with the invention of digital tools has it become possible to reconstruct, visualize, and analyse these relational structures on an unprecedented scale. They have transformed the way we think about groups and societies, space and culture. Not only economists, political scientists or researchers in literary and cultural studies but also historians and archaeologists have adopted the concept of "networks" to study certain forms of information as part of a broader whole. Rather than looking at data in isolation, the focus is shifting to the links that unite different entities, and to the structures that emerge from their connections. Especially for archaeologists and historians, who are often dealing with large amounts of data that stand in a complex relation to each other - be it objects, sites or people - network theory and formal network analysis can be very powerful tools for study.

Particular constraints, however, surround the use of network-theoretic methods in the historical sciences. The analysis usually deals with fragmentary datasets, examines data of different types (sites, objects, landscapes, institutions), or unites data from different regions or periods of time within one study. Finding a common denominator that unites disparate and sometimes problematic datasets within one network that sustains a valid historical hypothesis can be a challenge. It is not always clear which analytical tools, e.g., different centrality measures, can be applied to gain a deeper understanding of a dataset and what exactly their use implies for the conceptional framework of the research in question. To which kind of historical questions can we find answers through a formal network analysis? Is a more fluid approach dealing with metaphorical networks more useful? Which new perspectives on existing data can network research open up to different disciplines?

In order to provide prospective and more advanced network scholars and students in the historical sciences with a sound background and solid arguments for structuring a network-related hypothesis, a two-day workshop is organized to:

- provide basic training (day 1)
- provide in-depth discussion on the application of network theory for specific datasets and research questions (day 2)

The first day of the workshop aims at novices and prospective students in network analysis in the historical sciences and archaeology (no previous knowledge required). Participants can bring own research ideas to the workshop to receive feedback, but this is not obligatory.

The second day of the workshop is devoted to in-depth theoretical discussion for advanced scholars, who already have an understanding of network concepts and are applying it to their own case studies. A general discussion will conclude the exchange within small groups focusing on specific case studies and central issues in historical and archaeological network research. Students participating in the first day are welcome to attend the second day of the workshop to broaden their understanding.

There are three points of focus for discussion on the second workshop day:

1. Objects as Actors
2. Fragmentary data – fragmentary networks? Implications of source criticism for archaeological and historical network analysis
3. One theory fits them all? Critical reflections on theorizing about social networks across time and space

Participation in the workshop is free of charge; however, participants are required to provide for their accommodation and travel.

The number of available places in the workshop is limited. To be considered for participation, prospective participants should send an abstract of their project or a statement concerning their motivation of participation (about 300 words) to the workshop email address:

contact-nats@protonmail.com

As the aim of this workshop is to initiate a critical discourse across disciplines, we encourage all participants to contact us if you would like to propose further topics for discussion on the second workshop day.