TOWARDS THE FORMALIZATION OF METADATA  | A COMPLEX AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL NETWORK ANALYSIS IN HISTORY | CASE STUDY

CONTEXT

This research focuses on understanding the structuration of scientific and cultural coordination in the inter-war period, based on the archives of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) of the League of Nations. This case study allows the establishment of a paradigmatic reflection on the contribution of network analysis in the humanities in general. This perspective consists in developing a quantitative and structural analysis jointly mobilizing mathematical theories, computer sciences and archival questioning.

SUBJECT

Created in 1921, the ICIC is a committee bringing together leading scientists such as Henri Bergson, Albert Einstein, Marie Sklodowska-Curie and Hendrik Lorentz. First constituted as a consultative body, the ICIC gradually built up around itself a full "intellectual cooperation organization" comprising several sub-commissions and secretariats, involving experts in bibliography, copyright, academic exchanges, university relations, etc. It bid the foundations of UNESCO after the Second World War. The rise and bureaucratization of this organization during the 1920s is accompanied by a rapid diversification of information flows.

ORGANISATION CHART

Structure of the League of Nations

AFFILIATION GRAPH

>3000 League of Nations staff connected through the different offices to which they belong

CIRCULATION/METADATA GRAPH

>3000 individuals connected if they appear in the same documents of the LCN archives

INSTITUTIONAL TOPOGRAPHY

Synthesis of the three previous networks

DATA AND METHOD

Reversing the process of making a study of international organizations by their discourse or focusing only on the most prominent personalities of the institutions, this research proposes to analyze the activity and the ability of the ICIC to create links through a fine indexing of its correspondence archives. By mapping this circulation in a network composed of more than 3,000 individuals involved in intellectual cooperation during its early years (1919-1927, approx. 30,000 documents), this method reveals the main organizational trends while highlighting the situation of actors that are so far little studied in this context.

This exploratory "datafacation" of the archives of the League of Nations leads us to reconsider and recontextalize the personal commitment of the individuals who made up the ICIC. Thus, the development of visualization methods that allows a comparison between the official institutional framework of the international organizations of this time and the structuring of information exchanges at an individual level helps to highlight the discrepancy from a hierarchical level to another. More generally, this research develops a framework for coding, analyzing and interpreting such metadata networks in history.

MAIN ANALYSIS SCENARIOS

▶ Understanding the overall organization of the archives and establishing a new source criticism
▶ Analyzing the evolution in time (evolution of the structure or of the relations within a predefined structure)
▶ Comparing thematic sub-graphs
▶ Analyzing the distribution of centrality metrics to qualify individual positions and to understand their roles in the network
▶ Playing with scales to qualify institutional positions
▶ Detecting unexpected relationships and hierarchies
▶ Building case studies on a selection of individuals, linked to an institution, a specific debate or subject.

THESIS

GRANDJEAN Martin, Les réseaux de la coopération intellectuelle. Le Comité des Nations unies pour le développement scientifique et culturel dans le contexte mondial, Université de Lausanne, 2019 (doctoral dissertation)

OPEN DATA


PAPER

GRANDJEAN Martin, « Analyses visuelles d’échanges intellectuels », L’Écume (d’) les champs de la pensée, 2017, pp. 73-114 (DOI 10.16997/15291)