

**Collections as networks,
Uncovering information exchanges and information networks in the
collections of the Meertens Institute (KNAW)**

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This paper is about uncovering information exchanges and information networks in humanities research collections. Most humanities researchers focus on obtaining data from research collections, without realizing that those collections also can be seen as the results of epistemological experiments. That is: every collection is the outcome of the process of gathering information and therefore interconnected with the presuppositions, foundations and the activities that have led to the knowledge it contains. Charles Jeurgens (2012) states about this connection that: ‘(...) understanding that bond has to precede understanding the records’ (p. 51). The ‘bond’ Jeurgens writes about, is not only dictated by the goal(s) forming the collection, but is also determined by (among other things) the cultural, administrative, scientific and social climate. Moreover, it is dependent on the individuals who were collecting, their scientific experience, their interests and personalities.

The paper will reflect on the issues of extracting, visualising and processing this context information, using the concept of ‘deep networks’. Charles van de Heuvel introduced this concept (2015). It allows the contextualisation of networks and the visualisation of uncertainty while creating layers of historical sources in multiple perspectives. The vast collections of the Meertens Institute will be used as a use case in order to make the first steps in realizing these networks (Meertens, 2016). The collections have been accumulated in a period of over 80 years and concentrate on the diversity in language and culture in the Netherlands (Jongenburger et al., 2013). Access to the more than 15 terabytes of data and 2 kilometres of archival material is provided by a record keeping system containing data about, amongst other things, the researchers involved in collecting. Additional information about the provenance of the collections is extracted from the annual reports. Those reports contain information about, for instance, the acquisition of the collections.

The objective of this research is threefold: first it will demonstrate that building such a network is feasible. The web-based software platform Palladio and the software tool Nodegoat will be used for visualizing the networks and processing the data (Palladio, 2016; Nodegoat, 2016).¹ The network will consist of hundreds of

¹ As this research is ongoing, experiments with other network analysis tools will be considered. Various data visualization platforms and network architectures have been developed. For visualizing data Palladio is one of the platforms that is advised as a network visualization tool for the humanities (Düring, 2016). Nodegoat was used in the project ‘Circulation of Knowledge and Learned Practices in the 17th-century Dutch Republic’ (Huygens, 2016).

nodes and thousands of (potential) edges in order to include the relations among the most prominent persons involved in collecting the information. Second, this method can, with local modifications, be reused by other humanities researchers to generate networks within the framework of archives and collections. And third, the outcomes will be incorporated in my PhD research, which is about the history of the collections of the Meertens Institute. As this PhD research started in January 2016 and is ongoing, this paper will show the first results.

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