

Project title: “Setting-up e-infrastructure for collaborative work on thesaurus integration”

Theme: ‘DARIAH-ERIC Funding Scheme for Working Group Activities 2017’

Project summary

The [Thesaurus Maintenance Working Group](#)¹ has cooperatively built and maintained the [BackBone Thesaurus \(BBT\)](#) – an overarching thesaurus for the humanities, under which the terminologies/ structured vocabularies in use in the arts and humanities can be aligned, with minimal modifications. The WG has also developed [BBTalk](#)², an online editing and communication tool between the curators of the BBT and its users, and [BBT Browser & Federated Thesauri Viewer](#),³ the online access service allowing users to navigate through the concepts and hierarchies of the BBT and the thesauri connected to it.

The funding received in the framework of the DARIAH Funding Scheme for Working Group Activities 2017/2018, was intended for the organization and hosting of a workshop that would test and validate the above tools and services, based on real data and use cases that the WG members had previously supplied.

The workshop⁴ was held at the Foundation for Research and Technology (FORTH) in Heraklion, Crete, on September 29th, 2018. The participation of representatives from both domestic organizations - AA (Academy of Athens), ASFA (Athens School of Fine Arts) - as well as international ones - DAI (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut), FRANTIQU (Fédération et ressources sur l'Antiquité), the ACDH-ÖAW (Austrian Center for Digital Humanities) and the Getty Research Institute - was viewed as an opportunity for fruitful discussion and reflection on issues of implementation of the BBT, in order to accommodate the needs of researchers working in a digital arts and humanities framework.

As a result of the workshop, we believe, that we have now established a common ground concerning our future steps as a Working Group, with the aim to ensure the sustainability of the BBT. The activation of BBT curating committee, the rules of engagement involved in the curation of the BBT, the means and the manner to reach decisions by voting in order to implement changes on the BBT, as well as our future dissemination strategy to promote the BBT, as a service, were all laid out in the workshop. Finally, a memorandum of understanding was drafted, to declare the dedication of the WG towards the application of BBT.

¹ The Thesaurus Maintenance Working Group operates within the framework of the DYAS network participation in DARIAH-EU actions.

² Developed by ICS-FORTH.

³ Developed by the Austrian Center for Digital Humanities.

⁴ Detailed minutes, presentations and photos can be found in <http://backbonethesaurus.eu/events-workshops>



The team outside ICS-FORTH building



The team is having a fruitful discussion in room 211

Team members (in both photos): Martin Doerr, George Bruseker, Eleni Tsouloucha, Lida Charami, Christos Georgis, Elias Tzortzakakis and Anastasia Axaridou (ICS-FORTH), Evelyne Sinigaglia and Blandine Nouvel (FRANTIQ - CNRS), Camilla Colombi and Lena Marie Vitt (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut – DAI) ,

Jonathan Ward and Gregg Garcia (Getty Institute), Matej Durco and Ksenia Zaytseva (ACDH-OEAW), Athanasios Karasimos, Athina Iakovidou, Gerasimos Chrysovitsanos, Eirini Mergoupi Savaidou, Eleni Gouli and Patritsia Kalafata (Academy of Athens - AA), Maria Chatzi and Garyfallia-Christina Dimakopoulou (Athens School of Fine Arts).

Project evaluation report

Description of the main results

The Thesaurus Maintenance Working Group workshop on the BackBone Thesaurus led to the intensification of our efforts towards the sustainability and dissemination of on BackBone Thesaurus.

First, it helped motivate thesauri maintainers that participated in the workshop to provide real material for testing the BBT infrastructure. This led to the definition and the proposal of a set of guidelines on the format and content of the data provided, as well as the definition of the way data would be exchanged and shared across the BBT infrastructure.

The preparation period for the workshop also enforced the collaboration between technical partners through a series of virtual meetings and a face-to-face meeting that took place in Vienna, on 28 May 2018, in order to extend the interoperability between the BBTalk and the BBT browser, based on the testing material that had been supplied. Few days earlier, on the DARIAH Annual Event that took place in Paris, on 23 - 24 May 2018, we presented a tutorial on the epistemological principles and the methodological rules we follow in order to build sustainable, interoperable thesauri, which facilitate the harmonization of different local terminologies and the stable collaboration between the thesauri maintainers. There we had the chance to disseminate our progress and enforce our collaboration through fruitful discussions with many DARIAH WG members.

The workshop helped us verify the functionality of our methodological and technical tools and test their applicability in real use. The BBTalk and the BBT browser play a key role in the development of robust e-infrastructures enabling the harmonization of different terminologies across Europe, rendering them compatible and interoperable.

The workshop was an opportunity for thesauri maintainers attending it, to address the challenges faced by the harmonization and alignment of specialist thesauri to the BBT and by the strict application of its methodological principles. The facets and hierarchies of the BBT that were used without problems but also those that did not fully correspond to the concepts documented in the said thesauri were presented, discussed and any relevant issues were adequately addressed. The process of aligning the vocabularies that were generated by the PARTHENOS project to BBT using BBTalk, served as a use case for the involvement of a scientific community in the BBT maintenance and support, which all participants have greatly benefited from.

That the active role of the members of the BBT curation committee is of paramount importance for the sustainability of the BBT was clearly demonstrated in the course of the workshop. The

structure of the committee and the basic rules of cooperation were discussed, as well as a decision was made to use BBTalk as the online tool for communication and maintenance of the BBT.

The discussion that took place throughout the workshop also helped clarify the necessity to move more intensively towards the dissemination of BBT and to find ways to promote BBT to the network of collaborating institutions that maintain thesauri.

Deviations from our original plan

We had two deviations from our original plan that did not affect the overall project outcome:

- The project leader/coordinator Dr. Martin Doerr was retired and his duties were undertaken by George Bruseker (coordinator of Centre for Cultural Informatics, FORTH)
- We had to reschedule the date of the planned workshop that would be hosted in Heraklion, Crete, from May 2018 to September 2018 for the following reasons: (i) it was almost overlapping with DARIAH Annual event, which would act as a rival event⁵, and (ii) it was rescheduled to be adjacent the CIDOC ICOM annual conference, which would also be hosted in Heraklion, and would include workshops and tutorials on specific issues of documentation and especially workshops focused on building vocabularies and terminologies organized by the GETTY, allowing participants from the CIDOC – ICOM conference to participate in our workshop.

Looking at the future

As a result of the fruitful discussions held in the workshop, we drafted⁶ a memorandum of understanding among the institutions represented (currently under release), which focuses in collaboration and sustainability issues regarding the BBT expansion and maintenance, as well as its dissemination to a broader audience of thesauri maintainers. The topics it focuses on are (a) the consolidation of a core community responsible for the support, maintenance and expansion of BBT and the “rules of engagement” in this core community (membership, meetings and voting mechanism), (b) the promotion and dissemination of BBT, by contacting potential users, (c) the commitment of mapping the existing thesauri of workshop participants to BBT, (d) the update of the BBT and of the interface of its supporting tools, which are to be quadrilingual (translation of the labels and the scope notes for the facets and hierarchies of the BBT), (f) the update of the existing documentation on the BBT and its infrastructure and (g) the training and educational material for building and designing terminologies by providing an online tutorial and papers/documents on these topics.

⁵ At the time of writing the proposal, we didn't know the date of the DARIAH-EU Annual Event.

⁶ Currently under release (draft attached).