REASSEMBLING
THE REPUBLIC
OF LETTERS

1500-1800 - A digital framework for multi-lateral collaboration
on Europe’s intellectual history
What is the context?
• Background: Howard Hotson

Why do we need it?
• Research Questions: Robin Bunig, Thomas Wallnig

How should it be structured?
• Data model: Mikkel Jensen, Jetze Touber

How do we get data into it and link it together?
• Eetu Mäkelä, Jouni Tuominen, Antske Fokken

What do we get back out of it?
• Data analysis and visualisation: Martin Hadley, Sandra Toffolo

Where do we go from here?
• CofK / EMLO, COST RRL, H 2020, spinoff applications
Between 1500 and 1800, the evolution of postal communication allowed ordinary men and women to scatter letters across and beyond Europe.
This exchange helped knit together what contemporaries called the *respublica litteraria*, a knowledge-based civil society, crucial to that era's intellectual breakthroughs.
Yet the exchange of letters which created this community also dispersed the documentation required to study it, posing enormous difficulties for historians ever since.
To reassemble that scattered material and chart the history of that imagined community, we need to harness the ongoing revolution in digital communications.
As the advantages of digital technology for this field have become apparent in recent years, web-based projects on early modern correspondence have proliferated.
To reassemble the scattered data on this community, we now need a revolution in digital communications, based on collaboratively developed standards and infrastructure.
Why do we need it? Research Questions

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716)
Leibniz’s network

A static view

http://www.gwlb.de/Leibniz/Leibnizarchiv/Korrespondenz/
Leibniz’s network
A dynamic view

Leibniz's network
A genetic view
Leibniz’s network
People, places and topics

A Heinekamp and I Hein, Leibniz und Europa (1994)
Definition
What do we mean by ‘prosopography’? = Biographical data in structured form

Purpose
Why do we need it? What are we aiming for?

Task
- disambiguating people
- understanding networks
- understanding content
- a generic tool

Requisites
- basic data
- location and contact histories
- rich biographical information
- standard solutions
Basic approach
A dynamic model: based on event streams rather than attributes
(every attribute has its history: Leibniz was not born a mathematician, etc.)

Balance
The greatest difficulty will be to find a balance between

Simplicity (easy to learn)  Comprehensiveness (covers many cases)
User-friendliness (easy to use)  Durability (not requiring revision)
Flexibility (adaptable to many purposes)

Possible starting point
Academics: i.e. the species of intellectuals with the most regular and best documented careers
How should it be structured? Data model Pilot projets
Prosopographical data model

Basic categories

genealogy
personal life
social status
personal location history
social contact
ecclesiastical activities
educational activities
professional activity
learned activities
creative work activity
Prosopographical data model

Basic categories

genealogy
personal life
social status
personal location history
social contact
ecclesiastical activities

educational activities

professional activity
learned activities
creative work activity
Prosopographical data model
‘Educational activities’
Prosopographical data model

‘Matriculation’
How do we get data into it? Data inputting Spreadsheet
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1599-05-10</td>
<td>matriculation, Paedagogium, Herborn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600-10-08</td>
<td>in third class, Paedagogium, Herborn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1602-10-02</td>
<td>matriculation, schola publica, Herborn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605</td>
<td>theological disputation under Johannes Piscator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605</td>
<td>verses in disputation by Joannes Vetterus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1606-04-29</td>
<td>matriculation, University of Marburg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1606-late</td>
<td>travelled to Westphalia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1607-07</td>
<td>matriculation, University of Basel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>studied mathematics under Leonhardt Zubler</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1608</td>
<td>Published <em>Flores theologici</em>, Basel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1608-10-10</td>
<td>letter from Caspar Waser, Basel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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http://www.republicofletters.net

http://www.culturesofknowledge.org/

http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/