

Global Outlook :: Digital Humanities

Introduction

The map at right is from Melissa Terras's infographic, Quantifying the Digital Humanities (Terras 2012).

The map shows the distribution of physical centres in the Digital Humanities (as this is defined by members of ADHO communities) across the globe. As Domenico Fiormonte has argued, it can also serve as a proxy for other types of activity in the field, including, broadly speaking, the residency of members of ADHO affiliated Digital Humanities societies (see Fiormonte 2012, fig. 1).



Illustration 1: Physical Digital Humanities Centres (Terras 2012)

But as Fiormonte also points out, the "blank" areas on Terras's map can serve as an inverse proxy for other data. Linguistic diversity, for example, or Gross National Income (Ahlenius and UNEP 2012).

This proposal is about these "blank" areas. Although the Digital Humanities as we define it is, relative to the humanities more broadly, a highly international and collaborative endeavour, it remains the case that our internationalisation and collaborative activity is primarily conducted on an East-West basis among a relatively small number of generally contiguous, high income economies: Japan, North America, Western and Central Europe, Brazil, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

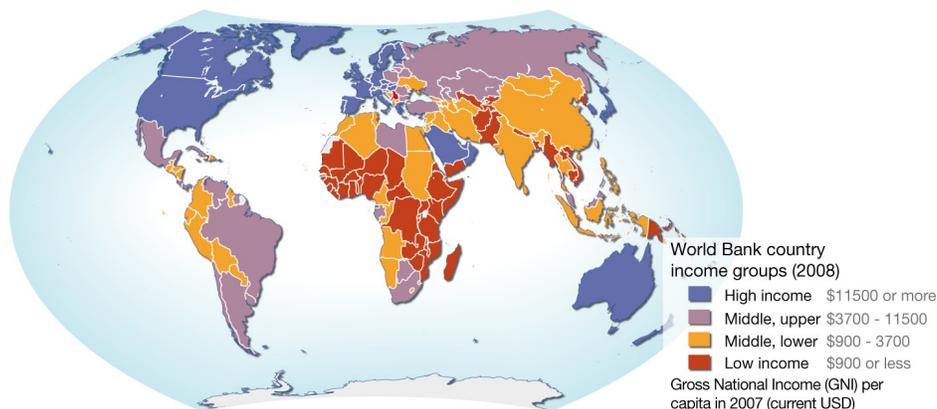


Illustration 2: Gross National Income (Ahlenius and UNEP 2012; The World Bank)

We can do better. The digital revolution that has made our field possible is also having a massive effect on mid- and low-income economic regions. Low and medium income economies outpace high income economies in growth in mobile phone subscriptions, broadband subscriptions, and, especially, mobile broadband subscriptions:

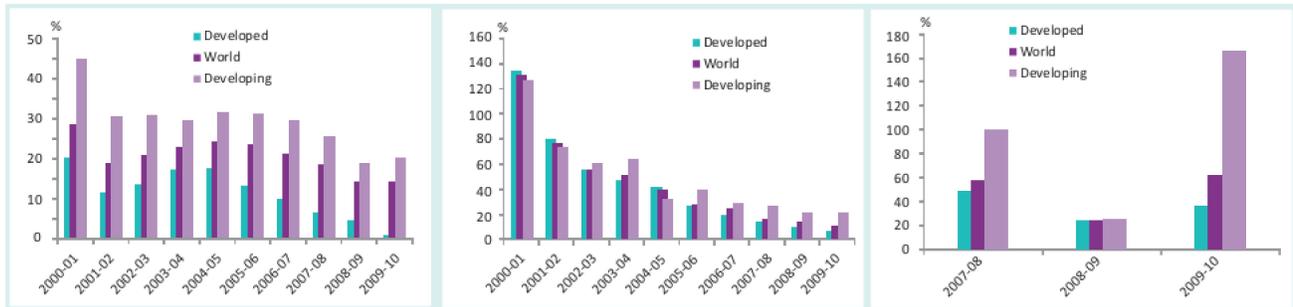


Illustration 3: Subscription growth for mobile telephone (left), fixed broadband (middle), and mobile broadband (right) by level of development (International Telecommunication Union 2011)

Perhaps more significantly for our purposes, while overall internet penetration remains relatively low in such economies, the gap narrows considerably among citizens with tertiary education (Illustration 4).

In other words, while the distribution of physical Digital Humanities centres on Terras's map closely reflects both the distribution of high income vs. medium and low income economies and the distribution of internet penetration among the general population, it would not reflect maps showing either the penetration of internet usage among those with a tertiary education or the rate of change in various forms of ICT connectivity. Maps showing these figures would have far fewer and much smaller "blank" spots.¹

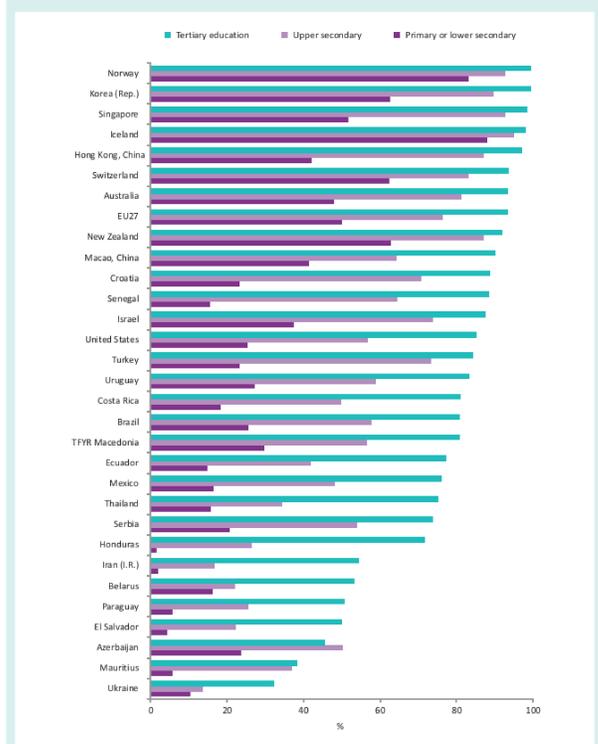
GO::DH

Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH) is a proposal to bring the map of the Digital Humanities into closer alignment with technological penetration. It would do this by taking advantage of the personal and institutional connections between researchers in the ADHO community and researchers who are less well represented in our networks.

Working as a Special Interest Group under the ADHO Admissions Committee, GO::DH would focus primarily on engaging with digital humanities researchers and institutions in geographical areas not currently involved with ADHO: bringing people, projects, and institutions together and fostering engagement with and by ADHO and other members and institutions in our community (see Harle 2012 for a more general discussion of the need for this kind of engagement).

This work fits in with little modification under the Admission Committee's latest Terms of Reference,

Chart 5.5: Percentage of individuals* using the Internet, by highest educational level attained, latest available year (2008-2010)



Note: * Age scope varies across countries, see Annex Table 3.1. Source: ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database.

Illustration 4: Internet use by educational level (International Telecommunication Union 2011)

¹ As Titilola Babalola has argued in an unpublished paper, Internet penetration is not the only factor affecting the ability to carry out Digital Humanities research. Infrastructure difficulties (such as lack or cost of power) and lack of training opportunities can also present serious systemic problems (Babalola 2012).

particularly, 5 and 6:

5. **Outreach and Advice.** To initiate as well as respond in discussions with associations whose interests overlap with or are complementary to those of ADHO, in order to explore the suitability and desirability of a formal relationship with ADHO, whether as a CO or AO.
6. **Support for new or emergent associations.** To offer advice and support for groups who have recently formed a digital humanities association or who are planning to do so. Where potential COs are concerned, the emphasis will be on geographical regions where no such organisation yet exists, or where there is not yet a CO within the ADHO family.

While an important part of this work would involve discussions about "admissions" in a broad sense (i.e. working with institutions in the relevant regions that are interested in joining ADHO or working with it in some other capacity), the SIG would also work to foster more personal and institutional connections networks and communities including the Constituent Organisations and individual researchers and projects.

In terms of concrete activities, the SIG would focus on work that helps develop these kinds of connections: researching existing organisations, projects, and researchers in low and medium-income economies, organising conference sessions, special issues of journals, collections of essays, and the like, that help raise the visibility of work in these regions and allow members of our community opportunities to collaborate and otherwise interact with researchers from outside the ADHO community. Thus, for example, we are currently in the process of organising two conference sessions: one on DH in China (intended for DH 2013) and another, in conjunction with DHSI, on DH in Africa for the meeting of the Canadian Society for Digital Humanities this June in Victoria.

Relationship to MLMC

GO::DH shares an interest in multiculturalism and multilingualism with ADHO's standing MLMC. Despite this, however, their ultimate functions and foci are quite different.

The mandate of the MLMC is primarily internal in focus and linguistic and cultural in scope: its work is advocating for and engaging with ADHO members and the larger Digital Humanities community in their own languages, making the ADHO membership and larger Digital Humanities community aware of how linguistic and cultural factors can affect how we understand each other in contexts like adjudication panels, and ensuring that multilingual and multicultural issues are kept in mind as part of our larger educational and research discourse.

GO::DH, on the other hand, is focussed primarily externally: it is about those who are not part of the ADHO community and do not define themselves as Digital Humanists. The reasons for this exclusion can be cultural and linguistic. But they can also be geographic, economic, or political.

Structure

As a Special Interest Group, membership in GO::DH would be open to anybody with an interest in the issue. The SIG would be overseen by a smaller executive drawn from its membership and with *ex officio* representation from the Constituent Organisations and representatives co-opted from relevant committees.

In addition to this broad general membership, the SIG will divide into a number of more-or-less formal subcommittees as appropriate to its work. At the moment, for example, the SIG has a subcommittee

working on issues to do with DH in Asia and especially mainland China, and another working with a proposal involving DH in Africa and the African Diaspora. Because issues and sensitivities can vary even within a single region or country—and because strictly defined continental "desk" approach has counter-productive colonial resonances—we will need to remain flexible in how these committees are constituted and operated. But in purely practical terms we are already seeing the wisdom of developing this community of interest-style approach.

Resources

The project does not require any significant ADHO resources at the moment. As with other ADHO activities, opportunities may arise from this project where access to ADHO funding would be useful or desirable, but no such activities are currently foreseen and any future request for resources would be subject to the usual procedures and negotiation. The University of Lethbridge has agreed to fund first year administration costs with a grant of CAD\$5k.

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