



Publishing digital history scholarship in the era of updatism

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We explain in this editorial our updating policies that are designed to adapt to author's, reader's and editor's needs. Using the concept of “updatism”, we also reflect on what it means to sustain a digital project such as the *Journal of Digital History* within our current digital environment, which is unstable by nature.

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Introduction

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In October 2021, we were proud to launch the first issue of the *Journal of Digital History*. Its editorial showed how the journal inherited from a long trend in digital history, by taking advantage of the converging trend of the web and hypertext, datafication and digitization. Those long-term tendencies have a counterpart: projects such as the *Journal of Digital History* face a constantly changing digital environment. As a consequence, the *Journal of Digital History* and the publishing platform that our team is building along the way could not stay as it was in October. With this second issue come many enhancements of the journal's publishing platform which we would like to highlight in this editorial.

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Navigate

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In the long-term, maybe, the most important improvement is simply to document what we updated and why. This is something all development teams are supposed to do -- and we did it for the first version, as you can see if you have a look on our [GitHub repository](#). Our aim here is to make these changes visible, so that readers and authors know in which technical context they are writing and reading articles. Too often, important updates on the back end of digital platforms remain hidden and thereby work against the call for more transparency and traceability in digital humanities – although being a necessary condition for the sustainability of open science (*Barats, Schafer, Fickers 2020*).

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Apart from augmented documentation, the main set of improvements of the new version of the *Journal of Digital History* that you can discover today are navigation-related, such as the linking to a particular part of one of the layers, the turning of the fingerprints into interactive tables of content, and enhancing searching (which is a way of navigating) by adding faceted search options for key-words and bibliographic references.

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Some of these updates were encouraged by the rich feedback we got from our users, readers and reviewers. For example, we updated our frontend upon the request of authors to enable them to have a proper link to the hermeneutic layer while writing the articles. Another acclaimed functionality were the fingerprints of articles [that were already evoked in our previous editorial](#). With this issue of the *Journal of Digital History*, the fingerprints have been turned into an interactive table of content, enabling readers to navigate to precise paragraphs within the article by moving the hand with the mouse. As such, the fingerprints not only offer an intuitive overview of the structure and multi-layered elements of an article but turn into a navigation tool to explore the content of an article in a playful manner.

10 Another way to navigate through the rich content of the articles (including the bibliographies) is the new faceted search functionality that we implemented. Thanks to keywords, the faceted search option allows readers to quickly find content that is most interesting or relevant for their own research. As all articles are tagged with specific keywords, this search option enables topical search across all articles published so far. In addition, we added another facet coined “libraries”. This search functionality allows you to see how other researchers are using, for instance, text-mining libraries such as [gensim](#) ([python](#)). We are not publishing “lessons” or “tutorials” as our fine colleagues from the [Programming Historian](#) do. However, we hope that browsing articles through the “library”-function ([python](#) or [R libraries](#) for now), will inspire less experienced colleagues in digital history to experiment with efficient tools of information management.

12 Different flavours of updates

13 So far, we are realising two kinds of updates of our publishing system: discrete and major ones. Discrete updates are small changes that are required for the publication of specific articles. For instance, we had to make our platform compatible with [bokeh](#), a python visualisation library, as one of our authors of this second issue, Patrick Hoehne, has intensively used this library for his article [“Murderous, Unwarrantable, and Very Cold”: Mapping the Rise of Extralegal Collective Killing in the United States, 1783-1865](#). We also adapted the infrastructure to present 3D models in Tim van der Heijden and Claude Wolf’s article, [Replicating the Kinora](#). Discrete updates, though documented, will not be the object of a specific communication on our side. On the contrary, major updates are important changes to the interface and to the functionalities we offer to authors and readers which need to be made explicit as we do with this editorial. All new functionalities, bug fixes, etc. are detailed on a [dedicated JDH webpage](#).

14 This ‘updating policy’ is a consequence of the way we are working. From the start, we decided to build our publishing platform according to the needs of authors (and readers), trying to implement a ‘co-design’ and ‘co-construction’ policy. Sometimes, those needs are expressed along the way of writing an article for the journal. These interactions with our authors allow for a certain flexibility but also come with important costs: they mean a major investment in terms of communication and development of the whole JDH-team and are therefore object of strategic and managerial discussions of the JDH Board.

15 As our possibilities of adapting the publication platform to the specific needs of our authors remain limited, we’ve tried to reach out to the community of digital history scholars by organising seminars in which we try to explain the epistemological design principles of multi-layered articles and the technical affordances which come with such a design for our authors. We are thankful for the many colleagues in France, Germany, United Kingdom, Belgium, United States, Sweden, and Canada who gave us the occasion to speak at their digital history seminars and who’s feedback and ideas continue to be a great source of inspiration for us. We have a special thought for our colleagues from the [Center for Urban History of East Central Europe](#) in Lviv – with whom we’ve collaborated on multiple occasions in the past and we support as much as we can during these difficult times.

16 In the next few months, we will continue participating in seminars and international conferences in order to promote the journal and establish contacts with future authors. We will have the pleasure to present long papers and organise workshops at the Humanistica

(Montreal, May '22), DH Benelux (Luxembourg, June '22) and DH2022 (Tokyo, July '22) conferences.

17 **Streamed issues**

18 As we are publishing this second issue and preparing a special issue on *Web History of Society and Social Institutions*, it is necessary to explain what we mean by an 'issue' of the *Journal of Digital History*. Every new 'issue' of the *Journal of Digital History* is not published as a finished set of articles, but once launched, will continue to grow step by step. One of the reasons for such an approach is the workload included in the publishing of a single article on our platform. Though we are supporting authors all along their writing process, the final version of their article (a notebook) rarely functions from the start – despite the fact that our authors have all been extraordinarily compliant to our guidelines. Libraries may not work and require an adaptation on our side. Our platform is for now obviously better working with python than R (but at least two R-based articles are being currently reviewed). In short, publishing articles on our multi-functional platform requires time – and publishing new articles one after another enables us to manage our workload and -flow in the most efficient and manageable way. In the future, we will experiment further with the concept of “open ended issues” – a call for paper for a topic-related open ended issue will be out soon.

19 **Conclusion: a publishing platform in the age of updatism**

20 In this sense, the way we are updating the journal's platform is typical of our age of *updatism*. *Updatism* is a concept that comes from memory studies, introduced several years ago by Mateus Pereira and Valdei Araujo and translated into English in 2020 (Pereira, Araujo 2020). Based on a reflection about François Hartog's concept of presentism (Hartog 2003) and Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht's broad present (Gumbrecht 2014), Pereira and Araujo try to define *updatism* as a new historical regime in which the memory of the past is constantly updated. The term updatism – obviously coming from computing – refers to the constant push towards upgrading apps and pieces of software on our computers or mobile phones. The same is true for our way of thinking about the past, they argue. In a way, the principle of updatism is inscribed into both the ideology and materiality of the *Journal of Digital History* (and many other online publications, whatever their publication system). Having articles online in a sustainable fashion, meaning keeping them readable and explorable in their most developed format, requires continuous efforts on our side. Updatism comes with a high price – both intellectually and financially, and will for sure be the biggest challenge for the *Journal of Digital History* in the years to come.

21 Despite being a post-print academic journal, readers will soon be able to download articles as PDF on the website of our partner De Gruyter. By definition, those PDFs cannot offer the many functionalities and reading possibilities that this platform does. But we believe that it will further help to enhance the visibility of the excellent scholarship we aim to promote with this journal.

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