



**Theorising Digital Cultural Heritage:
A DIGHT-Net PhD Summer School
University of Turku 24–26 August 2026
1 ECTS**

Abstracts

Monday, 24 August

**14:00–14:30 Veronika Laippala (University of Turku): From raw text to structured collections –
TurkuNLP Register Tools for digital cultural heritage**

Digital cultural heritage offers groundbreaking possibilities for many fields of science. However, the datasets often suffer from noise and a lack of metadata, making their large-scale use challenging. This presentation introduces the TurkuNLP Register Tools for the automatic identification of registers, i.e., text varieties such as advertisements, stories, and informational texts. Focusing on web-scale corpora and historical newspapers, we demonstrate how these tools make heterogeneous collections more accessible for research. In particular, we show how register information provides new perspectives on cross-linguistic comparisons of online language use and allows us to discover the wide range of text varieties found in historical newspapers.

**14:30–15:00 Lauri Kemppinen (University of Turku): Producing the Past in Minecraft: Cultural
Heritage Learning in a Finnish Late Iron Age Game Environment**

This presentation draws on a project launched in 2017 in which a Minecraft environment was constructed to represent the Late Iron Age landscape of the Kokemäki River Valley in western Finland. The project is situated within the field of digital cultural heritage and explores how the past can be represented and produced in game-based environments. The virtual world was informed by research on historical changes in the river valley, while also incorporating deliberately fictional elements, such as the village of Teljä. Chests placed within the buildings contained objects reflecting household wealth and trade connections, and features such as cairn burials were included in the surrounding landscape. Non-player characters (NPCs) were designed with period-appropriate clothing to support an experiential engagement with the past.

The presentation examines how such an environment can function as a medium for both learning about and producing Digital cultural heritage. Cultural heritage research has emphasized the processual nature of heritage as something continuously produced and negotiated. The Minecraft environment makes this process visible: rather than merely representing the past, it operates as a platform where users actively participate in its interpretation.

Game-based environments can be used in two complementary ways: through play and through modification. Playing enables an immersive engagement with the past, while modifying the game world—such as designing new objects or character skins—connects learning with the active production of cultural heritage. In this way, heritage emerges as a dynamic and participatory phenomenon rather than a fixed body of knowledge.

Further reading: Krappala, K., Kemppinen, L., & Kemppinen, E. (2024). Achievers, explorers, wanderers, and intellectuals: Educational interaction in a Minecraft open-world action-adventure game. *Computers and Education Open*, 6, Article 100172.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeo.2024.100172>

15:30–16:00 Anne Alvesalo-Kuusi (University of Turku): What's Law got do with Digital Cultural Heritage?

Laws embody experiences of communities and societies often expressing collective wisdoms. Certain laws become political symbols and articulations of shared myths. Legal documents constitute both physical artifacts and intangible attributes of cultural heritage, providing insights into societal beliefs and values across generations. Law is cultural heritage in its own right; it is a living expression of a society's history, values, and identity, acting as a vital container for its evolving ideologies.

The LAWPOL research infrastructure (RI) offers a constantly expanding, comprehensive digital data repository of legislative and political documents. Developed at the University of Turku it is the first-ever open-access research infrastructure that enables access to legislative and political documents covering the whole timespan of Finland's independence since 1917.

The RI's Lawradar service (lakitutka.fi) contains legal materials central to the legislative process such as documents produced by legislative drafters, stakeholders, and experts, as well as government proposals, committee memorandums and parliamentary debates related to legislative projects. Lawradar is not merely a data repository, as visual queries tool and semantic search improves research-based exploration. This presentation features a demonstration of Lawradar and explores various perspectives on studying law.

16:00–16:30 Kimmo Elo (University of Turku): Plenary Debates as Digital Cultural Heritage

A parliament is the heart of the democratic system. It not only uses the power entrusted to it by the people, but also is the core arena for political contestation. In plenary sessions politicians engage in struggles over topical policy issues, seek to persuade their opponents of the merits of their own alternatives.

Hence, plenary debates constitute a valuable source for parliamentary research. They offer an irreplaceable peephole into temporal political debates, enabling researchers to observe the dynamics of political issues over time. At the same time, plenary debates open perspectives on how speakers make use of history and politick with time in different situational contexts.

The growing availability of digitised parliamentary data across countries provides new possibilities for the study of parliamentary debates. The cyclicity of political themes and disruptions caused by crises are rather obvious research targets. In addition to this, massive, longitudinal data enables new perspectives for exploring the dynamics between the use of power related language, the temporality of politics, and societal change.

Digitisation of parliamentary materials is, therefore, an essential and indispensable component in building digital cultural heritage. Parliaments are a central object for the study of modern history, and this parliamentary past must be preserved for future generations. Digitised parliamentary data enrich our cultural heritage research by enabling research designs that would be impossible for traditional close reading. The LAWPOL "Politiikkapöytä" research environment established and continuously developed at the University of Turku seeks to provide digital tools to study this digital cultural heritage.

Tuesday, 25 August

09:30–10:30 Anna Maria Lorusso (University of Bologna): Lecture: Authenticity, reliability and truth in digital archives

After an initial account of some specific features of digital archives, my presentation will focus on the issue of the reliability of items in a digital archive. Does the concept of *authenticity* still hold meaning? What makes the documents in an archive *legitimate*? What role does *temporality* play?

One of the arguments I would like to make is that contemporary digital archives contribute to (or reflect) the blurring of the distinction between true and false, in favor of a more complex category of *legitimacy*.

10:45–12:00 Sophie Berrebi (University of Amsterdam): Lecture & workshop: Writing the Digital Archive

Alternating between practical exercises and individual research, this lecture and workshop invite researchers to consider ways of writing about digital archives. We will reflect on how one can read 'along the grain' of archives, paying attention to categorisations, search tools, organisation, and selection, and from there, explore ways of writing from the archive. What constitute faithful, critical, and ethical writing about archives that nonetheless is also engaging? Thinking about modes of digital storytelling and authorial voice, we will examine and try out different ways in which we can 'find' a story within an archive, combining literary and academic voice to present research results.

13:00–14:00 Marek Tamm (Tallinn University): Lecture: Digital and post-digital historicities: theorising our new relations with the past

Digital technologies do more than provide new tools for studying and preserving the past: they are transforming the ways in which past, present, and future are related. This lecture explores these transformations through the concepts of digital and postdigital historicity. Moving from the archive to the platform, from immersive historical environments to generative AI, it examines how the past becomes increasingly accessible, interactive, algorithmically organised, and computationally generated. At the same time, the distinction between digital and analogue is becoming less useful as historical experience is produced through hybrid assemblages of people, objects, institutions, infrastructures, platforms, and algorithms. The lecture proposes "postdigital historicity" as a way of conceptualising this condition and asks what it means for historical agency, authority, distance, and responsibility – and for the futures that digital cultural heritage helps to make possible.

Wednesday, 26 August

10:45–12:00 Christian Olesen (University of Amsterdam): Lecture & workshop: Working with AV Collections in Digital Scholarship: An Introduction to Current Approaches

As a consequence of large-scale digitization in recent decades, audiovisual collections have become increasingly significant resources for a broad variety of fields involving historical, archive-based research and media analysis. In this respect, researchers play an increasingly important role in contextualizing audiovisual archival materials in collaboration with archives - especially in cases where these are only minimally described. Because of their time-based, multimodal, and often materially heterogeneous characteristics, audiovisual collections can be challenging to navigate, analyze, and incorporate into research projects. Moreover, researchers need to be able to critically navigate the different scales and analytical tools of the digital environments audiovisual collections are embedded in: from the quantitative perspective of "distant viewing" approaches (Arnold & Tilton, 2023) used in the context of large-scale infrastructure, to the granular and close analysis of online "rogue" archives (De Kosnik, 2016) and "little databases" (Snelson, 2025). Discussing a range of examples pertaining to the CLARIAH Media Suite and the Critical Audiovisual Heritage Initiative against the backdrop of an overview of current approaches, this workshop provides an introduction to some of the key challenges of working with digitized audiovisual collections and invites participants to think about how to devise strategies and methods suited for their research.

14:15–15:15 Giovanni Maddalena (University of Bologna): Lecture: Digital archives as gesture: an opportunity to understand communication as knowledge

Archives were usually considered as repositories of documents. The digital revolution we are living through obliges us all to change and deepen our perception. Documents, and a fortiori archives, display their intrinsic communicative values. In this new consideration, documents and archives cannot be considered anymore static object but meaningful actions in which, at the same time, we acquire and communicate meaning. Completing the pragmatist tradition, we call these actions as "gestures". Some examples will show that the way in which we create digital archives shows the profound unity between knowing and communicating.

Gli archivi digitali come gesto: un'opportunità per comprendere la comunicazione come conoscenza

Gli archivi erano solitamente considerati come depositi di documenti. La rivoluzione digitale che stiamo vivendo ci obbliga a cambiare e approfondire la nostra percezione. I documenti, e a maggior ragione gli archivi, mostrano i loro intrinseci valori comunicativi. In questa nuova considerazione, i documenti e gli archivi non possono più essere considerati oggetti statici, ma azioni significative in cui, allo stesso tempo, acquisiamo e comunichiamo un significato. Completando la tradizione pragmatista, chiamiamo queste azioni "gesti". Alcuni esempi mostreranno che il modo in cui creiamo archivi digitali mostra la profonda unità tra conoscere e comunicare.