

Dealing with the digital world: how historians can contribute to creating a better scientific environment.

By Tine De Moor

Scientists in the Humanities can -although never at the forefront of new technology development and hardly ever the first to apply a new technology- play an important role in the debate on the use of data that should accompany -but is still underdeveloped- scientific practice. Scientists, whatever discipline they belong to, are not all that busy with dealing with problems such as access to data -as long as they have the data themselves-, copyrights, or scientific fraud. However, the more "digital" science becomes, the more large datasets are created and the more virtual collaboration becomes a reality, scientists are confronted not just with the wonderful opportunities this all offers, but also with the potential problems. Several recent developments demonstrate that "something is rotten" in academia, or at least: we, as academics, should be aware of the potential pitfalls our digital age brings along.

In this lecture, Tine De Moor will explain that digital humanities should not simply about "how" you work as a scientist -whether this is a scientist in the humanities or elsewhere is in fact not so relevant- or which technologies you apply to analyse your data, but at least as much attention should go to the institutional framework in which the scientist operates. What happens with the data when the researcher is finished? How about copyright when data are re-used? How do we deal with the increasing power of commercial publishers and is there another possibility for academic publishing? What kind of duties do we as scientist have to share our results with non-scientists and in what format can this be done? How can historians play a particular role in making sure that digital methods and digital practice are in good balance? The lecture will start with discussing some recent developments in in particular social and economic history that could be considered as part of the "digital humanities" and will then deal with issues such as open access in both data and publications. The potential role of the historian to create a better academic environment in the digital age will be discussed at length.