

Computational Ethnomusicology: Methodologies for a new Field

27 – 31 March 2017 @Oort

The semantic gap between fields in humanities and computer science significantly impedes the development of shared research methodologies for music research. In this workshop we took a step forward towards such methodologies for computational approaches to the study of music by bringing together two fields with widely divergent methodologies but often shared goals: Music Information Retrieval and Ethnomusicology. Some of our main goals were the formation of new, genuinely interdisciplinary collaborations, an increased understanding of disciplinary differences, an understanding of the limitations of computational approaches, and the stimulation of interdisciplinary research proposals.

This workshop provided us the opportunity to assemble a participant group with mixed backgrounds, which is hard to organize otherwise. During the mornings, we organized lectures and plenary discussions, and during the afternoons, we split up in smaller working groups to address issues of particular interest for the participants. At the end of the day, we had a 'reporting back' session from the working groups.

During the workshop a continuous effort was made to document the gaps between the involved fields and to present strategies of how to bridge these by means of interdisciplinary work. As a major insight, it was understood that such gaps are the consequences of differing thought processes in the involved fields, and that instead of attempting to eliminate such gaps it would be a more fruitful attempt to work with them and to take advantage of differing methodologies when approaching research questions. We advanced to documenting the gaps and our common interests in the form of a common wordpress site¹ that will document the thoughts that emerged out of the workshop. We began the documentation by listing participants and their interests, existing archives, and by initiating a glossary that clarifies differences in how common terms are interpreted differently in the involved fields.

Potential areas for scientific breakthroughs were identified by discussing in which research questions the collaboration between fields could yield insights that were not possible without it. In specific, we identified the incorporation of computational analysis into archiving systems, the study of larger corpora of recorded and notated music, and the development of visualization tools for specific properties of music.

The focus on working groups enabled us to discuss between fields and to understand differences in approaches to music. From these discussions, some very important insights emerged in how far we conceptualize specific notions such as "model" or "ontology" in different ways. The selected presentations centered around specific focus areas and successfully stimulated the discussions. We believe the workshop was a catalyst for the participants to pursue interdisciplinary collaboration by indicating the above mentioned directions and by establishing a network of potential collaborators in research projects. The attitude throughout the workshop was open-minded, and during the week, we witnessed an increasing sense of community among the participants.

Furthermore, we increased our awareness of the difficulty to obtain funding for interdisciplinary work. In many cases, research proposals will have to be framed within a larger context, such as the technology development for health applications or gaming. On a smaller level, however, we identified possibilities to conduct summer schools and to establish interdisciplinary student projects.

Organizers

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¹ <https://computationalethnomusicology.wordpress.com/>