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#ww1, Twitter, the Centenary of the First World War and the Historian

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Why?

What is the on-line echo of the commemoration of the centenary of the 1st World War ? What is the behavior of Memorial/Heritage Institutions about the 1st World War on Twitter? How do they pass information about the Centenary ? Is there an effect of the English predominance on Twitter about the Centenary on the way non-English twitter accounts are considering the 1st World War?

How?

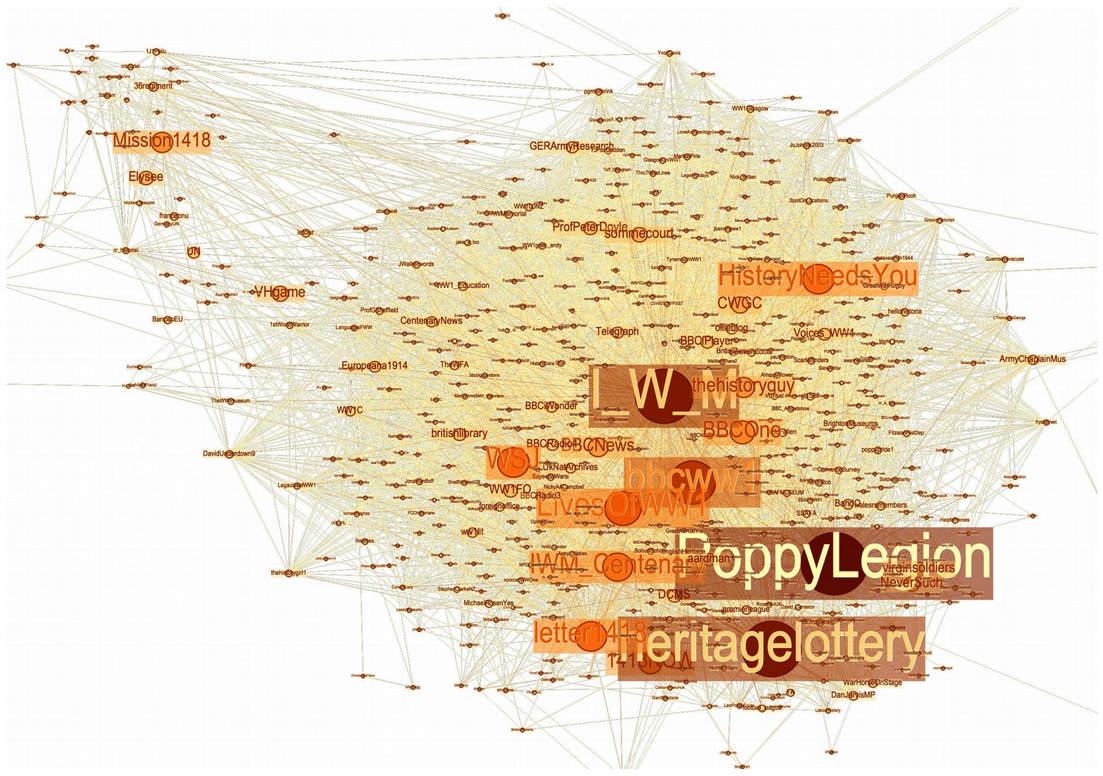
140dev, *an Open Source PHP script (http://140dev.com). Gephi. IRaMuTeQ. Home-based server / Research project without institutional support yet.*

What?

Since the 1st of April 2014: more than one million tweets, around 70% are retweets. Less than 50% have mentions. More than 300 000 accounts are involved. A bit less than 50 000 hashtags.

Analysis

Twitter as a good field to analyze relationships between history and collective memory, memorial institutions and citizens, historians and a wide non-academic audience
Social network analysis of the relations between users (mention or RT = link)
Text analysis of the content of the tweet (only original tweets, without RTs).



Results

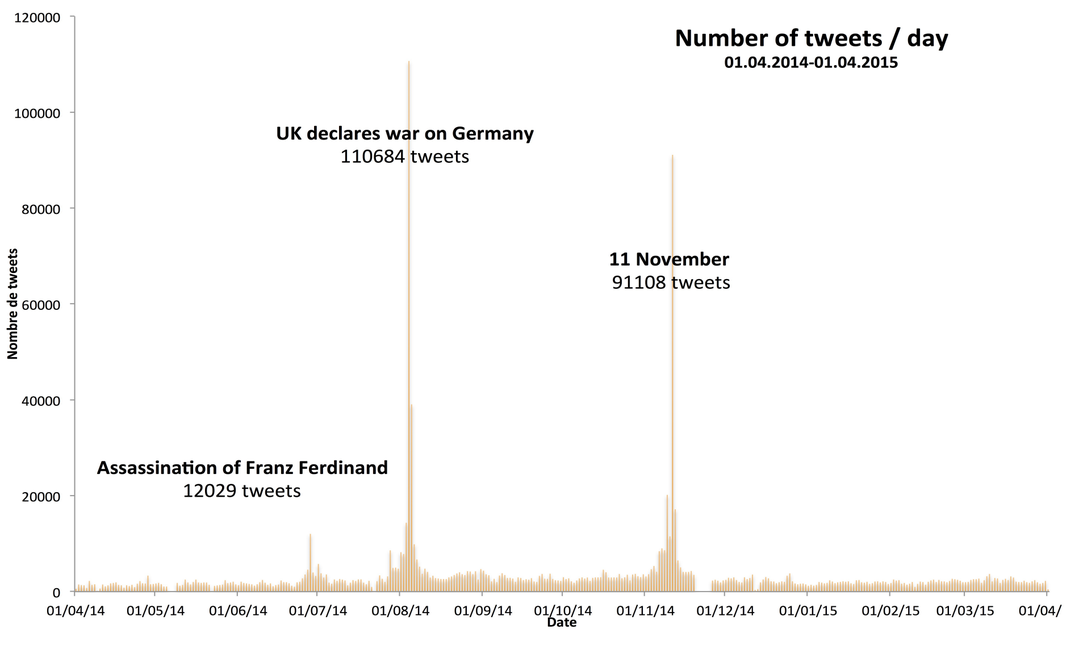
Language issue. English is overwhelmingly present. Around 10% only of the collected tweets are not in English.The fact that Twitter is an English-based social network does not explain fully this disequilibrium. The Memorial institutions' **communication policies on Twitter** seem to explain it better.

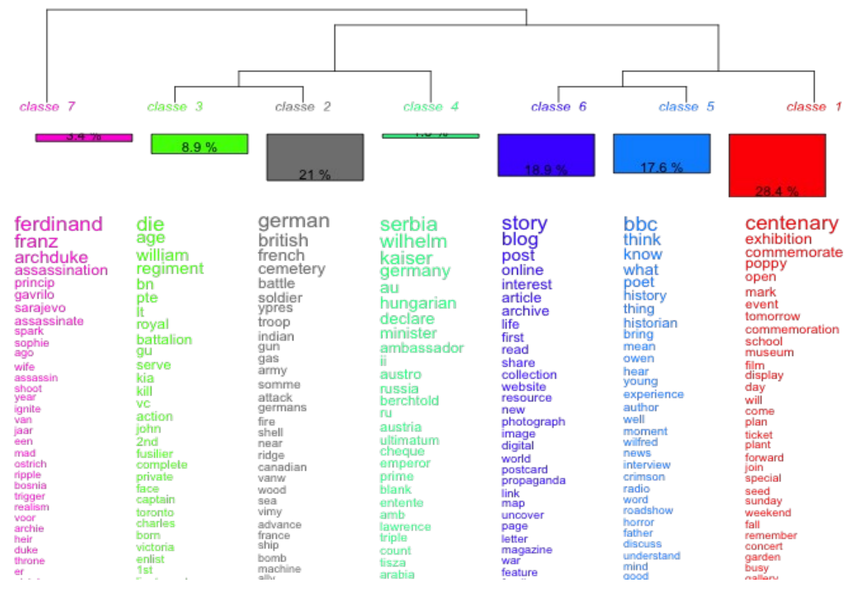
The decentralized communication policy of British memorial institutions (the BBC and all its Twitter accounts or the Imperial War Museum for instance) **is obviously efficient**

The more centralized French communication policy of the *Mission du centenaire* is less efficient. French WW1-related museums don't have any Twitter accounts or have one but do not follow implicit twitter rules (like the use of a general hashtag such as #ww1).

The first Marne Battle is not really present in the database, as the hashtags used by French museums were very precise and not as general as #ww1. As a consequence, they were not integrated in the general “discussion” on Twitter and few of French tweets about the Marne battle were retweeted.

British and French are not commemorating WW1 the same way. French are remembering the soldiers (Poilus). British citizens are remembering soldiers, but also battles. The French are focusing on the end of the war – the armistice, 11th November. The British focus on the way they entered the war.





Content of English tweets: clustering

Future

- Studying more focused “communities”: the use of #ww1 by public historians for instance
- Working with other historians and sociologists whose research could benefit from the harvested data
- The question of “temporalities” and their imbrications (the temporality of Twitter / the temporality of users / the temporality of the commemorations / the temporality of the First World War itself)..

Limits

Why Twitter? The fact that Twitter API, though sometimes very unstable, is very convenient to use is one of the criteria of this choice. But is it really pertinent in terms of research? Shouldn't we have broader sources? How to extrapolate the project's results to other on-line social networks? Last but not least, the difficulty to anticipate the hashtags to be collected might introduce biases in our research