Towards a national web in a federated country: a Belgian case study

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Although the .be domain was introduced in June 1988[1], the Belgian web is currently not systematically archived. As of August 2016, **1.550.147** domains are registered by DNS Belgium[2]. Without a Belgian web archive, the content of these websites will not be preserved for future generations and a significant portion of Belgian history will be lost forever.

In this paper we present the initial findings of a research project[3] exploring the policy, legal, technical and scientific issues around archiving the Belgian web. The aim of this project is to **a) identify current best practices in web-archiving b) pilot a Belgian web archive** and **c) identify research use cases for the scientific study of the Belgian web**. This case study is seen as a first step towards implementing a long-term web archiving strategy for Belgium.

In several European countries, national libraries have often taken responsibility for archiving their national web. Notable examples, which are also of particular linguistic[4] interest to Belgium, are the French National Library[5]**,** National Library of the Netherlands[6], the German National Library[7] and the British Library[8]. Additionally, other international best practices, such as the ICA Guidelines for the Archiving of Websites[9] will be significantly important for the development of a Belgian web archive. Within Belgium, the *Royal Library of Belgium* and the *State Archives*, two of the ten Belgian Federal Scientific Institutions[10] with mandates in the area of documentation are together in an ideal position to implement a long-term web archiving strategy for Belgium.

During the project, the team will work closely with researchers across Belgium to identify research use cases for the future Belgian web archive. To date, a socio-historical analysis of the Belgian Federal Elections[11] has been identified as a possible research case study. As a Belgian web archive does not currently exist, the Belgian web content in the Internet Archive[12] will provide an ideal

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[1] History of the Belgian web: https://www.dnsbelgium.be/en/history

[2] DNS Belgium: https://www.dnsbelgium.be/en/about-us

[3] At the time of writing, a consortium, led by the *Royal Library of Belgium* and including institutions such as the *National Archives of Belgium* and *Ghent University* in collaboration with *DARIAH-BE* is currently preparing a project proposal on this topic for the BRAIN-BE: Belgian Research Action through Interdisciplinary Networks 2016 call: https://www.belspo.be/belspo/brain-be/call_brain2016_en.stm

[4] The three official languages of Belgium are Dutch, French and German with English also being widely used Official languages of Belgium: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_Belgium

[5] French National Library web archive: http://www.bnf.fr/en/collections_and_services/book_press_media/a.internet_archives.html

[6] Web archiving at the National Library of the Netherlands: https://www.kb.nl/en/organisation/research-expertise/long-term-usability-of-digital-resources/web-archiving

[7] German National Library web archive: http://www.dnb.de/EN/Netzpublikationen/webseiten.html

[8] Web archiving at the British Library: http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/digi/webarch/

[9] ICA Guidelines for the Archiving of Websites: http://www.ica.org/en/guidelines-archiving-websites

[10] Belgian Federal Scientific Institutions: https://www.belspo.be/belspo/fsi/index_en.stm

[11] Belgian Federal Elections: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_Belgium#Federal_elections

[12] Internet Archive: https://archive.org

corpus to kick-start such research. Finally, the project is keen to further strengthen collaboration with RESAW[13], of which Ghent University is already a participant.

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[13] RESAW: a Research infrastructure for the Study of Archived Web materials http://resaw.eu/