



PortADa

Port Arrivals Data

Port Arrivals Data. Automatic data collection for a large-scale comparative history of 19th century shipping: a Digital Humanities approach to maritime heritage. A project for the exchange of academic personnel funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions program of the European Union's Executive Agency for Research.

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PortADa conducts intensive, three-month work session in La Habana, Cuba

Members of the PortADa team have successfully completed an intensive, three-month work session at the Universidad de las Ciencias Informáticas (UCI), in La Habana, Cuba. The main objective of the work was to obtain the primary sources (newspapers and additional sources for validating the information in these newspapers) and assuring their proper treatment as digital objects. With this work completed, the team researching the port of La Habana will be able to move forward with processing the digital images using software developed for that purpose. Two seminars were held at the UCI, aimed at socializing the project with students and professors, and at sharing the initial advancements of the project, especially as refers to the methods and the specific historical case of the port of La Habana. PortADa team members presented six papers at the Seminario Internacional PortADa at the UCI on the advances, challenges, and initial results of the project. They also took part in an exchange about research experiences in the Cátedra CTS-I of the Universidad de Cienfuegos. Finally, they attended a presentation of the project at the Cuban Society of Historians.



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The team was also welcomed by the Director of the Fidel Castro Centre. During the visit, the team discussed Cuban history in general, and the historical development of the Cuban economy and the role of the port in that process. This visit facilitated access to primary sources for analysing traffic in the port of La Habana.

PortADa team members during the visit to the Fidel Castro Centre in La Habana

PortADa team advances with software development to improve OCR results

PortADa uses a series of computer programs to facilitate and improve the digital processing of images of historical newspapers. Basically, the first step is to secure a high-quality image of the original newspaper pages. The digital images are processed by another program developed through the project. This step cleans the images, optimizing them to achieve the best results when using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software. OCR can be understood as the way a computer "reads" text from primary sources. It identifies characters and numbers in the images and generates a text document with that information. The team is developing software to improve the results of this process. All the software developed by PortADa will be made available to the public during the project.



Collaborative software development at the Work Session at the UCI in Cuba.

Preparations underway for the Barcelona 2025 Summer School

The Universitat de Barcelona will host a two-month Summer School in Barcelona from January to early March 2025. The main objective of the Summer School is to process the data of ship arrivals. This includes a number of steps: extracting the information about arrivals; processing and curating the extracted data; and establishing the infrastructure to manage and store the processed data (data integration). These strategies are focused on the development of the PortADa technological resources; even so, the work is designed to be collaborative, with the historians participating in the design of strategies and controlling the quality of the results.

Over thirty researchers are expected to participate in the Summer School from Argentina, Cuba, and Greece. Colleagues from the Maritime Museum of Barcelona and the Autonomous University of Madrid will also participate in the research activities during the Summer School.

PortADa to release four reports detailing historical sources

PortADa is based on developing and deploying software to facilitate the use of Optical Character Recognition. In this case, the sources are all historical newspapers that report on the arrival of ships in the port. As such, each team has prepared a critical analysis of the sources, addressing the chronologies of publication, the types and quality of information contained (and how it changes over time), the quality of the physical examples (paper newspapers), and the format and quality of the digital images of those physical objects. Specifically, the periodicals include: *El Diario de Barcelona*, *Le Sémaphore de Marseille*, and *El Diario de la Marina* for La Habana. In the case of the Port of Buenos Aires, several different periodicals will be used to cover the considerable chronological period covered by the project. While there are some differences between the sources, they all provide the same basic information about ship arrivals, including: port and date of departure; the type, tonnage and name of the vessel; the title and name of the captain in charge; and information about the types, quantities and destination of the cargo.

PortADa joins foundation event for Digital Arts & Humanities effort CLARIAH-CAT

On 26 June 2024, some 50 researchers and representatives from diverse universities and government agencies from throughout Catalonia participated in the foundational activities of CLARIAH-CAT celebrated at the Barcelona Supercomputing Center – National Supercomputing Center. They were united in their common interest in promoting the application of computer sciences to the Digital Arts and Humanities. The effort is aimed at facilitating access to digital resources through a distributed digital research infrastructure. Project team member, Jordi Ibarz, made a presentation about PortADa and its methodologies based on large-scale computing.

Participation in Congresses and Conferences

One of the most important activities of the PortADa project is sharing the methods and research results among a variety of research communities. Considering the breadth and scope of the project, papers have been accepted at regional and international conferences in a variety of areas, including social, labour, economic, and maritime history.

VI Conference of the Mediterranean Maritime History Network

Eight PortADa researchers presented a total of four papers at the VI Conference of the MMHN – the leading research network for Mediterranean Maritime History – between 27 and 31 May 2024. The Conference was hosted by the Institute for Mediterranean Studies at FORTH, in Rethymno, Greece. The presentations addressed the use of historic media as sources for the study of maritime commerce and traffic – one paper per port (Barcelona, Marseille, La Habana, and Buenos Aires).



V Conference of the European Labour History Network in Uppsala, Sweden

PortADa team members attended the ELHN Conference in Uppsala, Sweden between 11-13 July, where they presented a total of four papers on the second slavery in dock labour in Cuba, and on the social mobility of pilots and patronos in Barcelona and Tarragona. Whereas captains were responsible for ships involved in high-seas traffic, the less-studied patronos were responsible for coastal trade operations (cabotage), which played an important role in the logistic chains, trafficking goods to and from the main ports.

VII Congress of the Economic History Association of the Caribbean (AHEC)

Between the 6-8 November 2024, five participants in PortADa travelled to Mexico City to present four papers at a double session dedicated to maritime commerce and the merchant marines of Cuba and the Caribbean during the long nineteenth century. The presentations covered the ports of Marseille, La Habana, and Barcelona, with special attention paid to their relationships with the Caribbean region.

IV Congress of the Cuban Society for the History of Science and Technology

The Congress was held at the José Martí Memorial and National Library of Cuba from 14-16 November, having been organized by the Cuban Society for the History of Science and Technology, the Cuban Union of Historians, and the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation. The PortADa contribution included presentations about the project methodology; the transition from sail to steam (1850-1914); processes of innovation, industrial development and transfers of technology and know-how; and a case study of this transition in the merchant marine fleets of La Habana, and of the Cuban fleet in general (1878-1898).

PortADa at Upcoming Congresses and Work Shops

XIV International Congress of the Spanish Economic History Association (AEHE) to be held at the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria from 21-24 January 2025. The congress theme is fortuitously "Oceans of exchange: the blue economy in historic perspective". The congress forms part of the activities to be conducted during the PortADa Summer School to be held in Barcelona from January to March.

II Workshop on Digital Humanities (U. Barcelona) – Taking advantage of his stay in Barcelona, Agustín Nieto (Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Argentina) will give a presentation on 26 February 2025 about digital humanities and the PortADa Project to students and faculty of the Universitat de Barcelona.

XV European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) of the International Institute for Social History to be hosted by the University of Leiden (The Netherlands) between 26-29 March 2025. The conference is one of the largest in the field with over 1,500 presentations at almost 400 sessions.

Development of the PortADa project website

The project will be launching its official website in the coming weeks. The website provides general information about the project, participants, and researchers. As the project advances, the website will serve as a repository for storing and making available the PortADa software, conference papers, scientific articles and, most importantly, the complete database of ship arrivals for the four ports covered by the project.

Feel free to visit the website in the coming weeks at: www.portadaproject.eu or www.proyectoportada.eu.

For more information, we invite you to contact us through the following channels:
Email: pr.portada@ub.edu

The project uses @ProyectoPortADa on X (formerly Twitter). We look forward to hearing from you!