

# Context and Relationships: Ireland and Irish Studies

## Description of the Project and its Significance

In the Humanities, students, general public, researchers, and editors are necessarily concerned with the *context* and *relationships* of whatever is studied: What other documents relate this topic? Where and when did this happen? What else was going on around that time and place? Who were the people and institutions mentioned? How were they related? What else did they do?

Over time auxiliary resources have evolved: dictionaries and encyclopedias; bibliographies and library catalogs; place name gazetteers and maps; time-lines and chronologies; biographical dictionaries; and so on. In a print environment the reference collection of the library provides a carefully constructed environment of auxiliary resources for exploring context. Comparable functionality is not yet available in the digital environment.

A fortunate convergence of four kinds of specialists will create, demonstrate, and evaluate techniques to enable anyone to easily, inexpensively, and rapidly search out the background for topics, places, events, institutions, and persons encountered in texts.

1. Advanced Search Techniques. The *Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative* and the *School of Information* at the University of California, Berkeley.

2. e-Resources on Ireland. *The Queen's University, Belfast*, is creating "A digital library of core e-resources on Ireland," including back files of 100 journals on Irish culture and history.

3. Teaching and Research in Irish Studies. Collaborating humanities scholars.

4. Archives and Scholarly Editing: The *Emma Goldman Papers Project*

This team will develop three technical deliverables: two tools and a technique:

i. A *Context Finder*: To find contextualizing information about any word or phrase of interest encountered when reading Irish studies literature. The reader determines whether to search the word(s) for a place, a time period, a person, an institution, or a topic, then chooses from a short menu of appropriate searchable resources. Searches are automatically generated and results displayed. When the text already contains TEI or other XML compliant mark-up the interface could use the mark-up to pre-set default facet and resource options.

ii. A *Context Builder*: This would be an enhanced Context Finder with the option of adding XML compliant mark-up into the text such that the facet identification (as topic, place, period, person, or institution) and the choice of resource could be remembered as mark-up, or used to enrich or replace existing mark-up. Either way, the next time (or the next scholar) could have pre-prepared live search prompts for the same auxiliary sources, perhaps by now more up-to-date. The editorial tool could serve everybody who wants to retain search annotations, including professional editors. Annotations and marked-up texts can be shared in a contemporary peer production mode.

Named entity recognition software could have already prepared the text identifying proper names, places, and other recognizable terms by a combination of natural language processing and reference to lists.

iii. A *Context Provider*: Suppose that some historical and literary texts mention a hundred different place names and that these have been marked-up with links to a suitable place name gazetteer. The mark-up and the positions in the text could be extracted, rearranged by place name, and used to augment and enrich the gazetteer. The gazetteer becomes a geographical index to the texts; a map of the geographic aspects of the texts can be produced; and the geography of different texts can be compared. Time periods, persons, and institutions could be treated similarly.