

# **CARMEN: Collaboration in the Face of Contemporary Challenges**

**by Simon Forde**

The CARMEN network was set up at an inaugural meeting in Budapest on 9-11 March 2007. The original discussions had taken place at the Leeds International Medieval Congress in July 2006 where participants agreed that there was a need for a European version of the Centers and Regional Associations committee (CARA) of the Medieval Academy of America. It was also agreed that such a project should be characterised as being open and global, and modelled on an informal network as opposed to some formal academy or learned society.

In this paper I wish to assess how successful CARMEN has been in achieving its stated or implicit goals from eight years ago, in particular:

1. Generating research funding for medievalists
2. Learning from each other and sharing best practice
3. Creating a global platform for medieval centres and national associations
4. Becoming a sustainable network.

Despite my own involvement as conceiver of the project and its director in these intervening years, I shall try to present the compromises, the cul-de-sacs, the failures and tensions that CARMEN has experienced, at least from my perspective.

## **1. Generating research funding for medievalists**

### **Early successes**

The exploratory meeting at Leeds in 2006 was galvanised around the idea that medievalists, regardless of their context, country or institutional strength, always needed more research funding. At that stage it was clear that increasing amounts of research money either came from international organisations (e.g. at European level) or through bilateral international programmes. At the very least national funding agencies expected funding applicants to demonstrate active involvement in international partnerships and research impact at a global level.

Prof. Dick de Boer, then director of the Dutch national research school for Medieval Studies, played a major role in defining this strategy. He became the initial Academic Director for CARMEN and was instrumental in promoting an awareness of how medievalists should be aware – at the earliest possible stages – of international funding programmes, and in shaping them. He put this into practice through proposing to European Science Foundation the following research theme, and getting it accepted:

Understanding regional dynamics in Europe calls for a comparative and inter-disciplinary approach to historical developments (from their very origins throughout historical times) and to the constituent elements of regional cohesion (dialect and language, religion, historical geography, ethnogenesis, invented

tradition, material culture etc.) Starting from a historical basis, the EUROCORES programme “EuroCORECODE: European Comparisons in Regional Cohesion, Dynamics and Expressions” offers a challenge to a wide range of disciplines in the humanities to start exploring the functional dynamics of different aspects of regional development and its modern perspectives.

Prof. De Boer had identified the EUROCORE programme at the ESF which supported Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs) and proposed the overarching theme of “Regional Diversity and Cohesion” at a time when he was aware that the tensions of further centralisation of the European Union were becoming more tangible.

CARMEN participants were able to piggy-back on Prof. De Boer’s initiative through advance warning of what was happening, and by inviting representatives of funding agencies (such as the “Humanities in the European Research Area Network” [HERA-Net]) to discuss their ways of working, what they were seeking to achieve, and what made a successful application and project.

Within the EUROCORECODE theme, eventually three CRPs gained funding, each averaging 1 million euro over three to four years. Two of the three were CARMEN-led. One was by Dick de Boer himself (*Cuius Regio: An analysis of the cohesive and disruptive forces destining the attachment of groups of persons to and the cohesion within regions as a historical phenomenon*). The other was a hastily-collected network of Copenhagen, Krems, Tallinn, Trondheim and Budapest on a project entitled *Symbols that bind and break communities: Saints' cults as stimuli and expressions of local, regional, national and universalist identities*.

This triple success (overarching theme, and two million-euro projects) was hugely important for CARMEN in its early years. First, it showed that CARMEN would not, as some had initially feared, be simply a talking shop, with no action and benefits. Second, it gave CARMEN credibility with medievalists, and with heads of departments or deans in home institutions. Third, it raised CARMEN’s profile, since both the *Cuius Regio* and the *Cult of Saints* projects presented research findings at the Kalamazoo and Leeds conferences for medievalists, but also at major conferences of modern historians, urban historians, historians of music and so forth.

Lastly, it provided CARMEN with a source of income for four years, since these projects also met at the CARMEN annual meetings and small amounts of money, typically 6000 euro, could be used from the project budgets on CARMEN to assist them disseminate their research findings.

This undoubted success had two negative aspects, though. First, because these major funding programmes were European it gave the impression that CARMEN was solely focused on European participants. In particular, it was difficult to demonstrate benefits to colleagues from Canada, the USA and Australasia, who were not normally eligible for these funds. Second, some participants at early CARMEN meetings absorbed a message that CARMEN was solely interested in income-generating projects and had no wider scholarly agenda.

Internally within CARMEN opinions differed to this approach. The *Cult of Saints* project was successfully drawn together in barely two months, and worked very successfully. But this happened because almost all the partners were well known to each other, and trust in each other had grown over many years. Adequate trust is a *sine qua non* for any successful international funding application and project.

Naturally, CARMEN's aim is to foster these relationships so that – in time – groups have coalesced with a sufficiently common understanding of a research problem and with sufficient personal trust and commitment to make it work. But such a process can take several years and is difficult to rush.

Accordingly, some opinions within CARMEN wished CARMEN to focus more on developing such groups and relationships, and downplay the urgency for applying for funding imminently. Additionally, the two successful EUROCORECODE projects had been instigated by members of the CARMEN Executive, and the applications largely pulled together by these individuals. On one hand, this was successful, and a relatively neutral person with good knowledge of funding terminology and processes helped gain these awards. On the other hand, CARMEN could not become responsible for instigating and managing funding applications – that had to be done by participants on their own initiative.

### **The impetus towards links with businesses in sectors relevant to Medieval Studies**

Since those successes in 2010 CARMEN's success rate is patchy. Prof. Pam King (then director of the Centre for Medieval Studies at Bristol) made a successful submission to the ESF for a workshop entitled *Re-inventions of Early-European Performing Arts and the Creative City, Civic Regeneration and Cultural Tourism (REPACC)*. This workshop took place in Budapest in September 2012, directly after CARMEN's seventh annual meeting at the Central European University, Budapest. The workshop drew thirty participants – academics, practitioners, adapters of historical drama in contemporary settings, and social scientists. A clear outline for how to develop this into a major research project resulted, but no opportunity has yet been found for gaining the necessary funding.

Several other bids to the ESF for so-called Exploratory Workshops were not successful.

Several CARMEN partners were involved in applications to the European Union's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Networks. As with the REPACC project, the impetus here took CARMEN in a new direction – funding for doctoral (and some postdoctoral) training, and closer partnerships with business sectors relevant to medieval studies. CARMEN was able to define the following sectors that could be of interest for career-development of medievalists:

- Organisers of urban festivals based on historical themes
- Translation services (incl. scholarly translation into English)
- Publishing, including Open Access and digital publication
- Active recreation and leisure
- Cultural tourism, heritage sites and hospitality industries
- Video game creation (for games which use historical settings or themes)
- Media – press, video and film
- Institutions of cultural memory (libraries, archives, museums), particularly in relation to school and educational programmes (artefacts and learning)
- Graphic design, PR and promotional industries
- Heritage restoration (built environment and artefacts)

So far, however, the network of potential business partners offering reliable internships and meaningful research collaboration is very limited, and is best in the Publishing sector. Ideally, this would be a high priority in the coming few years.

The first, and (I believe) so far the only, Marie Curie ITN in the Humanities to gain EU funding is, in fact, a medieval project. But it developed independently of CARMEN. PIMIC (*Power and Institutions in Medieval Islam and Christendom*) does build on two centres that have been heavily involved in CARMEN (the CSIC or Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales in Madrid, and the University of St Andrews), but it developed independently of CARMEN and their two business partners were Brill Publishers in Leiden and López-Li Films in Madrid.

### **The situation today**

The CSIC and St Andrews have been successful in a number of major funding projects. For instance, Ian Johnson at St Andrews has played a key role in COST Action IS1301 (*New Communities of Interpretation: Contexts, Strategies and Processes of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*). This project runs from 2013 to 2017 but itself grew out of a major individual funding grant to Sabrina Corbellini (Groningen) from the European Research Council. We can similarly expect this project to morph into a new form after 2017.

Other major centres, such as Vienna, have however been exceptionally successful in gaining national and international grants, without any participation in CARMEN. The efforts of Walter Pohl with a network of established early medieval scholars in Leeds, Utrecht and Cambridge have been amply rewarded. But increasingly Vienna is attracting funds for new directions of research – into the Arabian peninsula, and into Asian and global medieval studies.

By contrast, several unsuccessful projects instigated by CARMEN participants in East-Central Europe have shown that the reputation of the Principal Investigator(s) and their home institutions weigh heavily, and so CARMEN has played some role in strategic tie-ups for good partners from eastern Europe and more established names in western Europe.

### **National and bilateral successes**

CARMEN has tried to open up the funding discussion to multilateral and bilateral programmes between countries. CARMEN's Forum for National Associations adopted the task of collating details, country by country, of bilateral possibilities with other countries. But, apart from Argentina, Germany and a few other countries, this project is far from complete or active.

The Centre for the History of Emotions at the University of Western Australia has been the medieval (and early modern) centre that has been the most successful of all in gaining public funding. It was the sole humanities institution to be awarded funding by the Australian Research Council's Centres of Excellence program. Public funding is worth \$A24.25m over seven years. Again, CARMEN can take no credit for the CHE's success. However, the higher profile, international standing and greater self-confidence of Australian medievalists on a global stage did arguably play some role in this award.

The Centre for Medieval Literature in Odense and York was similarly established by a large national grant, this time by the Danish National Research Foundation. This new Centre for Excellence was based at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense, and also the University of York. It started in early 2012, for six years, but with the possibility of an extension into 2022. Again, no direct thanks to CARMEN, though some of the personal connections that brought the contributing parties together date back to a CARMEN meeting in Prato in 2008.

### **Some conclusions**

CARMEN clearly has played a valuable role in opening up possibilities for gaining research funding in Medieval Studies. But, as the competition increases, the onus will be on individuals to take the initiative, with CARMEN perhaps playing more of an advisory role in diverting groups in directions that have better prospects. The role of the Academic Director (currently Gerhard Jaritz from the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Krems and the Central European University, Budapest) will remain crucial in giving early warning of topics that funding bodies will support, and new funding opportunities. This has been demonstrated most clearly with the HERA 2015 call for projects on the theme 'Uses of the Past', which is a topic that has been explored over several meetings by CARMEN.

The HERA 2015 programme also indicates an area where CARMEN has perhaps been successful. The HERA 2015 call will be announced in mid-January 2015. In late January in Tallinn 350 scholars will have been invited to a 'matchmaking event'. The aim is to bring individuals who wish to participate in some bigger project with partners who have an overall theme and are prepared to manage it, but are open to finding other contributors across Europe. Several CARMEN members have been selected and funded to go to Tallinn. And one of the provisional research areas is one to be organised by CARMEN and managed out of the University of Leeds on *Uses and Misuses of the Medieval Past Inside and Outside Europe*.

These 'matchmaking events' are identical in purpose to the 'market-place' meetings that CARMEN holds, traditionally throughout the Saturday morning of its annual meetings. Participants have a stall to display research interests and activities of their own centre or association, while other participants wander at their leisure and enter into discussions to discover any commonality of interest.

Coincidentally, or perhaps not coincidentally, this was the topic of the opening speech by Gábor Klaniczay, then head of the Department of Medieval Studies at the Central European University at CARMEN's inauguration in March 2007. The minutes record that:

[Gábor Klaniczay] summarized the history of the foundation of the CEU, the political context at the time and the CEU's aims, the discussions that led to the creation of a Medieval Studies Department, and the achievements and features of the department. He then went on to outline the challenges faced in East-Central Europe today for medievalists: resurgent nationalist movements which claimed their own medieval authenticity, academic jealousies between public and private, religious and secular universities in the region, and the historic and contemporary meanings invested in the concept of Europe.

Research themes and outputs are increasingly defined by national and supra-national governments as they try to maximise beneficial returns on public spending. Many of these themes are found around the

world. Identifying likely research areas is not the difficult element; the difficulty lies in preparing the groups and assisting the groups and knowing which themes are being funded and then.

## **2. Learning from each other and sharing best practice**

CARMEN is a continuing journey of learning, especially as the contexts for humanities research are changing fast. Some countries have moved faster than others, though the direction of travel has been similar across the EU and other Western countries like Canada and Australia where governments are the main funding agency for research.

The exception to this model, in developed countries, is the US where government funding for humanities is small and marginal. Nonetheless, despite the overwhelming dominance of English in academic discourse (though less so in many humanities disciplines), the US is becoming somewhat exceptional, in that careers are still made by publishing individual ground-breaking research and developing a coterie of doctoral students and disciples. Notwithstanding, US university administrators increasingly emphasise 'public understanding of research', and 'community engagement', both of which correspond to terms like 'impact', 'social impact', and 'valorisation' which have become commonplace in Europe.

The science-based model of team-based laboratories commissioned to solve a particular problem is now deeply embedded in Europe, Canada and Australia in a way that is not the case in the US. Whether this is a good use of limited public resources is a matter of debate. If Anglo-American research remains dominant in a generation's time, then one might ask serious questions about this expenditure. On the other hand, some key research theories today, like Reception History and Cultural Memory, have a German origin.

Has CARMEN facilitated the spread of these trends (collaborative, cross-faculty working, problem-solving research, research with a social impact)? Certainly, it is noticeable over the past decade how much better embedded younger scholars from east-central Europe are in international associations, often with positions in major 'western' universities. Exchange within northern Europe has spread from being a Nordic phenomenon to one that includes Britain, the Baltic lands, the Low Countries and Germany.

Notable gaps in this exchange remain. Poitiers, Lleida and CSIC Madrid are the only three institutions in France, Spain and Italy to be regular participants in CARMEN. Clearly, CARMEN is not operating in ways that seem congenial to medievalists from these countries; one can only guess at the reasons for this. Portugal is the exception to this southern European phenomenon and that is perhaps solely due to the proselytising of Cristina Pimenta from Porto.

CARMEN's main successes have been with its links to Australasia and Latin America. Both continents are full and active partners within CARMEN. Presumably CARMEN serves as an invaluable entrée into scholarly networks beyond their traditional ones (Spain, Portugal and France for Latin Americans, and the UK and US for Australasians). This has not been one-way, since the Australian success in gaining \$A24.5m for its Centre for the History of Emotions has been an eye-opener for many.

### **3. Creating a global platform for medieval centres and national associations**

One of the earliest concepts for CARMEN involved it becoming an international forum for the presidents of national associations in each country. This 'United Nations' model was problematic, since some countries had no national association of medievalists and had no desire to form one (e.g. the UK), others had an association of medieval historians and had more desire to link with early-modern historians than with medieval philologists and other medievalists (e.g. Italy). Others had multiple medieval associations, divided on political grounds (e.g. Poland). This complex structure was one of the reasons for opting instead for an informal, inclusive network.

A second complication with this idea is a matter of purpose, or lack of one. Some individuals believed that the national associations would together have a combined power that could influence university deans, provosts or even ministers of education. There was some evidence in this favour in the case of two proposals to cut positions: one in Australia, one in the US. A lobby led by Bob Bjork, director of the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and initial chair of what was originally called the Advocacy committee, had a clear beneficial effect with saving the job at the University of Tasmania. After Bob Bjork's initial term, Flocel Sabaté i Curull from Lleida took over the chairmanship, under the revised name of the 'Forum for National Associations'. Despite his best efforts it is unclear what the chairs, directors or presidents of the various associations are wanting to achieve at their meetings.

The countries regularly present in this forum include association representatives from Argentina; Australia and New Zealand; Bosnia; France; Germany, Austria and German-speaking Switzerland; the Netherlands and Flanders; Portugal; Spain; and the USA. In addition, representatives from national bodies in Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Italy, Mexico and Taiwan have attended once or more. Plus CARMEN has a representative for several years now from the Institute for World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. The UK has been represented by the director of the International Medieval Congress at Leeds; and east-central Europe by the Central European University in Budapest and its own network, lately formalised as MECERN (the Medieval Central Europe Research Network).

CARMEN therefore has relatively good coverage across the four corners of Europe. Eastern Europe is handicapped by finance because individuals find it difficult to attend meetings every year. Northern Europe has played a major role to now, but it may be that Finland will overtake Denmark as the leading player there. With the exception of Portugal and, to some extent, Spain, the involvement of southern Europe is not what it should be.

Beyond Europe, the Australasian medieval and early modern association (ANZAMEMS) and the various national research networks or projects (NEER, then CHE) have been strongly active from the outset. The Medieval Academy of America has been ever-present too, but under its new director, Lisa Fagin Davis, the institutional commitment and support is far more solid.

Flocel Sabaté devoted huge effort in getting involvement across Latin America and this has paid fruit. Argentina, Chile and Brazil are the three countries with the greatest tradition, number of scholars and students and all three countries are now actively involved. As CARMEN director, I have participated in the

Argentinian (now biennial) meeting of medievalists in Buenos Aires in September 2014, and will attend the Brazilian equivalent in July 2015.

China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan are missing, as too any representatives of medievalists from Africa and the Middle East, including Turkey. These regions should be targets for CARMEN for the coming decade.

After an initial few years when the focus was on Europe, CARMEN is now in a mind-set and position to play a role as the central meeting place for representatives of centres and associations from across the world. Challenges remain to establish a clear purpose for these gatherings, and to embrace researchers from Asia and Africa.

#### **4. Becoming a sustainable network**

##### **Founding principles**

When CARMEN was founded, two principles were enunciated: that CARMEN would be an informal network, and it would be open for all. During the first three years there was considerable discussion about how these principles would operate in practice. Participants from southern European countries argued that CARMEN must be registered with some international agency, have a constitution, membership structures and elections; otherwise it was impossible for them to get funding from their institutions or governments to participate in CARMEN meetings. But this argument implied a legal superstructure that contradicted the aim of an informal network.

But even as an informal network, CARMEN had certain costs – maintaining a website, underwriting the annual meetings (even if the host organisation bore the majority of costs), paying travel and accommodation expenses for invited speakers to the annual meetings, and supporting colleagues from countries that were strategically important but where travel funds were minimal (e.g. Russia, Latin America, parts of eastern Europe). That required funds held by CARMEN. This implied that CARMEN would have members and might contribute funds or subscription dues. But this argument contradicted the aim of a network open to all, regardless of financial contributions.

Efforts were made in the early years to compromise on the first point: by establishing a Constitution, Goals and similar, and to establish a list whereby institutions could register their membership. However, this was extremely time-consuming and generated barely a handful of registrations from Italy and Spain, who were the main proponents of this step. In other countries, deans or university administrators refused to sign such a membership document simply because it might imply a commitment that they could not quantify. This proved a dead-end exercise, and CARMEN stopped this level of formality after the annual meeting in Krems in 2009.

Since then, CARMEN has maintained a very broad circulation list of interested parties (managed by the secretary, Kateřina Horníčková), together with a working handlist of 'participating institutions and associations', loosely defined as institutions that have signed a formal membership document, or who have been active by attending annual meetings or another key activity in the last three years.



## Self-funding

At Poitiers in 2008 the annual meeting examined ways in which CARMEN might fund itself, whilst preserving free membership. Dick de Boer, then on the point of being awarded a 1.4m euro grant from the ESF proposed that projects which had been developed in association with CARMEN should pay a small amount to CARMEN's running costs. Major collaborative projects like these allowed scope for this, under budget-lines such as Dissemination Activities, Project Meetings (coincidentally held during CARMEN meetings). As a result the *Saints' Cults* project (but not *Cuius regio*) contributed 6000 euro each year for four years to CARMEN (out of its almost 1m euro grant).

Meanwhile, Dr Elizabeth Tyler at the University of York had applied for £20k of funding from the University of York and from the Worldwide Universities Network. The former was a discretionary fund from the Vice-Chancellor's Office to develop areas of expertise at York. The latter was a competitive grant from the WUN consortium of sixteen major research universities across the world. And it tied York and Bristol in the UK (both WUN members) with WUN partners in Australia (UWA, then home of the Australian Network for Early European Research), China (Zhejiang University) and Norway (Bergen, which at the time was the lead-party of a major trans-Nordic Centre for Medieval Studies). This helped CARMEN establish a proper financial structure based at York and managed by the secretary of the Centre for Medieval Studies there, Gillian Galloway. This was a two-year fixed grant, largely spent on a 20% salary for the CARMEN Director, to give the operation a firmer structure. Unfortunately, the funding bids submitted during this period were unfruitful and it coincided with a period of severe ill-health on my part, as director, so the outcomes were far less than should have been the case.

The principle of free membership has, though, been maintained. Nonetheless, since 2012 CARMEN has been making steps to a different funding model, based on voluntary contributions. This started at the Budapest annual meeting in 2012 whereby participants were asked to contribute money to cover the costs of daytime meals and refreshments which had theretofore been borne by the host institution (evening meals, travel and bed-and-breakfast had always been the financial responsibility of the individual). This principle has continued in Porto in 2013 and Stirling in 2014 and is likely to become more explicit in future.

CARMEN nonetheless needs about 6000 euro a year to cover travel bursaries, expenses for invited speakers and the half-yearly meeting of the Executive Committee, traditionally held each February in Amsterdam.

The decision was made at Porto in 2013 that CARMEN would draw up a letter inviting participating organisations to contribute as they are able, so that we can cover these 6000 euro annual running costs. Individuals too would be invited to contribute on a pay-as-able basis. A contribution of US\$1000 was made in autumn 2014 from the Medieval Academy of America, as the first such offering.

## 5. Conclusions

CARMEN's original terms of reference were to establish an informal network, open to the whole world. In those terms it has probably succeeded. If CARMEN were to be judged on different criteria, however, the judgement may be negative. Has CARMEN been transformative for medieval studies? Several important major new research centres have developed, directly or indirectly, through CARMEN. But the example of Vienna shows that dynamic individuals and centres elsewhere can develop more successfully using their own networks.

The important role of the CEU in Budapest for CARMEN is evident above. Hosts to two annual meetings, the CEU offers an unrivalled link to scholars across east-central Europe, particularly those who have been trained in ways which allow ease of communication with western scholars. The network that the CEU has itself constructed since it was founded in 1991 is a sort of multinational medieval association. It has delivered key members of CARMEN's executive (Prof. Gerhard Jaritz, since CARMEN's foundation and its Academic Director since 2009; Kateřina Horníčková who has been our secretary since 2009, and Nada Zečević on the executive since 2014). But it has drawn in participation from Russia (Moscow), Estonia (Tallinn), Croatia, Hungary and Bosnia.

CARMEN has focused resources, since its early years, on travel grants for key individuals from strategically important centres, such as Moscow, on the condition that the recipient is highly active at the annual meeting to which they are invited. Repeated encounters with the same individual leads to more regular contact and the building of trust and friendship. In the early years, CARMEN was less strategic and people who could only afford to attend CARMEN on alternate years never built up the momentum to benefit from the discussions.

The higher profile of Australasian medievalists over the past generation is remarkable. Many early-career scholars from Australia are well networked not only in English-speaking countries (UK and US) but elsewhere. A similar process may be happening in Latin America. Whilst scholars in Portugal and Spain have been aware during the past decade of the increased numbers, interest, quality and financial standing of researchers in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and elsewhere, this is beginning to be noticeable outside the Luso-Spanish world. CARMEN is taking a strategic role in opening up Latin American medieval studies to other areas.

CARMEN has made efforts to make links with Taiwan and China in particular. These have not yet borne fruit in the ways it has done elsewhere. And closer to 'home' some countries like Italy and Canada have not been represented for several years, and there is still an uneven balance in commitment across Europe.

Certain trends are evident above and are probably likely to intensify in the coming years:

- (a) Increasing competition for research funding, and greater direction from the public agencies distributing money – only the most outstanding projects may now get funded, and the level of preparation and skill required will also intensify

- (b) Greater prominence for scholarship undertaken beyond Western Europe and North America – reflecting an increasingly globalised world and one where East Asia, South Asia and Latin America will become more central
- (c) Cross-faculty research into defined ‘problems’, whereby medieval studies is just one component of the research. Cross-faculty partners might be in medicine, social sciences, creative arts and beyond.
- (d) More attention to the social or community impact of humanities research outputs, and the need to make meaningful partnerships with the community and with business.

Is CARMEN fit to meet these new challenges? Is its informal, free and open network the right model to assist medievalists face these new demands? In such a world, is there a need for a loose, global organisation like CARMEN, or will ‘interdisciplinary medieval studies’ (an organisational phenomenon dating back, more or less, to the 1960s) fracture so that individual institutions seek their salvation in entirely different ways – with Centres of Excellence, say, where medievalists are just one component?

Simon Forde, January 2015