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Science Policy Briefing • September 2011

Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities

Executive Summary

Introduction

Without Research Infrastructures (RIs) significant strands of Humanities research would not be possible. By drawing on a number of case studies the ESF Science Policy Briefing (SPB) *Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities* demonstrates that digital RIs offer Humanities scholars new and productive ways to explore old questions and develop new ones, opening the way to addressing ‘grand challenges’ in Humanities research and at the interface with other research domains.

This SPB positions itself in terms of priorities and future research directions for a common strategy on RIs in the Humanities at the European level. It is aimed at researchers and information professionals (including librarians, archivists, etc.) as well as institutions such as funding bodies, those responsible for management and administration of research organisations and RIs, selection and promotion committees. It is also addressed to faculty and curriculum accreditation committees responsible for developing courses in the area of RIs.

Work on this SPB began in early 2009 following the decision of the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH) to make RIs one of its top priorities. Having identified RIs as an area of strategic importance, the SCH set up an SCH Expert Group on RIs which has for the last two years been deeply involved in the creation of this paper. In addition, the SPB also incorporates views put forward by members of different communities involved in Humanities RIs, views expressed at the *Strategic Workshop on Research Communities and Research Infrastructures in the Humanities* organised by the SCH in October 2010 in Strasbourg. Furthermore, the report was reviewed by some of the leading experts in the field and by three anonymous referees.

Priorities for Policy and Research



State of the Art and Needs

- The production of a detailed inventory of **current research activities and future needs** in terms of infrastructural support (e.g., standards, tools, licences).
- The fostering of **partnerships** across communities and institutions (scholarly community, libraries, archives, museums, private institutions and, where appropriate, public bodies and the commercial sector) to achieve better coordination of funding and activities at European level.
- The recognition and establishment of **RI ecosystems** where multiple levels of RIs (pan-European, local, community-driven, institutional) co-exist and collaborate harmoniously. Within such ecosystems, the development of *multilingual, multimodal and multidimensional* frameworks should be supported.
- The development of **higher education programmes** and training opportunities at fundamental, intermediate and expert levels.



Physical and Digital RIs

- The constant examination of recurring, perceived and actual **challenges** in integrating physical research infrastructures in Humanities and digital research infrastructures and hence the identification of means to **bridge ‘physical’ with ‘digital’**.
- Increased support for **interdisciplinary profiles** that are able to act as ‘translators’ between Computer Science/Engineering and Humanities approaches and traditions.



Strategic Directions

- The development of RIs that build on existing communities and research questions, in order to facilitate research **beyond monodisciplinary interests** and across different communities. Infrastructures have the potential to act as ground for cross-fertilisation between the Humanities and other sciences.
- The development of RIs that connect the ‘silos’ of isolated project-based data and resources so as to reach a reliable and dynamic **correlation** across resources and data responding to the complexity of scholarly material and relevant interpretative process.
- The fostering of research programmes that identify and promote **good practices** with respect to interoperability, usability and collection curation (including sustain-

ability and preservation) within and across national boundaries.

- The development of RIs that offer **open access** to processed as well as original data, with regulation by funding agencies of public access to research sources and outcomes of publicly financed projects (*public access to publicly funded research* including permission to reuse data).
- The development of RIs in the Humanities that reach across linguistic borders and provide access to large **multilingual** datasets from different cultures to inform comparative and transnational research.
- The development of **legal instruments** (copyright regulations and relevant policies) on a national and international level in order to respond to and steer the digital environment potential according to an open access policy.
- The **sustainability** of RIs through long-term funding commitment beyond thematic or project-based models and their development.
- The deposit of data in **certified repositories**, in order to avoid in future non-accessibility or even loss of primary source materials.

Partnerships and Networking

- The establishment of partnerships and productive alliances **across communities and institutions** (scholarly community/libraries/ archives/museums and private institutions) based on equality. Cooperation agreements, joint access policies, coordination of depositing rules (as regards, notably, processed data in databases and other forms of research output) are all elements that can only be tackled by the Library, Archive and Information Studies sector and research organisations together.
- The identification of **obstacles to alliances** to date between **RIs providers** (e.g., librarians and archivists) and the academic community (e.g., potential conflict between libraries' requests for free, reusable data and researchers seeking to add value and retain recognition of their work).
- The fostering of relevant partnerships with the private sector to contribute to **innovation society** and 'smart economy' strategies with potential to foster social and economic benefits, including market innovation.
- The enhancement of the **networked dimension** of RIs (e.g., across CLARIN/DARIAH and other international infrastructures).

Academic Recognition

- The change towards a **culture** of recognition that accepts the process-oriented character of digital publications.
- The establishment of more comprehensive clearing and authoritative **mechanisms** (including peer review) to secure scholarly reliability and recognition of research across international and interdisciplinary collaborations.
- The fostering of **interdisciplinary tools and teams** where all contributing specialist roles and competences are recognised and rewarded.
- The implementation of **targeted advocacy** (e.g., for emerging cross-disciplinary fields and relevant academic recognition).

Dissemination and Outreach

- The development of RIs that have outreach built into their management plans in order to foster the emergence of a **new culture** that looks beyond established academic circles.
- The demonstration and dissemination of **scholarly results** of research products arising from/facilitated by RIs.
- The dissemination of existing models of good **community of practice** in order to provide education to researchers on how to build new and effective community infrastructures and use existing ones.

Evaluation of RIs

- The implementation of improved and agreed **systems for evaluation** of RIs.
- The expansion of current evaluation requirements to include, when appropriate, expectations associated to the development of RIs as well as to their consequent **economic and social benefits**.
- Proper recognition and credit of **interdisciplinary contributions** across research project partners by the European funding agencies and academic professional organisations.
- Proper recognition, credit and career perspectives to foster and promote a **new generation of young researchers** who will be able and willing to take on the challenges discussed in this document.

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