

DH Foresight: gleaning the future of digital methods and infrastructures for the humanities

CLARIN Annual Conference 2018 – Monday 8th October, 9.30 – 12.30

Overview

In recent years there has been rapid growth both in the development of digital methods and tools and in their application across a wide range of disciplines within the humanities and cultural heritage studies. In parallel to these developments, there have been numerous initiatives and projects at both national and international levels dedicated to the creation of more coordinated research infrastructures at different levels of subject specificity. These projects have been marshalling and integrating tools, services, technologies, policies and human resources in support of advanced research in universities, cultural heritage institutions, and other organisations. The future development of this landscape depends on a complex and dynamic ecosystem of interactions between: changing scholarly priorities, questions and methods; technological advances and new tool development; and the broader social, cultural and economic contexts within which both scholars and infrastructures are situated. A sound knowledge base is required if policy-making bodies are to 'optimise' outcomes through implementing appropriate research and innovation policies, setting research priorities, and influencing the progress of research through funding programmes and other interventions.

To this end, the Horizon 2020 project PARTHENOS is carrying out a *foresight study*¹, which is investigating how (digital) research methods, technologies and infrastructures in digital humanities and cultural heritage may develop over the next 5-10 years. It is important to understand that foresight research is not simply 'future gazing', nor is it about forecasting by experts (although experts may, and indeed should, participate). Rather, it is a way of facilitating structured thinking and debate about long-term issues and developments, and of broadening participation in this process of thinking and debate, to create a shared understanding about possible futures and to enable them to be shaped or influenced.

A key component is the participative aspect. The vision is not that of a small number of experts, but is based on engagement with and involvement of a broad range of key stakeholders, including decision- and policy-makers, but also members of the broader community, including scholars, potential users of research infrastructures, and practitioner stakeholders such as infrastructure providers, data curators, and archivists. This workshop is one of a series of structured, interactive events being organised by the PARTHENOS project over the coming year, and aims in particular to obtain valuable input for its foresight study by curating a multi-polar discussion between representatives from various EU research infrastructure initiatives, and a range of actual or potential stakeholders in those infrastructures, including (but not restricted to) user/researchers. Engaging a representative range of relevant and informed stakeholders in the dialogue extends the breadth and depth

¹ See, e.g., Georghiou, L., Cassingena, J., Keenan, M., Miles, I. and Popper, R. (Eds) (2009), *The Handbook of Technology Foresight: Concepts and Practice*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot.

of the knowledge base created by the foresight process, by drawing on distributed knowledge (different stakeholders having access to different information), and thus enriches and improves the decisions that will ultimately be made on the basis of our work.

The aim of this study is thus not *simply* to identify trends and to predict future evolution within the sector, but rather to enable the community to inform and influence this evolution by identifying research and funding strategies and interventions that can be taken forward by the various stakeholders active in the (digital) humanities landscape, including universities, research institutions, funding agencies, and research infrastructure providers. This workshop will thus feed into strategic R&D thinking within the European Commission, other funding bodies, and research organisations, and will give participants the opportunity to make their opinions known and to influence these strategic developments over the coming years, and thus to maximise the innovative potential of digital research in the humanities.

Format of Workshop

We will frame the discussion of 'foresight' in the context of this workshop by asking the following questions, and identifying:

- current trends – what is happening, and what impact is it having?
- potentialities and opportunities – what may happen?
- requirements – what do we want to happen?
- obstacles, constraints, risks and threats – what might prevent this from happening?
- what activities and interventions (e.g. funding programmes, strategic research, service provision) might serve to 'optimise' outcomes?

These trends etc. may have aspects relating to technology, to scholarly or professional practice, or to the broader 'environment' (social, cultural, economic, political, etc.), or some combination of the three.

The workshop will be introduced by a number of brief presentations (max. 10 mins) representing different stakeholders in CLARIN, and then the discussion will be opened up to the audience for questions to the speakers and general discussion. The chairs will ensure that the audience is encouraged to contribute actively, and that an inclusive environment is created in which multiple viewpoints and opinions may be canvassed.