

# DH Foresight: informing the future of methods and infrastructures

Mark Hedges \* <sup>1</sup>, David Stuart \* <sup>2</sup>

George Tzedopoulos <sup>3</sup>, Vicky Garnett <sup>4</sup>, Sheena Bassett \* <sup>5</sup>

Claus Spiecker \* <sup>6</sup>

Maurizio Sanesi <sup>7</sup>, Roberta Giacomi <sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> King's College London – United Kingdom

<sup>2</sup> King's College London – United Kingdom

<sup>3</sup> Academy of Athens – Greece

<sup>4</sup> Trinity College Dublin – Ireland

<sup>5</sup> PIN – Italy

<sup>6</sup> FH Potsdam – Germany

<sup>7</sup> SISMEI – Italy

## 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 data, 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 has carried out a *foresight study*, investigating how (digital) research methods, technologies and infrastructures in digital humanities and cultural heritage may develop in the short to medium term. 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

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\*Speaker

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.

The aim of this study was 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 study 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 the Study**

Over the last year, the foresight study team has organised a series of structured, interactive workshops to obtain input for study 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 extended the breadth and depth 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 may ultimately be made on the basis of our work. These events were supplemented by a series of interviews with key actors representing different career backgrounds and levels.

We framed the discussion of ‘foresight’ in this study 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 data gathered was encoded to produce a ‘knowledge base’ of data about DH foresight.

## The Proposed Meeting

The meeting will be introduced by a number of brief presentations, but the aim of the meeting is to be interactive, with discussion opened up to the audience. 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. Depending on the number of attendees, the chairs may decide to organise a number of parallel break-out groups. The meeting will address the foresight study from several angles:

- **Dissemination:** Presenting the results of the foresight study to date [Note: this is of particular relevance to the event, as the proposed meeting follows on from the foresight workshop organised at the DARIAH event in Paris in 2018].
- **The Hub:** Demonstrating the use of the PARTHENOS Hub, using the Foresight Issue as a case study, both as a dissemination channel and as part of the sustainability agenda for the study [Note: the Hub is a concept that was originally proposed by the DARIAH project *Humanities at Scale*].
- **Feeding back:** capturing feedback on the results of the study, and contributing by open discussion and break-out groups to their further development and refining.
- **Sustainability:** Setting up the foresight study as a dynamic and sustainable body of knowledge. Foresight does not end at the formal end of the study, but is conceptualised as an ongoing process, not only in terms of dissemination by continual monitoring the changing landscape and updating the results of the study. The Hub will be a locus for capturing this information, but in this (and other) meetings over the next six months we intend to initiate the creation of sustainable networks of foresight research by embedding stakeholders with ‘foresight interests’ within research and education organisations.

**Keywords:** foresight, data, infrastructures