

## ESF Science Policy Briefing 42

# *Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities*

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# The Historical Background of SPB42

- work on this report begun in early 2009 following the decision of the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH) to make RIs in the Humanities one of its top priorities
- the SCH set up the SCH Expert Group on RIs (led by professor Claudine Moulin) in 2009
- the SPB42 builds on already existing documents pertaining to RI in the Humanities and especially on the report compiled by an earlier SCH 'Vision Group on RIs' which met during 2007
- Strategic Workshop on Research Communities and Research Infrastructures in the Humanities
  - organised by the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities and RI Expert Group
  - October 2010, Strasbourg
- experts contributing to the SPB42
  - 24 from Europe and the US with their knowledge and expertise
  - 15 from Europe and Japan gave invaluable input in wider consultation process
  - the final document was revised after comments from external peer reviewers



# Urgent science policy issues for RIs in Humanities in SPB42

- six main topics covered
  - recording the state of art and needs
  - integrating physical and digital RIs
  - following strategic directions
  - support partnerships and networking
  - reaching academic recognition
  - disseminating information
- a number of case studies intertwined
  - examples of research activities reflecting the particular issue

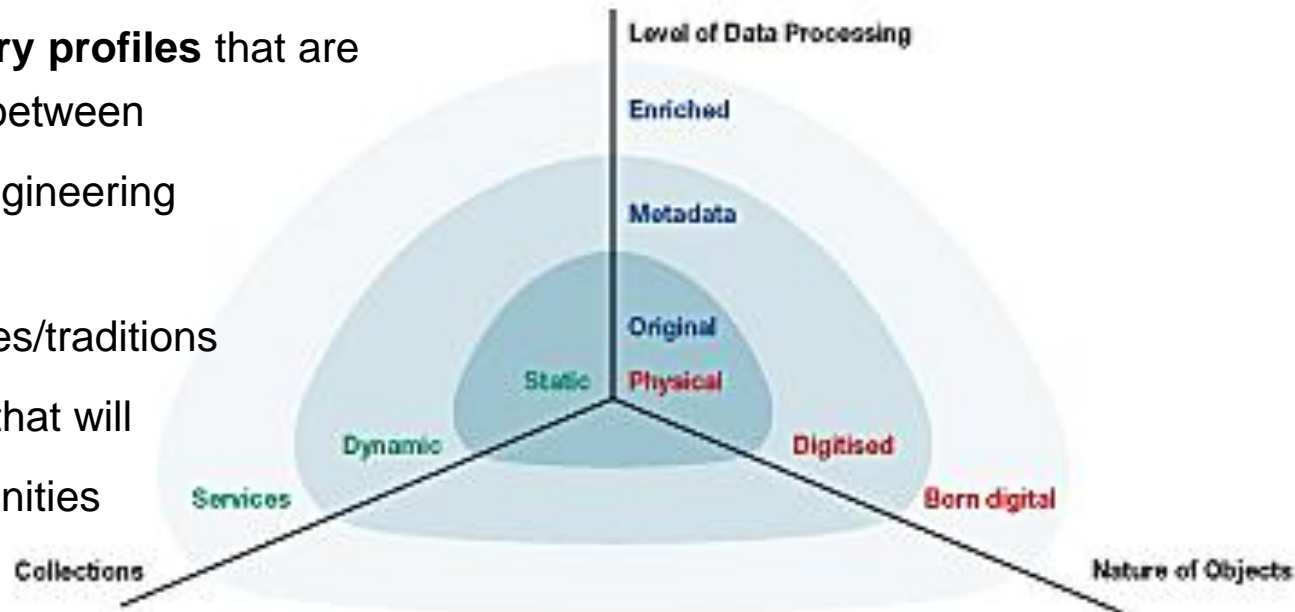
# The State of Art and Needs

- detailed inventory of **current research activities and future needs** in terms of infrastructural support (e.g., standards, tools, licences)
  - MERIL project (<http://www.meril.eu>)
  - covering all scientific fields, but defining closely
    - categories of RI relevant for Humanities (collections, archives, resources, facilities...)
    - transversal RI categories (conceptual models, GIS info, timeline info, visualisation...)
- fostering **partnerships** across different communities and institutions
  - better coordination of funding and activities at European level covering
    - scholarly community, libraries, archives, museums, private institutions
    - public bodies, commercial sector
- recognition and establishment of **RI ecosystems** where multiple levels of co-exist and collaborate harmoniously
  - pan-European, national or local
  - community-driven or institutional



# Physical and Digital RIs

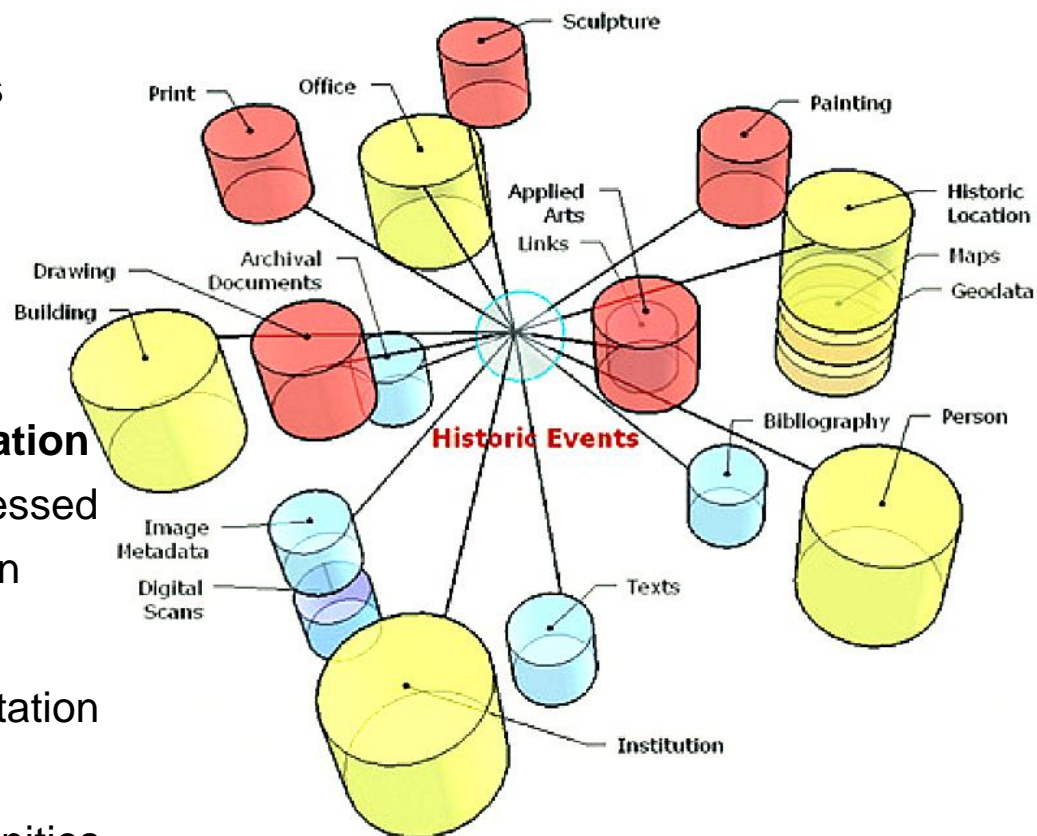
- actual **challenges** in integrating
  - physical RI and digital RI
    - physical and digital objects collections
    - definition, preservation, maintaining, accessing
  - identification of means to bridge ‘physical’ with ‘digital’
- support for **interdisciplinary profiles** that are able to act as ‘translators’ between
  - Computer Science/Engineering approaches/traditions
  - Humanities approaches/traditions
- educating **young experts** that will
  - use future RI in Humanities
  - maintain future RI in Humanities



A set of concurrent criteria for defining the RI in Humanities

# Partnerships and Networking

- establishment of **partnerships/alliances** across communities and institutions
  - scholarly community
  - public libraries/archives/museums
  - private institutions
- **access policies** (e.g. OA, PA), **coordination of depositing rules** (primary data, processed data, research output) are issues that can only be tackled jointly by
  - digital libraries + archives/documentation centres + information sciences
  - research organisations in the Humanities
- relevant partnerships with the **private sector** to contribute to
  - innovation society and 'smart economy' strategies
  - social and economic benefits, including market innovation



Simplified data model, showing entities interconnected by 'historic event' relations



# Digital Research in the Humanities: who is responsible for RIs?

- with smartphones it is common for the general user to choose across thousands of standardised apps for special purposes. Similar facilities in the Digital Humanities?
  - established standards are rare
  - researcher may lack a critical mass of digital data and material
  - still few incentives in academia to undertake digital research
- urgent need for
  - standards for metadata
  - organisation and interlinking of data and texts (e.g. semantic web)
  - OA, PA publishing in text and data repositories

5 stages of the humanistic research process

## Data collection

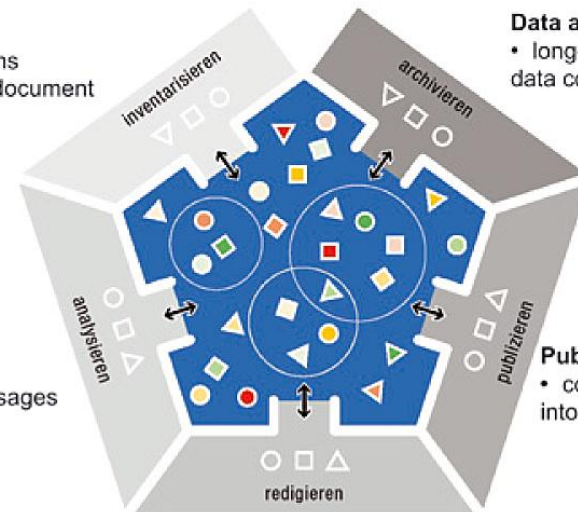
- context related forms for different types of document

## Data analysis

- annotating text passages with meta data

## Data archiving

- long-term preservation of all data contained in the system



## Publishing

- converting the edited texts into print or online publications

## Publishing preparation

- collaborative system supports the editorial process

INF-Project Research Network and Database System (FuD)  
– CRC 600 Strangers and Poor People

# Who is responsible for RIs?

- current challenges in Digital Humanities
  - digital research is mainly project driven: small scattered groups, short timescales
  - digital data and documents are volatile: they need long-term preservation (e.g. PIDs)
  - digital objects must be available to be consulted for a long period: they need institutions responsible for maintaining them for future generations of researchers
- every researcher in the Humanities in Europe must be assured of finding a service provider for
  - their digital research activities
  - short-term accessibility
  - long-term preservation of data and publications
- key dimension to the this objective
  - concept of a Europe-wide RI for Humanities with strong (virtual) centres (e.g. like in CLARIN-ERIC or DARIAH project)
  - designed to support the development, promotion and implementation of shared protocols and standards



# Conclusions about SPB42

- the first overview of the state of art of RI in the Humanities from wide-perspective
  - positions the Digital Humanities research based on existing and future RI
- the first overview of issues that have to be addressed, geared towards
  - funding agencies
    - recognising the importance of RI in the Humanities
  - academia
    - triggering off research potentials existing in usage of RI in the Humanities



# Recommendations for the future development of MERIL: a view from the Humanities

- the MERIL/MOFRI will
  - develop recommendations on requirements for RI
  - study the merits and applicability of the European legal framework for RI proposed by the EC
- there is a need to maintain the inventory of national research infrastructures with European and global significance
- specific requirement for data bases and repositories as RIs
  - substantially different from other types of RIs
  - might require special attention
- this is paralleling the outcome of the MERIL/MOFRI/ESFRI workshop on European relevance
  - where it was found that for the physical and digital RI's in the SSH further discussion is needed



# Recommendations for the future development of MERIL: a view from the Humanities

- the present input to MERIL of SSH should be seen as
  - an initial, pilot attempt
- in the future development of MERIL special attention should be paid to SSH introducing
  - finer criteria regarding both physical and digital RIs in SSH
  - a bridge between physical and digital Ris



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