NeDIMAH final Network Conference

"Beyond The Digital Humanities"
Senate House, University of London
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Organisers

Professor Lorna Hughes, School of Advanced Study, University of London
Professor Andrew Prescott, University of Glasgow and Leadership Fellow for Digital
Transformations theme, Arts and Humanities Research Council.

**The event was co-sponsored by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research
Council Digital Transformations theme.**

Abstract

Hosted by the School of Advanced Study, University of London, and held at Senate House in
central London, this was final event of the ESF-funded Network for Digital Methods in the
Arts and Humanities (NeDiMAH.eu) which has been chaired by the UK from 2011-15. The
event reviewed the lessons that have emerged from the work of NeDiMAH and other
current initiatives in the UK and elsewhere, and looked forward to key emerging challenges
and opportunities in and around the digital humanities.

Some commentators argue that we are now in a 'post-digital era', in which we are coming to
terms with the effects of the changes associated with the rise of the PC and network
technologies in the 1990s. Within the arts and humanities, digital methods were initially
developed and deployed by a relatively small community, but they are now becoming more
mainstream and can no longer be treated as separate specialised activities. Moreover,
research questions, primary materials and interfaces are now becoming increasingly
intertwined, which among other things means a shift in emphasis from the presentation to
interpretative tools. As a result of these and other developments, while digital humanities
has become increasingly popular and influential as an academic subject area, its relationship
to more orthodox academic disciplines and creative practice looks increasingly complex and
unclear.

This day built on the work undertaken by NeDiMAH and elsewhere to consider and identify
future potential links and connections which will help develop the vision of a digitally
transformed arts and humanities. It considered the relationship between policy, research
and practice in this area and examined its potential contribution to such current grand
challenges as creative cities, cultural heritage, big data and the relationship to new forms of
science.

PROGRAMME

9.30: Introductions and overview

9.45-10.45: Keynote: Lucy Kimbell (University of Brighton), Open Policy Making in a Digital
World: Opportunities and Possibilities for Academic Research

10.45-11.15: Coffee

11.15-12.30: Roundtable on creativity and cultural heritage: Alessio Assonitis (The Medici Archive Project, Florence), Helle Porsdam (University of Copenhagen), Jon Pratty (independent digital producer), Teal Triggs (Royal College of Art)

12.30-13.30: Lunch

13.30-14.30: Keynote: Brett Bobley (National Endowment for the Humanities), The Trans-Atlantic Platform and New International Collaborative Initiatives for Exploring Data. Chair: Susan Schreibman (Maynooth University)

14.30-15.45: Roundtable on new forms of data and collaboration. Chair: Sean Ryder (NUI Galway, Chair of HERA): Keri Facer (University of Bristol), Jacqueline Hicks (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies), Catherine Moriarty (University of Brighton) Jessica Parland von Essen (University of Helsinki)

15.45-16.15: Coffee

16.15-17.30: Roundtable: Genres of scholarly knowledge and production: Lorna Hughes (School of Advanced Study, University of London, NeDiMAH Chair), Andrew Prescott (University of Glasgow), Barry Smith (School of Advanced Study, University of London), Patrik Svensson (Umeå University), Milena Zic-Fuchs (Zagreb University, European Science Foundation)

18.00 Reception

Scientific summary

The framework for the event was the NeDiMAH Network, its activities and outputs, and how the research developed by NeDiMAH can be situated in the wider 'post-digital' era. What is the impact of the digital humanities: not just on research, but on policy, on creativity, cultural heritage, and genres of scholarly knowledge production? How is the rich landscape of the digital humanities, with its emphasis on collaboration, trans-national work, and interdisciplinary effecting transformations in the production of knowledge?

This event was an important international activity to showcase these themes, building on NeDiMAH's programme of activities and collaborative
research forum to investigate the use of digital methods in arts and humanities research. NeDiMAH has explored key areas of theory and practice in a number of methodological areas, including: the analysis of time and space, visualization,
linked data, large scale data analysis, editing, manuscript imaging, temporal modeling, and scholarly communications. The reach of these activities has been documented visually in a series of maps of digital humanities activities across Europe:

http://www.nedimah.eu/content/events-maps, and http://www.nedimah.eu/content/map

Through our activities, the Network has been able to get a sense of the diversity of practice of digital humanities around Europe, and to understand and demonstrate the collaborative and trans-national nature of digital humanities, and to demonstrate the integration of digital approaches into all aspects of the research lifecycle. Our objective has been to understand better the impact that digital methods have had on transforming scholarship in the arts and

humanities, and the potential for extending the benefits of digital research to the creative industries, the commercial sector, and public policy and planning. Collaboration has been key: with scientific and technical disciplines; with data science; with libraries, archives and museums; with existing European research infrastructures including CLARIN (clarin.eu) and DARIAH (daraiah.eu), and with commercial entities. The very complexity of the digital environment means that individual researchers and small groups are less able to exploit it effectively, so collaborative models are emerging as the norm.

As we look forward 'beyond the digital humanities', the evidence gathered by NeDiMAH is an excellent basis for understanding the impact of core elements of current digital research: the seamless integration of data, and a critical engagement with its management and preservation as part of the humanities research life-cycle; the ability to scale up (and down) while working with heterogeneous data from diverse sources; skills for the critical analysis and interpretation of data created locally, and by commercial entities; and the experience of embedding digital scholarship in cultural contents, and those that promote widest public engagement.

At a time when attempts to define the digital humanities can be contentious, NeDiMAH has provided a powerful example that the digital humanities is essentially understood through practice, and that a critical framework for digital research within the 'big tent' of digital humanities must be based on a reflection of the diverse and rich work carried out to date.

This will be the basis for future knowledge production in the humanities that takes advantage of digital tools, methods and content. Our main output has been the NeDiMAH Methods Ontology (NeMo, nedimah.dcu.gr), a formal expression of the practice of digital humanities that explores this richness and complexity, and provides a valuable resource for critical and peer review of digital outputs. It also demonstrates directly the scholarly ecosystem that underlies digital research in the arts and humanities as a distinctive intellectual practice with considerable impact within and without the Academy

These key themes were all addressed at the meeting. The opening keynote speaker, Lucy Kimball, of the University of Brighton but currently seconded to the UK Cabinet Office, discussed the potential relationship of digital humanities to policy making. Digital humanities research topics, such as open data, large scale data analysis, cognitive and behavioural science, new modes of engagement and data gathering, and social media analysis are all areas that could be central to the development of public policy, and it is important that the research developed in these areas, and its transferrable impact, is highly visible to all communities that can benefit from it. There is a landscape of open policy making that is deeply invested in using open data (see for example the work of @PolicyLabUK). Digital humanities has a role to play, thanks to the development of expertise in framing research questions, research processes, and developing and using research methods and tools, for analysis and interpretation, visualization, and modeling and representing historical change. The humanities values of criticality, historical perspectives, ethics, and an agnostic multi-disciplinarity are key.

These themes were picked up throughout the conference. The second keynote speaker, Brett Bobbley from the NEH Office of Digital Humanities specifically highlighted the underlying infrastructures that can enable digital humanities to have a wider impact, with a reminder that infrastructures are about human connections and communications, not just technology.

Other presentations emphasised how much digital humanities has to offer other communities and agendas: not just policy, but commerce, creativity, and other industrial and scientific communities. This is thanks to the following key strengths we see in digital humanities: the emergence of a dynamic, distributed local set of knowledge practices leading to engaged, experimental scholarship; the co-creation of knowledge, and its unfolding within, and in relation to, public issues; the development of real interdisciplinarity and internationalism, and the development of expertise across domains.

Facing the Future

The conference clearly showed how NeDiMAH has been extremely successful in building up the case for the digital humanities. In a period when the landscape that surrounds research cultures across the disciplines has shifted dramatically, the impact and importance of digital humanities methods and approaches is increasingly apparent. NeDiMAH has made clear the inter/multi/trans-disciplinarity at the heart of digital humanities. Other narratives within digital humanities remain challenges: the question of knowledge preservation, and the semantic web and ontologies that are needed to make meaningful digital data.

The work continues, and the research forum of digital humanities practitioners supported by NeDiMAH from 2011-15 will continue to address these and other essential questions as we move beyond the 'digital humanities' into 'digital research' and finally, just 'research'. Now that NeDiMAH funding has ended, the challenge for the Chairs and Steering Committee is to work to obtain funding from other sources to continue to develop this vital networking that has been so successful in presenting a trans-national approach to understanding the impact and value of the digital humanities, and in documenting the digital scholarly ecosystem.

Related material

Website for the event: http://www.nedimah.eu/events/beyond-digital-humanities-final-network-event

Storify of Tweets from the event: https://storify.com/NeDiMAH/getting-started

Lorna Hughes: presentation given at the event:
http://lornamhughes.blogspot.co.uk/2015/05/genres-of-scholarly-knowledge-and.html

A high-quality brochure was produced for the event, with detailed information on presentations. This was distributed at the event in hard copy, and a free web version is available from the NeDiMAH website: http://www.nedimah.eu/sites/default/files/nedimah-booklet-final-copy-v11-for-web.pdf