# Promoting diversity and inclusivity in Digital Humanities in Ireland and the UK

**Fourth discussion paper of the UK-Ireland DH Network**

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**Table of Contents**

# I. Introduction

**Description**
This is the fourth discussion paper produced by the UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network in consultation with the wider Digital Humanities (DH) Community in the two countries and beyond. It summarises the findings of the fourth workshop organised by the network, and offers recommendations based on these findings.

**The UK-Ireland DH Network**
The UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network is an AHRC/IRC-funded project (2020-21) to undertake research and consultation towards the implementation of a permanent DH association for the UK and Ireland. The project is led by the UK PI Professor Jane Winters (School of Advanced Study, University of London, UK), and Irish PI Dr. Michelle Doran (Trinity Centre of Digital Humanities, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland); the full list of project members and participating institutions can be found on the Network's website (https://dhnetwork.org/team).

As part of the Network project a series of workshops, discussions, surveys, reports and consultations are being conducted in order to formulate recommendations that will inform the future of the UK-Ireland DH Network. The planned impact of the Network project is described at
https://dhnetwork.org/about/.

The aim of this document is to present the findings and recommendations of the fourth Network workshop, organised by Trinity College Dublin on the topic of inclusion and diversity in and for Digital Humanities in the UK and Ireland.

**The Workshop and Discussions**
The fourth event of the AHRC-funded UK-Ireland DH Network was entitled "Who has Access to the Digital Humanities?  Diversity and Inclusivity in DH in Ireland and the UK."  The day-long workshop was organised by the Trinity College Dublin Centre for Digital Humanities and was held online via Zoom on the 22nd of October 2021.

205 people registered for the event on Eventbrite. The number of participants on the Zoom call varied throughout the day but peaked at over 70 simultaneous attendees.

The programme of the workshop can be found in "Workshop Overview" (part III, below) and on the project website (https://dhnetwork.org/events/event-4/). The workshop's main themes will be discussed in "Workshop Highlights" (part IV, below).

**Methodology**
In the analysis leading to the present report, the authors drew upon ideas and opinions

expressed in the contents of the workshop's presentations; correspondence with presenters, panel chairs and 'critical friends' before and after the event; and participants' notes from the workshop.

## II. Issues

**The objective of the event was to contribute to the development of a UK-Ireland DH Network by drawing out from the community examples of principles and practices that might be adopted so as to ensure any future network could be open and appropriately broadly defined, avoiding potential biases toward certain conceptualisations of DH, which could be seen as exclusive or elitist.**

As per the Call for Participation issued for the event:

*"One of the dreams of information and communication technologies is that of equitable and open access to information, to services, and to opportunities. We know, of course, that this is only true on the surface, and that technological systems tend to recreate the inequities of the cultures and societies that build them. As such, the dream of the digital humanities as a 'big tent' (that is, capacious, broad and inclusive) is also one that we need to constantly query and challenge if the field is to have a claim to being inclusive and diverse.*

*This is a particularly pressing issue as we explore the potential for a regional DH network to support the use and promotion of DH methods in the UK and Ireland. We would therefore like to ask our growing community to co-create an event on the state of inclusivity in DH in our countries, and how we might actively strive to improve from this baseline."*

The programme committee wanted to solicit presentations addressing the many forms in which barriers to access might appear, as the only way to address them is to surface and discuss them. For this reason, the programme committee sought submissions addressing the broadest possible interpretation of disinclusion, based on ageism, racism, classism, sexism or ableism; geography, culture, or ethnicity; hidden behind the availability or accessibility of data, funding, software, infrastructures, or the languages we use; manifesting as closed opportunities, labour or reward inequities, or well-meaning inclusivity measures that trivialise or tokenise certain kinds of experience. In particular, the committee welcomed submissions that point not only toward the problems, but profile good practice examples and measures we might take as a network.

This call was intended to reach students, early career researchers, activists, community workers, or any who do or would engage in DH/online practices, methodologies and spaces etc., and who would have an interest in shared practice, open exchange, or to showcase their work. Submissions could therefore be from individuals, teams or pairs of collaborators having experienced successful or failed attempts to be a part of the DH community, or representative groups from different sectors. The programme committee particularly tried to encourage non-academic contributions, and indeed those representing the voices of people who would like to access DH but who could not for various reasons. As a UK/Irish network, however, we did

choose to highlight experiences either tied to the specificities of this geographical space, or offering reflections relevant to our future development.

## III. Workshop Overview

Link to workshop page: https://dhnetwork.org/events/event-4/

The programme committee encouraged potential participants to propose a form to follow their function. The workshop was ultimately structured around three panels: "Digital Humanities and Access to Cultural Heritage," "Access to Places and Spaces; Networks and Communities," and "Structuring for Inclusivity." Each panel had between three and five speakers who were each given between five and fifteen minutes to present their position on the topic. These presentations were followed by an open discussion facilitated by the panel chair, each of whom was recruited from outside of the group of investigators named on the UK/Ireland Network grant. Because some proposers suggested larger formats for their presentations, we also held three lunchtime breakout sessions of 45 minutes each: one workshop, one demonstration and one panel session.

**Programme**

**Virtual event: 22nd October, 2021, 9:30AM-3:30PM.**
**Convened by the UK/IE Digital Humanities Network event**

09:30 Welcome to the event, Jennifer Edmond

09:45 - 11:00 Session 1: Digital Humanities and Access to Cultural Heritage
Moderator: Lisa Griffith, Digital Repository of Ireland

Presentations:

| Tinashe Mushakavanhu | African Digital Humanities and Archiving Gaps | 10 minute presentation |
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| Adam Stoneman and Paul Mulholland | Making cultural participation and citizen curation accessible | 10 minute presentation / demonstration taster session |
| Valeria Carrillo Garza | The COVID19 crisis and small museums in the UK | 10 minute presentation |
| Kyle Ramsy | Accessibility in virtual heritage reconstructions | 5 minute presentation |
| Kenna Hernly | The Museum Challenge | 5 minute provocation |
| Discussion | >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> | 35 minutes |

11:00 - 11:30 COFFEE break

11:30 - 12:45  Session 2: Access to Places and Spaces; Networks and Communities
Moderator: Rianna Walcott, Kings College London

Presentations:

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| Samya Brata Roy | Making Networking Accessible for Early Career Researchers | 8 minute presentation |
| Nabeel Siddiqui | Travelling through DH: what Big Tent? | 8 minute presentation |
| Anna Maria Sichani and Tiago Garcia Sousa | 'So close, yet so far away': European DH professionals in post-Brexit Britain | 8 minute panel taster session |
| Nicholas Bowskill | Post-Autonomy and 'Groups in the Mind'<br>This taster session will highlight the post-pandemic shift to interdependency and the 'classroom' as a psychological entity. In preparation, participants are invited to add a song to the shared 'Digital Humanities for Christmas' playlist on Spotify via the link below. The relevance of the activity will be addressed in the session.<br>https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1l18ZZz3nCzuaX7wAzNeNu | 8 minute workshop taster session |
| Vicky Garnett | Accessibility Lessons from Lockdown | 8 minute presentation |
| Discussion | >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> | 35 minutes |

12:45 - 2:00  LUNCH Break

1:15 - 2:00 Lunchtime Breakout sessions.

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| Adam Stoneman | SPICE curation platform demonstration and workshop<br><br>This session will introduce the SPICE Platform for citizen curation as an example of how a technology can be used to support a wide and diverse public to actively participate in cultural heritage and share their own stories and perspectives.  This session will include a practical workshop element in which participants use the software to create and share interpretation activities using artworks from the IMMA (Irish Museum of Modern Art) Collection. This will provoke a group discussion on how DH methods can be used to extend the practice of curation of cultural heritage in an inclusive and diverse |

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| | way. |
| Anna-Maria Sichani and Tiago Garcia Sousa | 'So close, yet so far away': European DH professionals in post-Brexit Britain.<br><br>Speakers:<br>**Arianna Ciula** (King's Digital Lab), "My experience in the move: some facts, politics and emotions"<br>**Agiati Benardou** (DCU/ATHENA R.C, Athens), "Goodbye Ruby Tuesday: EU research in DH after Brexit"<br>**David J. Amelang** (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), "¿Digital What?: Forging a Career Path in DH and Academia in Post-Brexit Europe"<br>**Martina Delucchi** (University of Bristol), "What now? Prospects for Early Career Researchers"<br>**Gabriele Salciute Civiliene** (King's College London), "Institutional DH and The Politics of Hypercollective Epistemic Goods" |
| Nicholas Bowskill | SharedThinking and 'Making Groups Visible' Workshop.<br><br>This broader session will expand the taster session to consider the pedagogical challenge and opportunities created by the shared, collectivist and Constructionist task of 'making groups visible'. In preparation, participants are invited to add a pin to the shared online map (no account needed) and answer the question about initial concerns to do with online learning and teaching at the start of the pandemic. The relevance of the activity will be addressed in the session.<br>https://canvis.app/aQzR8C |

2:00 - 3:15 Session 3: Structuring for Inclusivity
Moderator: Alex Gil, Columbia University

Presentations:

| Kristen Schuster | Gender, Labour and Personal Information Spaces. | 15 minute presentation |
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| Chris Houghton | Bringing DH to the Masses | 15 minute presentation |
| Sharon Webb | The Sussex Humanities Lab | 15 minute presentation |
| Discussion | >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> | 30 minutes discussion |

3:15 - 3:30 Closing Remarks, Charlotte Tupman

Speaker bio notes from the event appear in Section VII below.

8

## IV. Workshop Highlights

What follows is an attempt to document the insights gathered through and the methods used by the UK/Ireland DH Network in general, and this event in particular. It should not be read as an attempt to make an authoritative, all-encompassing statement on diversity and inclusivity in the digital humanities, but rather as an exploration, based upon a partial view of what we recognise as a large and complex intersection of issues and drivers.

### Before the Workshop: Process Insights

The UK/IE Network team recognised from an early point their own limitations in terms of inclusivity. It is imbalanced in terms of seniority (skewing toward established researchers) and gender (skewing female), and does not include any members who self-identify as disabled or as people of colour. Although our experiences in other organisations and countries have made us aware of some of the challenges and good practices for fostering inclusivity 'from the top down,' we did feel that we could not credibly design a workshop on this subject as we had previous ones.

In order to create an open and inclusive event within the limits of the network context, we developed and applied the following process criteria:

1. Populate the workshop via an open call, so as to avoid the biases inherent in a committee driven recruitment of speakers.
2. Ensure within that call that we invite not only thematic proposals, but also suggestions of the most appropriate format and scope for a given intervention. We also asked potential participants to flag any concerns they might have and measures they would like to see implemented so as to ensure they would feel comfortable and safe in their participation.
3. Ask external experts able to speak for communities we might want to include to review our call for participation and flag any gaps, biases or drawbacks.
4. Accept all proposals submitted for the programme, even those the UK/IE Network Team might feel a little uncomfortable about, co-creating a truly crowd-sourced format and content within the limits of the audiences the network publicity could reach.
5. To ensure expert, strong, sensitive and well-supported panel chairing and to be sensitive in the timing of sessions to facilitate participants in other time zones.
6. To set clear ground rules for our meeting regarding dignity and respect of all participants (based loosely on the [Iowa State Ground Rules for the Discussion of White Fragility](#)).

### Structure of the Workshop

Given the approach we decided to take to letting the community define what inclusivity might look at, the three thematic panels that emerged did not necessarily reflect any preconceived notions of what inclusivity 'meant' (including - or not excluding - whom? for what purpose? In what ways?). Three potential answers of definitions to these questions are implied by the nature of the submissions, however.

9

The three panels were as follows:

Panel 1: "Digital Humanities and Access to Cultural Heritage" was populated largely by representatives of cultural heritage institutions and projects.  This group featured the opportunities and limitations inherent in the intersection of DH, cultural heritage and the users of these institutions and collections.

Panel 2: "Access to Places and Spaces; Networks and Communities," was populated largely by individuals able to speak to specific barriers experienced by potentially marginalised individuals and groups, who might feel disincluded on the basis of ability, nationality, career stage, race or other aspect.  It also included some presentations on how such exclusive practices might be addressed.

Panel 3: "Structuring for Inclusivity," gathered together macro-level responses to the problems of building for inclusivity: one from industry, one from the perspective of a research Centre and one from the perspective of a research project.

**Findings of the Workshop**

Access and inclusion can mean many different things to different people and groups.  Those with privilege need to ensure they are **listening openly and proactively** to voices that might be less pronounced in the community.

There exists a tension between the nomadic, **global nature of DH**, and of knowledge creation generally, and the desire to organise (and fund) activities nationally or regionally.  Networks, like science, should be as open as possible and as closed as necessary.  The cost of borders is a high one, paid in constrained careers, narrow perspectives and sustained biases.

Although we may tend to look more at the room there is to improve DH in terms of accessibility and inclusivity, it is important to remember that, done right, **digital methods can themselves be important engines for inclusivity and access**, for example when they are used to open up heritage collections or as a foundation for pedagogy.

The **paradox of hierarchies and classification** is that they may be practically necessary, but they create limitations for some that can be hard to overcome at a later date.  That can be seen in particular at some of the informal edges of the wider digital humanities community, manifest in practices such as **professional networking** or the assignment and reward of **invisible labour**.

The project of opening up DH is one that **engages every level in the wider DH ecosystem**, from the companies we rely on for data and tools, to centres forging new ways to configure research and researchers, to research projects and individuals informing our understanding of the issues with pioneering work, or by acting as advocates for their colleagues

**Gaps and Potential Blindspots**

In the course of the interactions that have shaped this report on the issue and workshop, a few issues have been raised that should be given greater consideration in the future. They include some of the following: Accessibility and design, in particular in terms of optimisation for phone-based delivery of content given the ubiquity of access to smartphones vs. tablet/laptop/desktop ownership in some communities); access to networks, not just for ECRs, but also more broadly, in service to exploring audiences and understanding them and their needs better; Curation by public, groups, communities, such as within an indigenous context, where there is a requirement to be able to contribute but also to limit access to wider public. This may impact platform and metadata model design etc.

## V. Recommendations

- Access to networking in particular within the academic community should be structured more equitably, and indeed included as a necessary skill in ECR-facing curricula. Otherwise, there is a risk of perpetuating a bias in professional advancement that privileges certain personality or neurological types, or sustaining systemic backhanded oppression.
- It is important to offer space within the network to debate DH methods in light of issues around access to heritage and of responsibilities in creating, remediating and processing cultural, social and historical content
- It is important to offer space within the network to debate and expose issues around labour inequality emerging from DH methods, history and contexts and offer opportunities to advocate for alternative models
- Institutional experiences (e.g. the Sussex model), informed by personal, political (e.g. post-Brexit UK and Ireland) and ethical contexts provide excellent models and practice evidence that can be used to sustain a more inclusive network
- Discussion is important, but concrete measures, such as mentoring for ECRs or monitoring for participation patterns, must also be taken.
- Inclusivity requires taking the time to engage, eg. with participants ahead of an event. The tendency to implement first and then react and "add" or throw in a diversity policy can never lead to optimal outcomes. Inclusion requires taking time and trying to get it right from the start.
- In forming any network for the Digital Humanities in the UK and Ireland, the convenors will need to ensure that inclusivity lies at its heart, not as a task to be completed, but as a value to be ever present in its processes and products. The network should commit to progressing this discussion over the coming years through a sustained, proactive, and action-oriented commitment. It should use its position of centrality to give voice to minorities in its midst, engaging and connecting the dots on the basis of shared approaches and interests.

## VI. References, and Points of Reference

Provisional Semantics Project: https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/provisional-semantics

Iowa State Ground Rules on White Fragility:
https://instr.iastate.libguides.com/c.php?g=869437&p=6240385

Intersectionality in the Digital Humanities
https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9781641890502/intersectionality-in-digital-humanities

Towards a Diversity Stack
https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/pmla/article/abs/toward-a-diversity-stack-digital-humanities-and-diversity-as-technical-problem/E35C3BDF717AC8E026DC537C0BBB89BE

IFTE Network
http://ifte.network

## VII.  Event Speaker Bio Notes

*This is the list of speakers as advertised.  For various reasons, not all speakers listed were actually able to participate on the day of the workshop.*

Samya Brata Roy is a PhD student in HSS at IIT Jodhpur. His interests lie around digital narratives, materiality, pedagogy and accessibility. He is associated with dhdharti.in, The Canterbury Tales Project, ach.org and is the founder of Electronic Literature India (@ELitIndia).

Adam Stoneman has developed digital engagement programmes at The Hunt Museum, Limerick Museum and Limerick City Gallery of Art. With a background in Art History, he is interested in the ways technology can be used to widen access to and participation in culture and heritage.

Dr Paul Mulholland, Senior Research Fellow, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics, The Open University

Nicholas Bowskill is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and Part-time Senior Lecturer in Education (University of Derby Online Learning) at University of Derby. His research interests relate to technology-supported pedagogy, teaching from home, Constructionist theory, and generative digital practices.

Tinashe Mushakavanhu is a Junior Research Fellow in African and Comparative Literature at St Anne's College, University of Oxford.

Chris Houghton is Head of Digital Scholarship for Gale. As such, he collaborates with academics, departments, libraries and institutions around the world to develop, support and integrate Gale Digital Scholar Lab for the benefit of the whole academic community.

Valeria Carillo Garza is a cultural heritage conservator from Mexico. Graduated with honours from the National School of Conservation, Restoration and Museum Studies. Participated in

conservation projects ranging from archaeological artifacts to novohispanic art. Now completing MSc in Digital Heritage at University of York and investigating how COVID-19 impacted digital practice for small museums in the UK. Research interests include digital preservation and museum activism.

Dr Sharon Webb is a Lecturer in Digital Humanities at the University of Sussex, History Department and a joint Director of the Sussex Humanities Lab. She is a co-founder of the 'Feminist Approaches to Computational Technology' Network (FACT) and a PI on the AHRC-IRC funded project 'Full Stack Feminism in Digital Humanities'.

Kyle Ramsy is a 3D generalist who has recently graduated from MSc Heritage Visualisation at Glasgow School of Art. Kyle's current practise focuses on the uses of acoustics in cultural heritage contexts. Using game design technology to create interactive soundscapes that allow the user to engage with the virtual environment and its sonotopes.

Dr. Nabeel Siddiqui is an Assistant Professor of Digital Media at Susquehanna University. His research focuses on the digital humanities, the history of computing, and information studies. Currently, he is completing a book manuscript entitled Byting Out the Public: Personal Computers and the Private Sphere.

Dr Anna-Maria Sichani is a literary and media historian and a Digital Humanist. She is currently working as a Post Doc Research Fellow in Media History and Historical Data Modelling, at the University of Sussex and Sussex Humanities Lab, with almost a decade of research & work experience in various UK and international digital scholarship projects.

Tiago Garcia Sousa is a digital humanist, early modernist, and a research software engineer at Newcastle University. He is a co-managing editor of the Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative and an editorial assistant for The Programming Historian.

Kenna Hernly is a PhD candidate at the University of Maryland (UMD), USA. She has worked as a lecturer at UMD and The Phillips Collection. Kenna's work in museums has focused on audience research and learning at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Gallery of Art, and Tate St Ives.

Vicky Garnett is Training and Education Officer for DARIAH-EU, previously worked on PARTHENOS, eCloud and DigCurV. Background in (socio)linguistics and dialectology

Kristen Schuster is a lecturer in digital curation in the Department of Digital Humanities at King's College London