Enhancing research and teaching capacity through collaboration: building a UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association

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In February 2020, the Irish Research Council (IRC) and the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) issued a call for network proposals as part of its 'UK-Ireland Collaboration in Digital Humanities' programme. The universities of Exeter, Galway, Glasgow and London, University College Cork, King's College London and Trinity College Dublin partnered to develop one such proposal, for a network which would undertake research and consultation vital to the implementation of a permanent Digital Humanities Association for the UK and Ireland. Building on existing research conducted by the partner institutions, and on established partnerships and collaborations, it brought together different stakeholders to consider and interrogate critically the concepts of sustainability, inclusivity, training, advocacy and career progression, among other key questions. Institutions and individuals across the UK and Ireland were consulted to propose ways in which the two countries could build a collaborative vision for the field, and create new and sustainable long-term partnerships in alignment with the international community. The overarching goal of the network was to develop a framework for a new Association which would nurture the capacity for excellent research and teaching in DH, establish and sustain more effective connections with sectors outside higher education (notably Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAMs) and the creative industries) and create new pathways for collaboration. The network culminated in the publication of a three-year roadmap for the establishment and consolidation of a UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association, which will be shaped in ongoing dialogue with digital researchers and practitioners located across the two countries, in industry, education and the cultural heritage sectors.

This panel will explore the processes of establishing an evidence base for the development of a new DH Association, of building - and building on - community through consultation, of defining value and purpose through collaboration, and of practising openness which is both radical and responsible. Presentations will discuss: the landscape of DH in the UK and Ireland; the development of a values-led organisation; community, consultation and inclusivity; the importance of advocacy for DH and the role of a DH Association in national policy-making; and the centrality of training and the development of career pathways in and from DH. A concluding presentation will reflect on the value of international collaboration, both between Ireland and the UK and among international subject associations and infrastructures.

The landscape of Digital Humanities in the UK and Ireland

Orla Murphy and Jane Winters

A prerequisite for the launch of a UK-Ireland DH Association was analysis of the DH landscape in the two countries. DH is highly developed in the UK and Ireland, with a range of established as well as emerging centres and laboratories. The models cover a wide spectrum, from institutions with teaching as a primary focus to highly sophisticated and specialised infrastructure hubs, and clusters of projects that encompass collections, tools and services alongside academic research. DH endeavours are highly collaborative but with differing degrees of maturity and focus, different strengths and weaknesses. Understanding key differences between DH research and practice in the UK and Ireland, and identifying and harnessing complementary strengths, was essential for developing a common ethos and goals, and ultimately for making the case for a regional DH Association.

This paper will present the results of three landscape surveys which informed the development of the new Association: research commissioned by the School of Advanced Study and others in 2017 to identify current and future DH support needs in the UK and explore the potential demand for a DH network or association; landscape analysis conducted by the DARIAH-DESIR project, led by King's Digital Lab and the University of Glasgow in the UK; and the dataset and forthcoming report on the DH landscape in Ireland led by Trinity College Dublin. It will also draw

on findings from four workshops organised during the period of the network grant, which served to develop earlier research, and in particular to introduce important international perspectives.

The development of a values-led organisation

Michael Donnay and Justin Tonra

In a technologically-oriented field like digital humanities, the pace of theoretical and methodological change is rapid and the range of practitioners involved is expansive. These elements contribute to the dynamism that often characterises the DH community, but also present a challenge to creating an organisation that appeals to a broad and diverse cohort. A subject association that is capable of adapting to these challenges can provide valuable stability for the field.

The UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association aims to provide such stability, while supporting a rapidly evolving community, by being a values-led organisation. The Core Values of the Association - inclusivity, community, collaboration, sustainability, openness and transparency, and advocacy and action - were developed collaboratively with members of the DH community in both countries. Placing a shared set of values at the core of the Association will help make the organisation meaningful to its members and give them a strong set of principles to identify with, while change continuously occurs in the field and in individuals' careers.

These values provide a foundation from which members can respond to changing technological or methodological concerns and guide the operation of the Association. The Association aims to combine values and action, so that every decision or process is guided by the Core Values.

This talk will outline the practical impact that values have on the day-to-day operation of the Association. It will lay out how the current Core Values were developed and how the Association plans to maintain them while allowing room for growth and change.

Community, consultation and inclusivity

Jennifer Edmond and Kristen Schuster

Digital technologies are often lauded as tools and infrastructures for equitable and open access to information, and the digital humanities have often parlayed these narratives to discuss open, democratic and inclusive culture and heritage. We know, of course, that this is only true on the surface, and that technological systems are affected by (and may affect) historical social, cultural, political and economic tensions. As such, the dream of DH as a 'big tent' (that is, capacious, broad and inclusive) is one that we need to constantly query and challenge if the field, or any organisation within it, is to have a claim to being inclusive and diverse.

This was a particularly pressing issue as we explored the potential for a regional network for DH methods in the UK and Ireland. Even the question of who might be able to speak for the diversity of fields and individuals working under the banner of DH in our two countries, which share a working language but are very different in size and distinct in culture, was something to be queried actively and iteratively.

This paper will discuss how we built our exploratory phase around mechanisms by which to leverage existing co-operations

and to ask our growing community to co-create our events and outputs, including one specifically on the state of inclusivity in DH in the two countries, and how we might actively strive to improve from the existing baseline.

Digital Humanities and advocacy

Paul Gooding

Advocacy for Digital Humanities is highly situated within local educational norms, political contexts, and funder priorities, yet simultaneously a matter of transnational collaboration. Developing a coherent, cross-border approach to communicating the value and impact of DH therefore remains a challenge. It was agreed that a new association would require a clear idea of policy areas, and strategic conversations, where a united voice for those working in DH is required. A workshop was therefore designed to explore key issues for DH development in the UK and Ireland that have policy implications, areas where expert opinions and guidance may be needed, and which audiences should be addressed. The workshop was structured around three topical strands, with short talks from a variety of speakers to inform plenary discussions with attendees:

- Research: what support is needed for researchers using digital tools and methods, and how might a professional association help articulate their needs?
- Teaching: what is the role of a DH association in relation to external teaching assessment, shared teaching infrastructure, and support for teaching advocacy?
- Infrastructure: What are the key areas of infrastructure required for DH research, and how should the DH community make the case for investment in trans-national infrastructures in a post-Brexit political landscape?

This talk will reflect on how the resultant conversations might shape the role and scope of a new association, using the notion of 'advocacy in infrastructure, advocacy for infrastructure, [and] advocacy as infrastructure' (Edmond, in Gambell et al., 2021) as a framing mechanism.

Capacity enhancement: training and career pathways

Arianna Ciula

Enhancing capacity in Digital Humanities research means first and foremost caring for and nurturing the human dimension of DH infrastructures. Roles and career progression as well as training and education are the conduit to sustain the field. A workshop was organised to frame the problem in the UK and Irish contexts, to reflect on Research Software Engineering process development and training experiences as well as DH teaching and training activities, and to surface connections as well as gaps across sectors (Higher Education, Cultural Industries, GLAM).

The objectives of the workshop were as follows:

- Contribute to developing pathways to sustained, effective and widespread capacity-building for DH researchers in the UK and Ireland across disciplines, institutions and career stages.
- Contribute to defining specific pathways for training highly interdisciplinary humanists who are able to work across multiple sectors, including and beyond academia.

- Contribute to the broad inclusion of communities beyond individuals based in research-performing organisations, including cultural heritage institutions, the arts and creative industries, and interested citizen scientists.
- Provide opportunities for individual researchers to develop their skills and networks, and to contribute to international debates about the future of the field.
- Consider and interrogate critically the concepts of sustainability, inclusivity, training, and career progression.

This contribution will outline the recommendations of the report that emerged from the workshop (Romanova et. al, 2021) with a particular focus on the diversity of roles the Association could contribute to act as a broker for.

International collaboration

Charlotte Tupman

While the main focus of this particular DH Association is to meet the needs of the diverse communities within Ireland and the UK, a fundamental part of its work is as an outward-looking organisation seeking to strengthen and expand our communities' connections, capabilities and perspectives and to contribute to DH activities extending well beyond our own physical locations.

Some of the most obvious challenges of international collaboration can also present us with genuine opportunities: spatial distance; diversity in languages, cultures, viewpoints and priorities; varied working practices and career paths; coordination across time zones; and of course questions of budgets, availability of funding sources, and institutional and national-level support of DH initiatives. The Association needs to learn from — and alongside — international colleagues not only to navigate these challenges, but also to identify and take up any resulting opportunities to support innovative collaborative research and practice for mutual benefit, wherever it arises. Drawing upon the results of our exploratory workshops, it is particularly important that we support DH work to take place beyond its most well-established audiences and venues.

International networks and activities are already flourishing and enabling a huge variety of DH work. What can our Association add, within our communities in the UK and Ireland and more widely in an international context? We will contemplate how an Association can work effectively with international partners to address shared goals, and discuss some of the practicalities involved in the creation and maintenance of successful collaborations between organisations across multiple borders and infrastructures.

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