

Collaboration as Necessity: Institutional Support for Digital Humanities Research

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Agenda

1. DH Labs and DH Centers
2. Expectations for Institutional Support:
Münster and Cologne
 - a. Service
 - b. Sustainability
 - c. Enabling
3. Advantages and Disadvantages
 - a. Infrastructure as Necessity
 - b. DH Centers as Social Contractors
 - c. Sustainability through Knowledge Transfer
 - d. DH as Research or as Service
 - e. Collaboration as Necessity

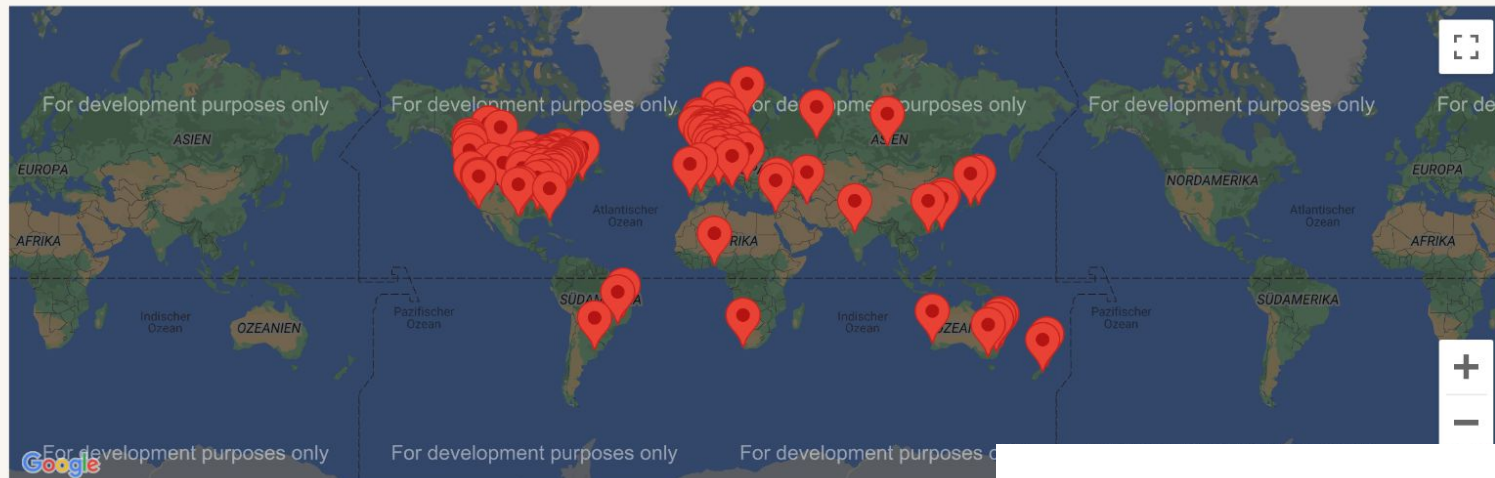


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DH Labs and DH Centers

Centers



Centers

<https://dhcenternet.org/centers>

Advanced Computing in the

Alabama Digital Humanities Center - ADHC

Alfa Informatica

Alliance of Digital Humanities

Definitions

“ I indicate five models for humanities labs based on laboratories’ statements and operations: the center-type lab, the techno-science lab, the work station-type lab, the social challenges-centric lab, and virtual lab.

Pawlicka-Deger, Urszula. “The Laboratory Turn: Exploring Discourses, Landscapes, and Models of Humanities Labs.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 14.3 (2020). <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/14/3/000466/000466.html>.

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Definitions

“ The center-type lab model is identified by the following features: [physical situatedness, manifold functions, facilities and equipment, a wide range of research projects, academic appointments and staffing, the community, education, service].

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<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/14/3/000466/000466.html>.

Opportunity vs. Necessity

“ [T]he center played an important role in restructuring the humanities within the university as well as reconceptualizing the field as a meeting place for interdisciplinary researchers and the local community.

Pawlicka-Deger, Urszula. “The Laboratory Turn: Exploring Discourses, Landscapes, and Models of Humanities Labs.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 14.3 (2020).

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German ‘Competence Center’ Models

“ The organization as a demand- and user-oriented center, which is **mainly financed by third-party funding**, has proven to be a successful strategy. [...] In other words: Further centers must and will follow, whereby on the supply side, consulting, methodological and project competence will be decisive factors, because this increases the chances of successfully acquiring third-party funding.

Burghardt, Manuel, and Christian Wolff. “Zentren für Digital Humanities in Deutschland.” *Information – Wissenschaft & Praxis* 66.5–6 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1515/iwp-2015-0056>.

Expectations

- a. idea that researchers should be provided with a **service** upon request,
- b. assurance of **sustainability** of resources and their long-term maintenance and preservation,
- c. **enabling** and empowering of researchers through teaching and knowledge transfer, especially where no dedicated DH departments exist



Expectations for Institutional Support

Two Examples from Germany

SCDH Münster

- founded 2018
- 1 head, 1 development coordinator, 5,5 developers
- located at University Library
- service for 6 faculties
- part of an infrastructure facility (ULB)



CCeH Cologne

- founded 2009
- 1 head, 3 coordinators, 15 research associates/developers
- located at Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- cooperation in and beyond the faculty (i.a. NRW Academy, (trans-)national networks)
- part of a larger DH ecosystem



DH at the University of Cologne

Cologne Center for eHumanities (CCeH)

Data Center for the Humanities (DCH)

Department for Digital Humanities (IDH)

Expectation 1: Service upon Request

SCDH Münster

- Embedded approach: provision of (generic) services in conjunction with the library
- Digital Humanities in a broad range for research in all of the humanities and their “traditional” research questions

CCeH Cologne

- Research-driven approach: focus on project-specific demands
- mandate depends on context:
 - a. Faculty: consulting, support with proposals and project implementation
 - b. Academy: support for ongoing long-term projects, quality assurance for new proposals

Expectation 2: Assurance of Sustainability

SCDH Münster

- hiring of permanent staff (incl. RSE) by pooling project resources
- sustainable options for generic software development (DH services)
- distribution of the different software development tasks required in the course of a project among several people of the SCDH team
→ promoting synergies

CCeH Cologne

- mostly fixed-term contracts due to third-party funding
- no generic software development, but shared technical solutions across related projects ('clusters')
- development of staff through teaching and training

Expectation 2: Assurance of Sustainability

SCDH Münster

- close connection to the library guarantees direct transfer to other services like e.g. RDM and long-term archiving
- but: no individual project websites
- instead: focus on formats and standards (data first principle):
 - a. data is published (via download with persistent identifier) (long-term availability)
 - b. data is made available via an API (as part of a generic service if available)
 - c. data is presented (visually) via a web frontend (if offered as part of a generic service)

CCeH Cologne

- long-term provision of all digital research results (data and software)
- strategy based on interlinking local institutions (CCeH, Data Center, DH department, computing center, library)
- strategic partnerships (e.g. other DH centers, Academy, NFDI)

Expectation 3: Enabling and Empowering of Researchers

SCDH Münster

- no dedicated DH department
- embedded DH approach
- Center for Digital Humanities (CDH): interest group from different departments
- regular tutorials for digital methods (Python, semantic web, annotation, visualisation, etc.)

CCeH Cologne

- DH department with long tradition (1990s)
- CCeH participates in teaching and training activities (X-technologies, digital editions, RDM, DH-colloquium)
- transregional coordination with other DH efforts (e.g. other DH and RDM centers, 'Arbeitsstellen' of the Academy, NFDI)



Advantages and Disadvantages

1. Infrastructure as Necessity

How can long-term infrastructures serve the dynamically changing needs of humanities research?

- institutional backbone for consultancy, FAIR implementation, technical support
- systematically ensure synergies:
 - Münster: development of generic, cloud-based and modular DH services; foster synergistic teamwork
 - Cologne: cluster methodological expertise (e.g. text-bearing objects, historical languages, digital editions)
- **But: limited flexibility**
 - new requirements may not fit into the portfolio
 - proliferation of isolated solutions puts a strain on the structure



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2. DH Centers as Social Contractors

What role do DH centers play as social contractors in managing sustainability mandates?

- social organization of interests in creating and/or preserving a resource
 - several disciplines, working backgrounds and interests
- longevity of resources often depends on individuals (not only institutional commitment!)
 - e.g. Cologne Sanskrit Dictionaries, Book of the Dead



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The image shows two overlapping browser windows. The top window displays the 'Cologne Digital Sanskrit Dictionaries' website, which lists various Sanskrit-English dictionaries with columns for ID, date, dictionary name, and displays/downloads. The bottom window shows the 'Das Altägyptische Totenbuch' (Book of the Dead) digital archive, featuring a search interface on the left and a large image of an ancient papyrus scroll with hieroglyphs and drawings on the right.

3. Sustainability through Knowledge Transfer

How can structures foster the learning of interdisciplinary-methodological competencies?

- the implementation of DH projects usually requires competencies that can rarely be carried out by a single person
- we argue that knowledge transfer between projects and people and pooling of expertise are the key functions of DH centers



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4. DH as Research or as Service

How can we shape services so as to leverage them into conduits for critical thinking?

- provision of DH services to humanists is an important step towards empowering DH research, regardless of background
 - however: the term ‘service’ can also lead to misinterpretation and can prevent researchers from engaging with DH questions on a deeper level
- need for close collaboration between DH and ‘traditional’ humanities research!



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5. Collaboration as Necessity

How can we organize collaboration between institutions as well as between individuals on local, regional and national levels to cover all needs?

- DH is characterized by a variety of actors and interactions
- the requirements are too diverse, no individual can fulfill them alone
- DH centers take on the role as social platforms to facilitate access to infrastructure, know-how and latest developments



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Thank you!