#dhiha5 Panel IV: Career, Financing and the Academic Recognition of Achievements in the Digital Humanities

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Par Anne Baillot

Working group: Anne Baillot (Humboldt University, Berlin), Natalia Filatkina (University of Trier), Anika Meier (artefakt)

Topic of the panel

This panel was devoted to **career**, **funding** and **academic recognition of achievements in the Digital Humanities**. After harvesting requirements and ideas in the blog carnival #dhiha5, we identified three main areas on which to focus our analysis and our propositions: recognition of persons, recognition of performances, and early career as a long term career perspective. We introduce to these three parts with two paragraphs, the first one reflecting the general framework in which these questions were considered in the blog carnival, and the second being a general remark regarding the definition of "early career".

Defining DH – in the German-French context

Trying to formulate answers to the question underlying the panel ("How can a young researcher construct a DH career?") means, in many of the contributions to #dhiha5, facing more or less frontally the question **whether DH should be a discipline or not**. In the following summary, we focus on career, funding and academic recognition in themselves, but the reader should bear in mind that the suggestions formulated here are to be read in the wider context of a debate on the institutional nature of DH.

The situation addressed by the blog contributions to #dhiha5 as well as the situation we who prepared the panel know best is the one in France and Germany. Our argumentation and propositions are formulated mainly for both or either of these academic systems. A comparison with the situation in other countries would be a useful addition to what we present here.

Defining early career: Nachwuchs, junior, post-doc and pre-what?

There is no English or French equivalent to the German term *wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs.* Graduates who aspire to an academic career (post-docs) or just work on their PhD thesis are called *early career researchers* or *junior staff* in English and *jeunes chercheurs* or *statut junior* in French. The title of the conference avoids language barriers and therefore simply addresses the *next generation.* An appropriate translation of the term *wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs* in English would be *offspring* or maybe *new blood*, but those two words do not involve the connotation that the German *Nachwuchs* does. The German *–wuchs* implies that something has grown or is growing, and the noun itself is generally used when talking about offspring. The German Ministry of Education recently published its *Federal report wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs 2013* which confirms that the term is officially established. But the report mainly stresses out the fact that **young academics are highly dependent on various persons and factors like their supervisor and fixed term contracts** (9 out of 10 research assistants have a fixed term contract, as shown here).

Although long-term positions exist in France, there are not so many of them in regard to the amount of PhDs and to the lack of a job market for PhDs outside Academia, especially in the Humanities. As a result, those positions, coveted by all of those who aspire to an academic career, are not sufficient to absorb the flux of candidates: the "stack" of PhDs awaiting their turn to get hold of one of those positions has become so thick that the hiring is highly competitive – and highly dependent on influence networks of commission members. In the past ten years, unease has clearly increased among PhDs and PhD candidates together with the feeling that being supported by a member of the commission seems to play a bigger role than scholarly accomplishments. The lack of transparency as well as the lack of clearly scholarly criteria is a major issue in general, and for people engaging in DH in particular.

Recognition of persons

DH would not be DH if there were no "D". In other words, defining academic recognition for early career researchers supposes to address the needs of both those that are by status researchers and those – equally necessary for DH to work – that are in charge of more technical aspects. The relationship between the two categories of personnel is a core problem of DH.

Although most of the suggestions formulated (cf. the next paragraphs) concern mainly early career *researchers*, the contributions to #dhiha5 unanimously plead for **a better recognition not only of the DH researchers, but also for those that are involved in the technical implementation**. There is a general wish to address the relationships between both in order to make them less hierarchical. A first way to improve the status of those that are more on the D's side than on the H's side would be to increase means of acknowledging their contribution, for instance by associating them more closely to publications and allow them to author results that can be recognized as a not merely of technical nature, but as a scholarly contribution. The word "ingénieur de recherche" signalizes in French the paradox of a research involvement not based on traditional academic achievements, but on engineering competence. In Germany, the technical personnel is allowed, in a typical digital project funded by the DFG, half a researcher's funding. The status, the contribution, the career perspective

of this personnel, which is essential to DH and just as much in the run for excellence as the researchers, should be addressed on a European level. This is also true for such careers as those of digital librarian or archivist.

A particularly inspirational contribution to #dhiha5 is the one of Marjorie Burghart ([The Three Orders or DH imagined](#)). She addresses this specific issue by stating the existence of a vicious circle:

"If a young humanities researcher starts getting involved in the creation of DH resources, and developing skills in this domain, there is a high probability that these DH skills will be called on before any others, since they are rarer, thus insidiously propelling this person towards a career path in what is known (with admirable optimism) as the "alternative academy": as a technician, a digital librarian, etc."

Recognition of performances

Recognition should also be achieved by giving a more explicit value to accomplishments or performances that are not being taken into account in the traditional framework of scholarly evaluation. This concerns a series of domains which are crucial to the progress of DH in all of their dimensions.

1) **In the domain of IT**: encoding, programming, developing software should be considered as part of the scholarly achievements of young researchers. This involves thinking about ways of including that type of work in dissertations for instance, which is, to this day, impossible in regard to the format in which humanities dissertations are dealt with administratively.

2) **Online publications**:

- **contributions to databases or to wikis** generally suppose a great time investment: gathering information, getting familiar with the format in which to feed the information, engaging in discussions (for instance in wikipedia) are activities that contribute greatly to sharing and extending knowledge. Evaluating this type of contribution is of course more difficult since the amount of time and effort put into it can vary greatly. A discussion should engage as how to formulate cautious and fair principles to recognize this type of contributions.

- **Blogging and online reviews** are publication activities that benefit from an institutional backup that is better recognized than for instance contributions to wikipedia. Such major platforms as hypotheses and recensio are recognized as scholarly publication organs . They are still used and read by a comparatively small group of researchers though, and are only recognized in disciplines in which professors themselves are involved in that type of publications. This should be made effective in the humanities at large, which supposes institutions like CNRS, ANR and DFG including them in evaluation criteria. There should be in that regard special consideration to those publications that are not being published in the author's mother tongue, and especially to those scholars who make an **effort to publish in English** in order to reach a wider audience. It certainly would make no sense to plead for publishing exclusively in the scholarly lingua franca, but it does make sense to encourage

young researchers to open up to other scholarly and linguistic areas by investing time in writing and publishing – and not the least, blogging – in English.

3) **Activities in social media** can be of scholarly nature when they contribute to a scientific dialogue and more generally to the dissemination of scientific information. Filtering information from RSS feeds to tweet the results is not a negligible part of scholarly activity in terms of time, energy and developing strategies to optimize the process. Young scholars that are particularly active in that domain play a key role for their institution in that they connect it with many potential cooperation partners. This type of activities should be recognized from the moment on when a benefit for the scholar's institution or his/her research is obvious.

Recognizing these performances supposes to **make them part of the evaluation criteria developed by funding agencies as well as by the universities** when hiring younger faculty. Those should include a general guideline acknowledging the risk taken in engaging DH activity and reducing accordingly the expectations in other areas of an early scientist's CV. Recognizing these performances also means reinforcing means of protecting them as such, involving to minimize plagiarism of methods as well as of results that often result from their not being taken for proper scholarly performances. Achieving a greater transparency is a key to reaching this goal. Project databases should be hosted centrally and in open access, in order for funding applicants to be able to know which projects have already been applied for and which have actually been funded. Consequently, presenting and sharing research results in new social media requires not only new forms of recognition but also new attitudes towards authorship.

As Marjorie Burghart puts it in the course of the vivid discussion that took place in the french DH-mailing list, "DH are useful to many fields, but necessary to none". This statement shows how fragile the recognition of single scholarly achievements is: there is no all-over understanding of the input of DH methodology, tools, performances in the humanities in general. Most of it is left to the dynamic of the disciplines and their community. The gap between the situation in disciplines like History or Classics on the one hand and modern philologies on the other is obvious – and too wide to be dealt with with the same control levers.

Each discipline should confront the question of the **return on investment** according to its singular situation: how can we recognize the risk taken by young scholars in engaging DH activities? That is only possible by redefining career paths.

Early career and long term career perspectives

The problems concerning early career and long term career perspectives are not restricted to the situation of young researchers in DH only, but due to the current state of the art in DH, they show a dangerous tendency to become particularly acute or typical for DH.

To have an early career start means to have an opportunity to begin and carry out a high quality research of one's own interest, without any supervision from "older and more experienced" colleagues. It also means to be put in a leading and responsible position, for example as a PI or a

group leader. In various European countries as well as at the common European level, funding resources were put forward to create exactly such opportunities for researchers in the post-doc-phase. In the framework of ongoing "initiatives of excellence" throughout Europe, it became possible to start a career already at the level of a PhD project by virtue of being integrated in a high profile interdisciplinary and international scientific environment.

Obviously, all these developments are welcome and should be carried out in future as well, integrating those researchers who so far have a status of "non-scientific faculty staff".

However, creating opportunities for an early career start does not provide any long term perspective, even for excellent and successful young scientists. This is mostly due to:

1) the temporarily or even short term nature of project funding,

2) the unclear status of "funding ID and experience" by comparison to other career requirements in the humanities (monograph, "habilitation")

3) the lack of clear evaluation standards and standardized requirements (German "Zielvereinbarungen")

4) the lack of alternative long-term perspectives (other than professorship; at least in Germany)

Ad 1) Carrying out research in DH nowadays is almost exclusively possible with the help of short term project funding. For DH, this situation can be particularly obstructive. Initiatives diverted towards long term financing in the areas of preservation of cultural heritage, development of research infrastructures, digital archives and corpora remain rare both at national and international (European) level. In contrast, the amount of temporary positions financed by virtue of limited project funding is growing. Fig. 1 documents this development for Germany and both for science and humanities (cf. in particular the last column). With regard to the importance of such tasks for modern societies, **their implementation cannot be only the matter of temporary project financing**.

The growing number of temporary project positions is presented in ["Forschung und Lehre" 4/2008, 225](#). For the French situation of non permanent personnel in 2010, see [here](#), for the general situation of research personnel in 2009, see [here](#).

Ad 2) Humanities remain a "book oriented" scientific culture. To have been granted several awards and/or project financing, even in a highly competitive international context (such as in DH), appears not to be treated as an equal qualification as having written a second monograph. Current job announcements of permanent positions at the level of assistant or full professor do not include the status "PI/research group leader" as an equal qualification to for example "Juniorprofessur". In France, it is administratively impossible to apply for such positions as Directeur de Recherche or Professeur des Universités without having successfully submitted a "habilitation".

Ad 3) What achievements meet the qualification criteria is often a subject of interpretation of a given university. Making a career in DH means to write an application for a short-term project while finishing an ongoing short-term project. How many project applications have to be written in order to be qualified for a long-term position? At what level do you have to apply: university research funds, national research councils, European institutions? How many projects have to be approved? Is "funding ID and experience" a qualification and evaluation criterion at all? Or is it rather a published monograph? If you have to deliver both – a monograph and a funding ID – in what proportion do both evaluation criteria stand to each other? These are questions that often remain unanswered (and sometimes also not asked) at the early stages of a career in humanities (including DH). **Clear guidelines are essential for successful career paths**.

Ad 4) At least in some European countries, a long term perspective is only possible as a full professor via "habilitation". As Fig. 2 forecasts for Germany, for three "habilitations" there will be on average only one "professor emeritus" and consequently one potential vacancy. The figure does not include any data from DH illustrating indirectly the status quo and all the problems with recognition of DH even after over 50 years of their existence. But Fig. 2 also raises **the question if DH cannot be considered predestinated for the creation of new long term career possibilities** (in addition to full professor) due to their non-traditional ways and methods of conducting research. (the number of "habilitation" vs. "professorus emeritus" for 2010 in presented in ["Forschung und Lehre" 5/2013, 377](#)).

In the French constellation, guaranteeing long-term perspectives would mean either creating dedicated sections of CNU and CNRS (and by that, recognizing DH as a discipline) or at the very least steering job descriptions towards explicitly digital profiles. This involves the conjunction of a strong will from the University itself, from the concerned disciplinary community and from the CNU or the CNRS to validate these types of profiles.

Be it in France or, for that matter, in Germany, this conjunction is certainly more likely to be realized if the dedicated Ministries explicitly encourage the creation of DH profiles for long-term positions, either as a dedicated disciplinary branch, or as a transversal support to the Humanities at large.