

RESEARCH

EMBRACING THE CHALLENGE OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES



The world is becoming digital and the situation is similar for the arts and humanities. [Federica Bressan](#) is one of many researchers working in the area of digital humanities. She talks to us about her journey from her Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) project to her career as a Producer and Host at Technoculture podcast.

Federica in her own words

I am an Italian-Slovenian researcher and podcaster, with a background in music and technology. I received my training in Italy. In 2016, I relocated to Belgium thanks to a Marie Curie individual fellowship. This experience boosted my career in ways I didn't even think possible. Among other things, it allowed me to engage with science communication, and to start my first podcast ([Technoculture](#)) which you could say is a spinoff of my Marie Curie project.

DEFINING THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

Imagine how many disciplines have been impacted by digital transformation technology. The list is long and still growing. And it includes the humanities.

Digital humanities is a term used to describe a broad field that covers the use of digital methods by arts and humanities researchers. According to the University of Cambridge, a pioneer in the development of humanities computing, an increasingly important element of the Digital Humanities is discussion of the way

in which the digital landscape has changed our view of the humanities and, conversely, the insights that the humanities offer on such central issues of the digital age.

For Federica, the Digital Humanities is an umbrella term, above all: it's not a discipline per se, but it connects

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many disciplines. “Much research that is now labelled under this term has existed for a long time, so there is a strong continuity with the past,” she says. The Digital Humanities can, therefore, be defined as a phenomenon that evolves with society. “You will get a different definition of Digital Humanities depending on who you ask,” she adds.

DAPHNET PROJECT

Federica works in a ‘niche’ area of the Digital Humanities. Her MSCA project DaphNet was launched with the following problem: most multimedia artwork produced since the 1990s is lost due to the lack of adequate preservation strategies.

To tackle this issue, Federica worked on a multidisciplinary approach to preservation. The DaphNet project aimed to reach a definition of a framework for the preservation of interactive artworks, as well as to ensure their future re-use and flexible access.

Our Alumna had to overcome numerous challenges to achieve her project in January 2019. “I stepped outside my field of expertise, moving from audio to multimedia. I think I initially underestimated some implications of this transition, but I am proud of the skillset I possess now as a result of the process,” she says.

THE EUROPEANA JOURNEY

Working now as a producer and host at Technoculture podcast, Federica has had the opportunity to become

familiarised with Europeana, a European collection which provides access to 50 million digitised items.

“Europeana is the largest digital repository of cultural data in the world,” explains Federica. “It aggregates digitised books, paintings, photographs, recordings and films, and it offers a variety of services to dedicated communities: teachers, journalists, scholars and others.”

Intrigued by this collection, she recently interviewed Harry Verwayen (executive director of the Europeana Foundation) at the annual Europeana Conference in November 2019, which took place in Lisbon. Verwayen defined Europeana as a “co-creation space, where the user community helps to improve and build new narratives through the data.”

What’s more, in this interview, Verwayen quotes the co-founder of the Museum for the United Nations and keynote speaker at the conference, Michael Edson: “In the next 10-20 years, nobody will remember the product. They will remember the network that came up with new solutions for the challenges we’re facing today.”

Europeana faced numerous challenges, including climate change. “Harry Verwayen talks about the

commitment of Europeana to decrease the carbon footprint of its digital infrastructure, by working with service providers that only work with renewable energy, setting a great example for every other cultural organisation in Europe and in the world,” says Federica.

SHARING IS CARING

Federica stresses the importance of the research community in tackling challenges related to digital humanities. “Nobody works in isolation today, so it is important to be aware that we share data and tools just like we share our history and identity, and most of all it is important to belong to a community,” she concludes.

INTERESTED?

Listen to the podcast [“Creating value from cultural data in the age of digital transformation”](#)

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