The DARIAH e-Infrastructure

By Mark Hedges Centre for e-Research, King's College London, United Kingdom; Andreas Aschenbrenner, State and University Library, Goettingen, Germany; Tobias Blanke, Centre for e-Research, King's College London, United Kingdom; Eric Haswell, Department of Scandinavian Research, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

DARIAH (Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities) aims to conceptualise and build a virtual bridge between different humanities and arts resources across Europe. Funded under the ESFRI programme (http://cordis.europa.eu/esfri/), DARIAH is in its preparatory phase, which involves design of the infrastructure and construction of a sound business and governmental model. DARIAH will begin its construction phase from 2011. Just as astronomers require a virtual observatory to study galaxies, researchers in the arts and humanities need a digital infrastructure to access, combine and collaboratively work on their scholarly resources, which include digital content, services and methodologies. DARIAH will be such an infrastructure: it aims to combine various national infrastructures – from the UK's arts and humanities e-Science initiative projects to the German e-Humanities infrastructure TextGrid – and also to help other EU countries establish their own arts and humanities e-Infrastructures.

The DARIAH vision
DARIAH will promote, support, and advance research in the digital humanities. Digital humanities is a long-established research field, and in the last sixty years numerous digital humanities centres and organizations have developed. This trend continues, and we do not perceive the digital humanities to be a closed field of existing centres, but rather an open, developing research environment. Everybody interested in using digital means for arts and humanities research is part of the DARIAH community. Thus, the DARIAH infrastructure will be a connected network of people, information, tools and methodologies for investigating, exploring and supporting work across the broad spectrum of digital humanities.

The DARIAH network will be as decentralised as possible, empowering individual contributors (e.g. researchers, national centres, thematic centres) to work with and within the DARIAH community and to shape its features to their needs. Each contribution builds DARIAH and is linked via DARIAH's architecture of participation. At the same time, collaboration across the borders of individual centers requires use of common technologies for authentication or federation of archive contents, for example.

(Re)use by anybody, anywhere
DARIAH is an e Research environment focused on the (re)use of digital research resources by anybody and anywhere. DARIAH will not prescribe standards, but will encourage their use to foster interoperability and compatibility. Researchers do not have to support interoperability and openness, but they may want to support and benefit from the opportunities these features facilitate, such as collaboration and re-usability. DARIAH will provide community-driven recommendations and foster interoperability and collaboration through incentives. This approach means less central control over what DARIAH contains and provides.

When DARIAH is operational after the construction phase, its technical products will be manifold:

- services and tutorials to help existing humanities data archives link their systems into the DARIAH network;
- a software and consultancy/training package that supports emerging data centres in establishing their own technology environment;
- an interoperability layer that will connect data centres;
- a means of linking into DARIAH for countries or disciplines that do not yet have e-Humanities infrastructure and cannot afford it in the near future;
- best practices and guidelines for individual researchers that foster data interoperability and preservation across the DARIAH network;

We imagine DARIAH not as one large infrastructure, but as a means for linking people, services and data for research in arts and humanities. Most likely,

DARIAH will not be one technical solution, but many, according to community needs and willingness to collaborate. The definition of a repository found in the DuraSpace midterm report also fits DARIAH: a "trusted intermediary that makes content (...) usable with a 'chinese menu' of added-value services". Of course DARIAH will not be a single repository, but otherwise the idea of a trusted intermediary fits well.