

Preface

In November 2015, the Volkswagen Foundation put out a call, “‘Mixed Methods’ in the Humanities? – Support for Projects Combining and Synergizing Qualitative-Hermeneutical and Digital Approaches”. The title of the call was quite cumbersome, describing the objective of the call. On the other hand, the title adopted the term ‘mixed methods’ from the social sciences to use it in the context of the humanities – a novelty at that time.

That is exactly the overall aim of the Volkswagen Foundation: we want ‘to swim ahead of the tide’, as it is described in our new funding strategy. The paradigm shift of data-intensive research in the humanities was identified at a very early stage; innovative funding opportunities were designed. In 1999, the Volkswagen Foundation launched the programme ‘Documentation of Endangered Languages’. About 100 endangered languages were documented in an electronic archive freely available on the internet (<https://dobes.mpi.n>). The DobeS archive is considered today as FAIR data ‘avant la lettre’. In order to support the innovative power of data-intensive research in the humanities, the Volkswagen Foundation in 2012 supported the foundation meeting of the regional association DHd – Digital Humanities im deutschsprachigen Raum. Later, the Foundation organized the international conference ‘(Digital) Humanities Revisited – Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Age’, followed by a conference on data quality organized together with the German Rat for Informationsinfrastrukturen. Lastly, in November 2021, the Foundation decided to integrate its various efforts and set a conceptual framework with an overall Open Science Policy.

The present publication ‘Mixing Methods. Practical Insights from the Humanities in the Digital Age’ also wants to meet the challenge of ‘swimming ahead of the tide’. The Mixed Methods call was open to all disciplines in the humanities. Its overall aim was to prevent a confrontation between those scholars in the humanities working with non-digital approaches (from hermeneutic to structuralist, post-structuralist and postcolonial approaches) and humanist scholars working with digital methods. Instead of confrontation, its overall aim was to focus on the opportunity for great discoveries and intellectual innovation while integrating the two approaches. The project teams were asked not only to work on a specific research ques-

tion within their discipline, but also to reflect on the interface between the two procedures—digital/non-digital—at a theoretical-methodological level. How can the two approaches be linked and synergized when a shared object of research is being investigated? How do digital methods change the humanities epistemically? What can we learn from living the ‘two worlds’ at the same time? Nine projects were funded and a tenth project was integrated into the programme’s network as it had quite a similar topic. A kick off meeting was organized followed by a midterm workshop where social scientist Udo Kuckartz, whose manual ‘Mixed Methods. Methodologie, Forschungsdesigns und Analyseverfahren’ (2014) originally provided the idea for the whole programme, presented in detail how to deal with mixing methods in his disciplinary field. At this workshop, the 10 project teams decided on publishing a joint volume. In putting together the results of the individual projects and their reflection at the theoretical-methodological level, this volume aspires to draft a new understanding of the humanities in the 21st century: What will the separate disciplines in the humanities have in common when they use digital approaches?

This publication took some time because of restrictions put on normal life due to the corona pandemic. Now it is our pleasure to present it as an invitation for interdisciplinary discovery. We thank the project teams for their sound cooperation. We thank Andrew Prescott, digital humanist from the very start, for elaborating on the history of digital humanities. And above all, we thank the editorial board – Birgit Schneider, Beate Löffler, Tino Mager and Carola Hein – for their tenacity to compose and complete this publication.

Vera Szöllösi-Brenig
Volkswagen Foundation