NCeSS workshop: Social Science Approaches to e-Science
Second International Conference on e-Social Science
28 June 2006
Manchester, UK

SUMMARY REPORT

This document is s short report of the discussions that took place during the NCeSS Workshop Social Science Approaches to e-Science, as part of the Second International Conference on e-Social Science, 28 June 2006, held in Manchester, UK. Inasmuch as most of the slides of presentations during the workshop are available on the NCeSS conference website, as well as some of the papers, this report concentrates on a few of the key themes discussed during the workshop. Many of these themes are noted here in question form since formulation of concerns was more prominent in the workshop than providing answers. In cases where the themes were mentioned by a particular workshop participant, the surnames of these persons are noted in parentheses.

We encourage workshop participants to contribute their own notes or reflections on the event to the wiki available on the conference website. One participant, Ben Anderson, has already done this and it would be valuable that this initiative be extended.

Ralph Schroeder and Nick Jankowski
Workshop facilitators

The Nature and Scope of e-Sciences

- e-Science projects may have unintended consequences, that is, they may encounter obstacles and produce outcomes that were not anticipated (Wessels).
- e-Sciences may be analyzed in quite different ways in developed and developing countries; for example, email may be an important e-science tool in certain contexts (Sooryamoorthy).
- Is a 'Protestant reformation' of the social sciences immanent without the need for intermediaries (Macy)?
- Will e-Science become 'invisible' as it becomes embedded in practice? Or turn into 'e-research'? Or will it produce new gatekeepers and specializations?
- e-Sciences are different in different disciplines; for example, physics has had a strong sense of its needs for Grid, whereas in other disciplines the needs may still emerge (Fry, Volk).
- Are there areas of the social sciences where it will be difficult to transfer to e-social science, in the light of traditional methods?
- Are there different drivers for e- enabling, for example in humanities where collections are being archived? Do these e-efforts face common issues with social and natural sciences? Efforts in the arts and other creativity tools could also make use of these tools.
- The incentives to pursue e-Sciences research may mean a shift from solo researchers to collaborative projects.

- Does the public need to be made aware of new issues as data moves online, and may be difficult to interpret?

Methods and Data

- Is it possible to combine quantitative and qualitative methods in new ways, that is, in counting museum visitor activities and analysis of Wikipedia entries? (den Besten).
- How should new forms of data be searchable (with new forms of metadata, Wouters)?
- What are the new preservations issues, and also standards across countries (Olson)?
- Do new combinations of data enable and challenge genres like biography, including bringing in new 'lay' practitioners?
- What is the difference between data that are born digital versus those that are transformed (Anderson)?
- What are the changing requirements for depositing data by funding bodies for re-use, and the sharing and confidentiality issues around this?
- What happens to data that persists regardless of the user, whose wish to have it available may have changed?
- Do collaborative or federated databases change the nature of the competition between institutions or perhaps lead to forced collaboration? (Anderson)