CLARIAH-CORE Mid-Term Evaluation

By the CLARIAH-CORE

International Advisory Panel

1 Introduction

This is the report of the CLARIAH-CORE Mid Term Evaluation covering the period from 1 January 2015 to 1 January 2017. This evaluation was carried out by the CLARIAH-CORE International Advisory Panel (IAP). The IAP studied and commented the CLARIAH-CORE Mid-Term Self Evaluation and accompanying Fact Book. The IAP visited CLARIAH-CORE on May 8th, 2017. At this meeting, it commented on and discussed the Mid-Term Self Evaluation report and fact book with the CLARIAH-CORE Board, and it attended presentations and demos of a small selection of the functionality dealt with in CLARIAH-CORE.

2 Evaluation

The IAP congratulates CLARIAH with the efforts done in this difficult project. The IAP is really impressed by the amount and the diversity of the work done. It appreciates the efforts towards integration of a large number of tools that have been made, as was clear from the demo session. CLARIAH did amazing work and is a very ambitious project in which many things are done in parallel and in which many datasets are integrated. CLARIAH offers enormous potential for the interplay of the three core disciplines by addressing research questions that require resources and tools from all 3 core disciplines. The Netherlands is a very instructive test case, a fascinating experiment of joining CLARIN and DARIAH in one national project. Many countries are looking towards the Netherlands experiment and are openly discussing also joining CLARIN and DARIAH in one national project or organisation (e.g. Germany-NRIC (National Research Infrastructure Consortium), Austria, Greece).

The IAP has formulated a number of specific recommendations and items of concern:

1. Integration should be the next priority, and there should be more concrete plans on how to carry out integration of the three Work Packages. Integration of additional humanities fields, however, seems to us to be a lower priority.
2. We suggest that you try to identify a single topic that can work well for integration of the three fields. While the demonstration of successful integration of this single topic would be too narrow a base for the entire project, we think it would be a good test case.
3. WP2 seems to be behind the other WPs in the degree of its progress. Readers of CLARIAH reports and users of CLARIAH interfaces will see the gaps, for instance in incomplete standardization of metadata.
4. As is common in academic projects, the CLARIAH PIs must wear many hats, as they carry responsibility for conceptualization, administration, reporting, and so forth. At later stages of the project, including integration as well as completing the infrastructure, this multi-tasking will be compounded. The problem won't go away, but conscious attention to it may help save time for attention to the highest priorities.
5. We applaud the strategy of CLARIAH, attempting to merge at the Netherlands national level the approaches of CLARIN and DARIAH at the European level. In a real sense CLARIAH is a test case for all of Europe. Especially since members of CLARIAH are on boards overlapping with CLARIN and DARIAH, we encourage the opening of discussion with members of those two bodies even before the completion of the initial CLARIAH project, to see if they have helpful suggestions and to enable them to envision the steps that they too will encounter.

6. We note two types of appointments for which there are bottlenecks or shortages. The emergence of academic technology specialists as mediators between researchers and technicians is promising in general, though few have been trained in this area. But the real problem for CLARIAH seems to be the shortage of engineers. Perhaps extra efforts can be made to make their jobs rewarding, integrating them as fully as possible into each WP.

7. The interfaces for the tools seem to be neglected, though less so for audio-visual than for linguistics and socio-economic history. Can it be that technicians create the interface and researchers are involved only after it is completed? Clarity of access and access to the granularity of research issues should be a top priority in each WP, through an interactive design process.

Some additional recommendations and suggestions by Patrick Manning:

8. The interim report and draft proposal both read from the top down. Perhaps some lower-level or more granular examples can be given early in the report, to give readers a sense of the multiple levels of the project and to enable them to remember engaging examples.

9. I would find it helpful if each portion of the report gave a sense of how many people are working in each area. Each WP introduces itself as "we," but this is vague in number and in the specializations of those in the group. It would be helpful to know the proportion of researchers and technicians in various project groups, to get a sense of the agency of project staff.

10. Connections among the WPs can perhaps be emphasized on the CLARIAH website and even within the reports.

11. Workshops, as emphasized by WP4 and WP5, seem very promising. These can build recognition and support for CLARIAH, helpful in convincing funders that the project will have a public effect. Workshops could be on the main focus of each WP, though I noted how WP4 might provide an important service by finding ways to link, in workshops, historians who work with structured data and those who work with texts. In addition, such a workshop might also show the potential for inclusion of audio-visual materials from WP5. Finally, the idea of WP3 about workshops on interoperability seems very promising.