

# Mapping Worldwide e-Social Science: National Comparisons of Uptake and Sustainability

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## Abstract

The aim of this workshop is to map worldwide e-social science efforts and discuss different national approaches to fostering uptake and achieving sustainability.

## 1. Background

e-Social Science promises to make social sciences resources available to researchers through modern information technologies, enabling increased resource sharing and collaboration. The vision is that sophisticated e-infrastructures and tools should be available to underpin all research activities, regardless of disciplines, locations, organisational contexts, etc. That is, e-infrastructure should become the “seen but unnoticed” fabric that underpins research activities in the social sciences. It will enable researchers to focus on their substantive analyses by removing some of the tedium of accessing and manipulating social science data and will therefore lead to better research.

At the same time, e-social science has the potential of widening engagement with the social sciences through easier access to its resources and products. A closer involvement of the public, for example, may help address the widespread problem of respondent fatigue.

However, before this vision can be realised, there are significant obstacles to be overcome. These relate to issues such as the commodification of technologies, the shaping of national infrastructures and organisational contexts as well as developments within social science research traditions. The uptake of modern e-infrastructures and tools in the social sciences is currently still relatively low compared to other research disciplines such as physics, bio-medical research or environmental sciences. We wish to map out existing projects

worldwide and document where e-social science has had a demonstrable impact before discussing what impact national strategies have in shaping its uptake and sustainability. This workshop proposal draws on two research collaborations aimed at investigating issues of uptake:

- In the context of the EU-funded AVROSS project, we are investigating requirements and options for accelerating the transition from traditional research to virtual research organisations through e-infrastructures in the social sciences and the arts and humanities.
- The UK’s National e-Social Science Centre and the Academia Sinica Grid Centre (ASGC) have received a small grant from the British Academy and the National Science Council of Taiwan to study the current development and adoption of e-Infrastructures in e-(social) sciences in Taiwan and the UK and to map e-social science particularly in the areas of digital archives & geo-science.

In addition, we will draw on the results of a Birds of a Feather session at the UK e-Science All Hands Meeting (Nottingham, September 2007) which will look at national approaches specifically in the areas of digital archives and usage of geo-spatial data, two important topics in a number of disciplines.

## 2. Aims of the Session

The aim of this workshop is to map worldwide e-social science initiatives and to learn from comparisons of different national strategies for the provision of e-infrastructures and tools for the social sciences. This will help raise awareness of initiatives and different approaches in the e-social science community and beyond. It will also help identify and address barriers to wider uptake.

## 3. Session Format

The session will kick off with short presentations giving an overview of activities in Europe, the US and Asia. This will be followed by a short talk on barriers to uptake and a discussion led and moderated by the organisers. We will take ten minutes time to prioritise discussion points to ensure the audience has got a say in shaping the workshop and can respond to suggestions made by the organisers.

We would like to limit the workshop to 15 to 20 attendees and would like to ask the organisers to provide a data projector and flip charts.

## 4. Envisaged Outcomes

The workshop outcomes will help expand on and complement the work of the AVROSS project and will feed into the collaboration between NCeSS and ASGC on comparisons between e-social science in the UK and Taiwan. They will also complement existing national comparison such as the one conducted by Gentzsch (2007) and, hopefully, will lead to further activity in this area.

Despite the ambition of e-Research to transcend national boundaries, key decisions are still made at national or regional levels and we need to gain a better understanding of the wider international socio-economic and political landscape in which such decisions are made as well as the factors influencing them. In our opinion, this is not just a valuable aim in itself but it will also contribute to our understanding of the challenges involved in the fostering of e-infrastructures for the social sciences.

## 5. Related Efforts

The organisers will have the opportunity to conduct work in preparation to the workshop as well as to follow it up through a number of projects:

- the JISC Barriers to Uptake project which investigates barriers to uptake of e-Research and responses to overcome them;
- the JISC eIUS project which collects use cases and service usage models;

- the e-Science Institute research theme on uptake and sustainability of e-Research.

Through the funding from the British Academy and the National Research Foundation of Taiwan, we will be able to follow this up with further workshops, for example at the International Symposium on Grid Computing in Taipei or at future OGF meetings through the HASS-RG. These links will ensure that the outcomes of the session are brought to bear and have wider impact in the e-social science community.

## 5. Audience

We expect that the issue of uptake and sustainability would be of interest to many attendees at the e-Social Science Conference, especially those who are working in international collaborations that involve different national infrastructures and datasets.

## References

- Gentzsch, W. (2007) *Grid Initiatives: Lessons Learned and Recommendations*. Renaissance Computing Institute, University of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, US.