EDITORIAL: FAIR Enough? Evaluating Digital Scholarly Editions and the Application of the FAIR Data Principles

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Digital scholarly editions have revolutionized the global accessibility of scholarly editions – but what are the standards that they adhere to (or should adhere to) in order to meet basic requirements of long-term availability? How are digital editions currently available, what parts of them are available for what purpose? And are they merely accessible or are they discoverable as well? These are some of the questions that the field of digital scholarly editing still needs to address.* With this RIDE issue, we present an important contribution by evaluating editions with special attention paid to the way they comply with the FAIR data principles, which serve as a guideline for ensuring the sustainability and re-usability of data.* These principles have gained acceptance in various research communities since they were first proposed in 2016 (Wilkinson et al. 2016). According to FAIR, data needs to be *Findable*, *Accessible*, *Interoperable* and *Reusable* both for human scholars and machines. Since the principles are formulated in broad and general terms, their specific application and implementation needs to be assessed and adapted depending on the disciplinary context.

The framework in this case is provided not only by the field of digital scholarly editing but also by efforts within Germany to standardize and stabilize research data infrastructures. For this reason, the German National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI) was initiated between 2016–2018.* Since 2021, the NFDI Text+ consortium is dedicated to the domain of text- and language-based data, particularly collections, lexical resources, and scholarly editions. A central aim of the task area ‘editions’ is the development of recommendations for the creation, processing, and publication of FAIR research data. The implementation of the FAIR principles is crucial for central aspects of working with digital editions; these include, for example, aspects of search, linking, licensing, and re-use. In order to gain a better understanding of what “FAIR” entails in the context of editions specifically and whether and how these principles can be applied to digital scholarly editions, existing practices are best described in the form of reviews. On the basis of individual case studies, reviews allow a survey of the diverse editorial landscape and can thus contribute to the development of new criteria. For this reason, Text+ has chosen to cooperate with the review journal RIDE. Together, Text+ and RIDE seek to further promote the discourse on best practices in the creation and publication of digital editions in general and in the application of the FAIR principles in particular.

In order to provide reviewers with a guideline to assist them in their reviewing, criteria for evaluating the FAIRness of editions (Gengnagel, Neuber and Schulz 2022) have been developed in the context of Text+ to supplement the IDE's general set of reviewing criteria (Sahle 2014). The current issue is the first to be published from the responses to the Call for Reviews published in April 2022.* It contains five reviews of the following digital editions:

- "Walter Benjamin digital", a digital edition that partly complements an already printed edition of the author's works and becomes a reading aid and research tool for users through the close interlinking of images and text of Benjamin's drafts;
- "Digitale Edition und Kommentierung der Tagebücher des Fürsten Christian II. von Anhalt-Bernburg (1599–1656)", which aims at presenting the complete diaries of the prince from Early Modern times;
- "Briefportal Leibniz. Ausgewählte Briefe in HTML", a digital collection of selected letters of the ongoing critical print edition of the German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz' works and letters which attempts to overcome some limitations of the printed volumes;
- "Theodor Fontane's Notebooks: A 'Digital Genetic-Critical and Commented Edition'", which presents the notebooks of the 19th-century German writer in a born-digital edition with a strong focus on the materiality of the documents;
- "Die Urkunden und Akten des Klosters und des Oberamts Königsfelden 1308–1662", which provides access to more than 1500 charters with a focus on their contents for research on the history of Switzerland.

The editions reviewed have some similarities and differences, some of which may affect their outcome and influence the implementation of FAIR principles. Generally, the editions originate from various disciplines, including literary studies, philosophy, history or regional history, and history of science. This represents the broad spectrum of disciplines and research areas that is also covered in Text+ with regard to text and language data. Moreover, the reviewed resources represent the variety of sources (drafts, notebooks, charters, letters, diaries) and the different models and traditions to capture, enrich, and present them (e. g. genetic edition, historical-critical edition, diplomatic edition) which characterize the field of scholarly editing.

Among the five reviewed editions, two editions - "Briefportal Leibniz" and "Walter Benjamin Digital" - are not primarily digital editions (i. e. born-digital) but rather supplements to printed editions. Accordingly, these editions are likely to have fewer resources available which affects the selection of documents and the text presentation on the one hand and the complexity of technical implementation and application of FAIR principles on the other. Furthermore, the maturity of the edition also plays a role in the implementation of FAIR principles. For instance, the edition of the diaries of Fürst Christian II. is still work-in-progress and the Königsfelden edition is a relatively young resource, thus for both editions adjustments to the FAIR compliance can still be expected. The benefits of making research data available are particularly evident in the review on the Fontane edition, which, in addition to an evaluation by means of a discursive text, also carries out a machine evaluation of the encoding. At the same time, however, the resource and its strict licensing also show that accessible data does not necessarily guarantee reusability.

In summary, after examining the first five reviews in terms of developing recommendations for applying FAIR principles in digital editions in the context of Text+, we can conclude: First, digital editions are living objects, often published work-in-progress, which must be taken into account when implementing and assessing the FAIR principles, for example when there are different versions of an edition. Second, depending on the project context and available resources (manpower, time, financing, technical know-how), the application of the FAIR principles may vary, which in turn means that recommendations on how to implement the principles

should be scalable accordingly. Third, policies and modes of data provision such as the FAIR Principles, Open Access, and Creative Commons are often used and interpreted synonymously but need to be clearly differentiated and related to each other.

We were very pleased with the response to the Call for Reviews and can already announce that there will be a second issue in the near future. The five reviews show once again how diverse the editing landscape is and thus also the implementation of the FAIR principles.

Enjoy the RIDE!

The editors, Tessa Gengnagel, Frederike Neuber, and Daniela Schulz, March 2023.

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Notes

Such questions will often feature implicitly but are rarely the focus of debate. Previous scholarship on this topic (in particular under the impression of the FAIR principles) include an article on the sustainability in multi-year research projects based on the example of hallerNet, which is a research and edition platform focused on the cross-linking of different collections from the period between 1700 and 1850 (~~Dängeli/Stuber 2020~~), and an unpublished master thesis by Jürgen Windeck titled “FAIRe digitale Editionen. Anforderungen für nutzbare wissenschaftliche Editionen” (Windeck 2019). Beyond that, a comprehensive discussion remains a desideratum.

See https://web.archive.org/web/20230209115851/https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/.

With its recommendation in 2016, the German Council for Scientific Information Infrastructures provided the impetus for the establishment of a National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI). This recommendation was approved by the Joint Science Conference in 2018. One of the goals of the NFDI is the systematic provision of research data in accordance with the FAIR Data Principles.

See https://web.archive.org/web/20230227084840/https://ride.i-d-e.de/reviewers/call-for-reviews/ride-textplus-en/

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