
Services in a research infrastructure - an attempt to review current definitions and their implications

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Abstract

Services are one of the defining elements for research infrastructures, but how to define a service is less clear. In the broadest sense any support for research practices at different stages (as described in the Scholarly Primitives) can be perceived as a service. If we follow the definition of research infrastructures as knowledge infrastructures [1] then both support of the staff working in and with the infrastructure and all the equipment they work with potentially count as service. In DARIAH's strategic plan, services are defined exactly in this broad sense. As DARIAH pillars via which services are provided we find the Marketplace; Working groups; Foresight; and Education/Training [2]. In each of the pillars the provision of the service materialises by a combination of IT based components and other forms of support (such as enabling activities, knowledge exchange, network activities, funding etc.). What is further agreed upon is that (a) research infrastructures for post-modern research are usually distributed, networked structures and that (b) research infrastructures follow a complex architecture with different roles, stakeholders and perspectives involved [3]. For the daily practice of an ERIC as DARIAH is it important to shape a shared understanding how the high-level definition of the services (DARIAH pillar's) translates into concrete services as build in member countries (DARIAH contributions), by projects (pilots of services), in Working groups, and other actors inside of DARIAH (as by participating institutions). This paper explores different ways to define and order services, applying different dimensions (such as geographic spread, addressed knowledge domain, maturity, envisioned audience, etc.). We start from existing definitions of services as for the European Open Science Cloud, or IT services in general, zoom into current DARIAH-wide applied definitions (as from projects such as HaS, DESIR and SSHOC), and test them with existing services (as propagated via the DARIAH website, or collected in the DARIAH contribution tool). By a clearer understanding of the different nature of services we aim to support decision of what services to foster, innovate, and maintain on which level, by which means, and in which time frame.

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