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Neelie Kroes, European Commissioner for Digital Agenda:

# 'Potential for new research is enormous'

Neelie Kroes, Vice President of the European Commission responsible for Europe's Digital Agenda, has strong views on the role of the social sciences and humanities (SSH) in today's society. *Erica Renckens*

"Society is not inert, waiting for technological innovation. Rather, it is an active innovation agent engaging with technologies in a way that often goes far beyond the intentions of the engineers, and that's when innovation really happens! Experts in social sciences and humanities can help policy makers and engineers to harness this vibrant societal intelligence." That's why Kroes supports e-science in the SSH: "Under the upcoming H2020 funding program for Research and Innovation we encourage the integration of SSH considerations in ICT research. We even have a specific cross-cutting topic 'Human-centric Digital Age' where we aim to support future work on integrating SSH knowledge with ICT innovation in all areas."

### Strong focus

"Today we have the technology to enable universal availability and connectivity of all the cultural artefacts of the past in unprecedented ways. Imagine every piece of paper, every bit of text on any medium, from the 19th century backwards, just a few clicks away. This will allow us to bring to life and explore our shared past in a breadth and depth never seen before, which has clear implications for Europe and the



## INTERVIEW

Neelie Kroes is responsible for Europe's Digital Agenda photo Peter Elenbaas / Hollandse Hoogte

work on our European identities." "The Netherlands is already very active in research infrastructures, particularly e-infrastructures. To mention only a few examples: Amsterdam hosts the EGI, the European Grid Initiative. SURF is a highly innovative National Research and Education Network that provides Dutch scientists with extremely fast access to research resources, and recently the Cartesius Supercomputer was installed at SURFsara, which demonstrates once again how Dutch

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### Neelie Kroes

Neelie Kroes studied Economics at Erasmus University in Rotterdam. She was a Member of the Dutch Parliament and served as Minister for Transport, Public Works and Telecommunication before she was appointed President of Nyenrode University. Since 2004, she has been a member of the European Commission, currently as Vice President responsible for Europe's Digital Agenda.

## Why the Social Sciences and Humanities need research infrastructures

**Until recently, museums, archives and libraries were the only large facilities used by researchers from the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). But the digitisation of SSH research has brought about new needs.**

*Peter Doorn*

Research infrastructures have become mainstream in the natural and life sciences: particle accelerators for physicists, telescopes for astronomers, nuclear icebreakers for polar researchers. Since the SSH came to rely heavily on information technology, however, the 'virtual laboratories'

for these disciplines have become part of the same league as the real-world labs in chemistry and physics: digital places where large numbers of researchers share their data and tools.

### No 'one size fits all'

An important factor in this transition was the formulation of a Roadmap by the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) in 2006; for the first time, this Roadmap included proposals with regard to the SSH. In the Netherlands, the 2005 NWO BIG programme and the first Netherlands Roadmap for Large-Scale Research Facilities (2008)

also embodied a breakthrough by including SSH proposals. Why are one or two research infrastructures not enough for the SSH? The silliness of this question becomes apparent as soon as we turn it around: why not have one research infrastructure for the natural sciences? You cannot look at the stars with a nuclear icebreaker and you cannot break ice with a telescope. The SSH are just as heterogeneous as the natural and life sciences, and therefore one tool or virtual lab does not fit all demands.

### Jungle of acronyms

Still, the SSH were among the first

to understand the logic of collaboration. In the Netherlands the two European-wide infrastructures CLARIN and DARIAH decided to join forces and they even merged their acronyms to form CLARIAH. The same goes for SHARE and LISS/MESS in the social sciences. Even collaborations embracing the entire SSH domain have emerged, such as DASISH, which is there to solve common challenges.

In the brave new world of research infrastructures the reader may get lost in a jungle of acronyms, like ESS, GGP and CESSDA. This special edition of E-data & Research aims to make them a bit more familiar.