**Call**

# 'Mixed Methods' in the Humanities? – Support for Projects Combining and Synergizing Qualitative-Hermeneutical and Digital Approaches

## 1. Background and Objectives

It is no exaggeration to say that the radical change impacting our lives as a result of information technology and its three components – digitalization, internet and mobile communications – constitutes a paradigm shift across virtually every area of modern society – and science is no exception. Of crucial significance for cultural studies and the humanities is that the subject matter of their research – the phenomena and occurrences in culture and society – is directly affected by the media change taking place. Increasingly, the objects of their research are born-digital data, which together with retro-digitalized content from libraries, archives and museums represent a previously unimaginable body of data from more or less heterogeneous sources. The subsequent complexity necessitates the use of new computer-aided methods of knowledge acquisition. Today, the humanities are faced with the same issues that previously confronted the social sciences when developing "mixed methods".

The aim of this funding scheme is to explore how to combine and synergize "qualitative-hermeneutical" and digital approaches on the example of a shared academically challenging research question. The difference between the two procedures is to be seen rather in a text-book interpretation, since the designations "qualitative" or "hermeneutical" humanities are meant to subsume such heterogeneous and partly contrary approaches as hermeneutics in the narrow sense of the word, discourse theory, structuralism, deconstructivism, post-colonial studies etc. The main differentiating factor between the two approaches is whether or not "computer-aided methods and tools are systematically researched, developed and applied". This funding offer addresses all historical-hermeneutical disciplines.

Projects are sought that develop measures reaching beyond the specific research question and explore the interface between the two procedures on a theoretical-methodological level. Qualitative-hermeneutical and digital approaches shall in reciprocity shed light on their epistemological differences and (interactively) investigate the potential "added value" of their interaction. How can the two approaches be linked and synergized when investigating a

shared object of research? Are research questions in digital projects always formulated from a hermeneutical perspective? Would it not be more adequate to grasp the data as themselves being products of historical-cultural contexts, and how can this aspect be reflected in quantifying procedures? Can the "confirmation bias" of "hermeneutics" be overcome by the epistemic characteristics of the digital humanities?

## 2. Scope of Funding

The offer comprises two funding lines: The first funding line addresses collaborative projects. The second funding line offers support for workshops and small-scale summer schools.

**Funding line 1: Projects**

The funding offer addresses "hybrid projects" which combine and synergize qualitative-hermeneutical and digital approaches in innovative joint research projects designed to make significant contributions to knowledge acquisition in the respective field.

On the example of a shared challenging research question, the aim is to conceptualize how non-digital and digital procedures can be combined and synergized. The expected advance in knowledge acquisition should be illustrated for both areas. Projects are expected to result in executable software solutions on the "proof of concept" level, or at least the modeling and formalization of qualitative-hermeneutical approaches that constitute the basis for software solutions. Proposals must include details of such technical-conceptual implementation. Any and all tools resulting from the project must be made available to research as open source materials.

*Target group*

Post-docs and all following career-levels across all historical-hermeneutical disciplines (e.g. literature studies, history, philosophy, history of law and comparative law, art history, musicology) working in equitable cooperation with partners in the areas of digital humanities and/or informatics.

*Budget*

Funding can be made available in an amount up to EUR 450,000 over a three-year period. Projects may apply for funds to finance one post-doc position for each approach. Positions may also be shared (Ph.D. students, student researchers etc.). Moreover, projects may apply for additional funds to cover costs of software programming. Applicants are free to design their own project structure.

*Review procedure and selection criteria*

Proposals will be reviewed and assessed by an interdisciplinary panel of experts. The final selection will be made on the basis of project presentations under consideration of the following criteria:

- Does combining the proposed qualitative-hermeneutical and digital procedures hold promise of methodological added value?
- Are the non-digital and digital approaches combined in the project integrated in an equitable manner?
- Does the research question constitute a truly shared innovative approach designed to make a significant contribution to knowledge acquisition in the respective fields?
- Is there a sustainable plan for storing data resulting from the project so it can be reused by research?
- Among the expected project results, will there be an executable software solution on the "proof of concept" level, or at least the modeling and formalization of qualitative-hermeneutical approaches that constitute the basis for software solutions?
- Will the developed tools be made available to research as open source materials?

Final decisions on the proposals are expected to be made in early July 2016.

*Cross-project cooperation*

In order to strengthen the overriding theoretical-methodological level beyond the specific research question, it is planned to network the selected projects and appoint an advisory panel to accompany their progress. There will be a closing event to discuss the results of the projects; if appropriate, the results will be compiled in a joint publication.

*Funding will not be granted for*

- Centers for digital humanities
- Research infrastructure projects and virtual research environments
- Projects in the digital humanities not oriented to the theoretical-methodological objective
- Open-access publication concepts and digital editions
- Visualization projects that mediate contents of the humanities/cultural studies.

**Funding line 2: Workshops and summer schools**

Beside funds to implement cooperation projects, applications may also be submitted for the funding of workshops and summer schools with up to 60 participants. Funding line 2 is open to all researchers in the historical-hermeneutical humanities, and it is not exclusive to grantees in funding line 1. Funding may also be made available to fill the gender gap and support the training of female researchers in digital technology.

Applications for the funding of workshops and summer schools may be submitted at any time. The review process is carried out in written form.

The budget may include travel and accommodation expenses, as well as (reasonable) costs of personnel required for the preparation and implementation of workshops.

The Foundation will not approve funding to cover:

- flat-rate payment for preparation and organization
- speakers' fees (although in exceptional cases funds may be allocated to defray expenses of speakers outside the realm of academia)
- expenses for accompanying family members or other accompanying persons
- costs of framework programs.

## 3. General Information

To facilitate the international review process, applications in either funding line may only be submitted in English.

The Volkswagen Foundation can award grants to academic institutions only. Applicants outside of universities and established research institutions need to provide details on their legal form, statutes, trustees and boards, non-profit status, budgeting and auditing of the institution intended to receive the funding.

Research institutions outside Germany may also be eligible for funding. Such applications must include specific details of a substantial cooperation with academics in Germany.

The Foundation is unable to process applications that have been submitted in identical or similar form to any other funding body. Moreover, the Foundation will not accept liability for financial obligations made prior to the receipt of a grant letter.

The Foundation will not allocate funding for overheads, i.e. administrative costs calculated on a flat-rate basis.

**Electronic Application System**

Please use the Volkswagen Foundation's online application system: portal.volkswagenstiftung.de.

# 4. Checklist

Please submit your application using the Foundation's electronic Application Portal (user instructions under Item 5). You will need to supply details on the **applicant**, the **institution** (recipient of funds) as well as the **project** (title, duration, and total funding amount) and **budget** plan.

## Funding line 1: Projects

- **Cover letter**
- **Summary** (max. 1 page, preferably German and English)
- **Project description** in English (max. 15 pages, 11-point)
  - Rationale and objective
  - Status of international research and discussion
  - Expected contribution of proposed project to funding initiative's theoretical-methodological research question: What are the new findings expected from combining the two approaches?
  - Project design: How is combination of the two procedures to be implemented in equitable manner?
  - Methods, including detailed description of planned technical conceptualization work
  - Sources and materials base
  - Time and work schedule
  - Project structure: Who does what?
  - Planned publications
- **References/Literature** (max. 3 pages)
- **CV** (max. 3 pages per applicant including up to 10 publications of relevance for the project)
- **Commented budget** for each of the applicants, containing personnel costs, ongoing and one-off non-personnel costs with accordant grounds

Other documents

- Miscellaneous (e.g. applications for research professorships).

## Funding line 2: Workshops and small-scale summer schools

- **Summary** (max. 1 page, preferably German and English)
- **Project description** in English (max. 7 pages, 11-point)
  - Event concept and status of international research
  - Details on selection of participants (call, distribution channels, selection criteria)
- **Program** and **List of participants** (possibly provisional)
- **Selected references/literature** (max. 1 page)
- **Short CVs** (max. 1 page per applicant including up to 5 publications of relevance for the project)

# 5. Electronic Applications – Tips and User Instructions

The Volkswagen Foundation can only process applications submitted via the Foundation's electronic Application Portal under portal.volkswagenstiftung.de.

Please note that you need to register on the electronic application system to be able to submit an application and have access to application data and receive e-mail updates. It is therefore necessary that all applicants responsible for the proposed project register online. Please also note that when you use the online system you will be identified by your e-mail address and not your proper name.

Please follow these steps to compile and submit your application:

- All new users must **register** in the Application Portal with their name and e-mail address together with a freely chosen password. After registering you will be asked to provide your employer's address. Following this, you will have to activate your user account via the link that will be sent to you by e-mail. In case you already have an account, you can **log in** immediately using your e-mail address and password.

- Via the button "**new application**", you can select the relevant funding initiative (here: 'Mixed Methods' in the Humanities? – Support for Projects Combining and Synergizing Qualitative-Hermeneutical and Digital Approaches) and/or select the funding lines (1 or 2) to start the application procedure.

- Here – as at any time later – you are able to interrupt the application process by logging out; you can then return and log in at a later date.

- Please check to ensure that previously entered data on the applicant is correct. You must also ensure that details on all co-applicants are **entered** correctly. You will still need to enter **application data** such as the project title, duration, and budget plan (specified for each applicant).

- Please fill in **all the fields** contained in the form.

- Please note that the "**save**" button will not transfer any data to the Foundation. You are able to revise all data until final submission and can interrupt the application process at any time and as often as required up to the time your application is completed and you click the "submit" button.

- Don't forget to read the legal notice and then to click **confirm**. If you wish, you can download a PDF file with all the required forms for your own records.

- Under "**attachments**" you can **upload the files** (project description, CVs etc.) that are listed in the checklist (see Item 4). All these files must be submitted as a PDF. You are able to revise all the data you enter until final submission.

- Any further information you may be requested to supply in the course of the application procedure can be uploaded and submitted under "**application supplement**".