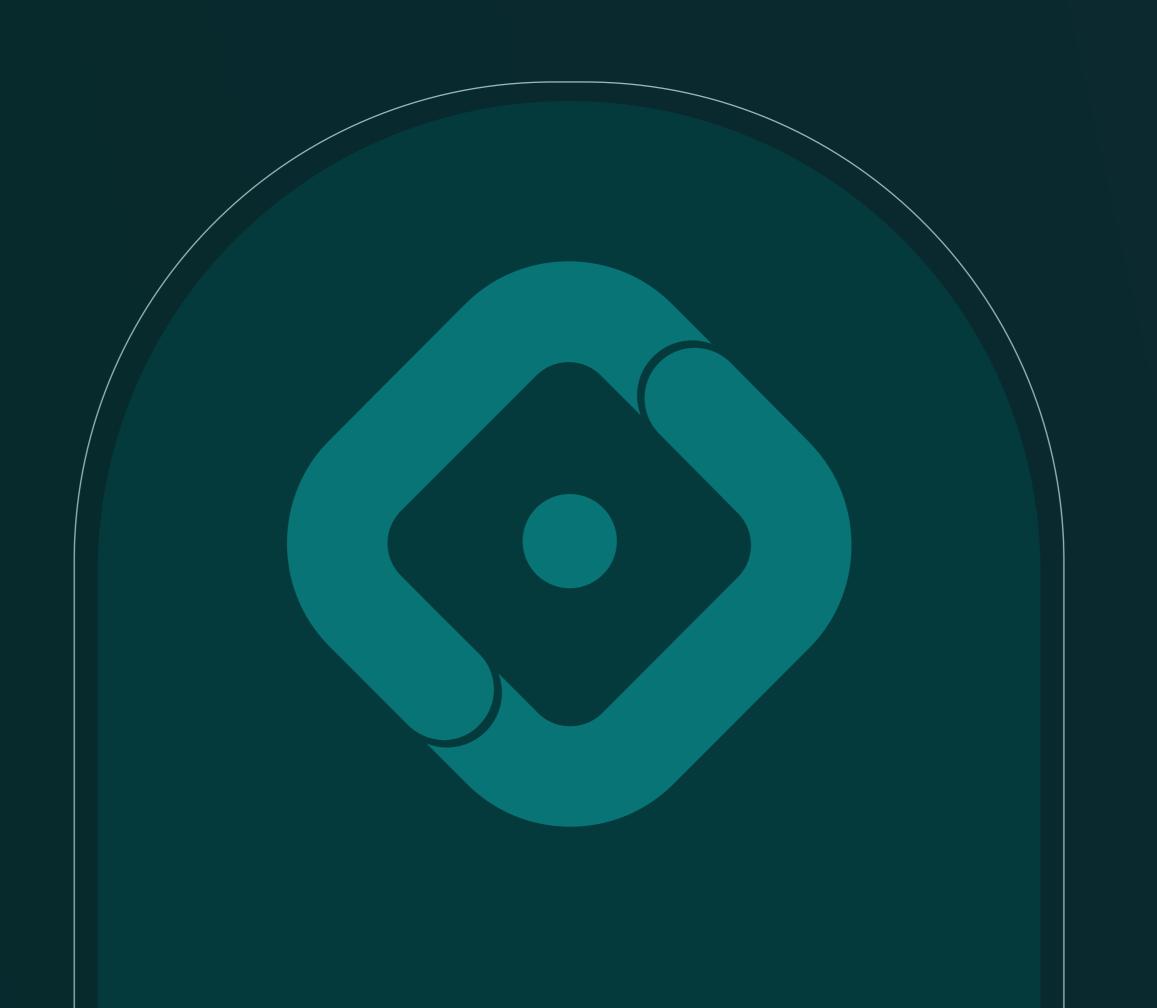# The Role of CESSDA for the Social Sciences and Research Community

Interviews with User Communities and Member Countries

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Introduction

CESSDA, the Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives, is a European research infrastructure whose mission is to facilitate and promote the collection, preservation, and dissemination of social science data. In the first half of 2023 we carried out a series of interviews with representatives from both CESSDA member countries and research communities. These interviews provide insights into the role of CESSDA in the social sciences landscape and highlight the benefits it brings to researchers across Europe and beyond.

During our interviews with the representatives of CESSDA Member Countries, it became evident that CESSDA serves as an essential platform for fostering synergies among social sciences data archives across Europe. CESSDA offers valuable services to researchers, including training opportunities and facilitates convenient access to extensive data services at the pan-European level. It also plays a significant role in establishing trust in data by delivering dependable and sustainable data services for researchers.

During our interviews with the CESSDA Data and Research Communities several of the resources provided by the CESSDA were highlighted as extremely useful. These included the CESSDA Vocabulary Service (CVS), and European Question Bank (EQB) which are valuable tools for individuals exploring unfamiliar research fields or grappling with unfamiliar terminology. In addition, the CESSDA Data Management Expert Guide (DMEG) was identified as a relevant resource for all students and professionals involved in the data management life cycle as was the CESSDA Metadata Validator for those who wish to ensure their datasets have appropriate metadata attached.

In general, these interviews offer valuable perspectives on how CESSDA plays a pivotal role in facilitating and advancing the gathering, safeguarding, and distribution of social science data. This, in turn, brings advantages not only to researchers throughout Europe but also to the member countries of CESSDA, including Austria and Norway.

Each of our interviewees were asked about the following CESSDA resources (all of which are **freely available on our website**);

CESSDA Data Catalogue

CESSDA Data Management Expert Guide

CESSDA Tools

Interview with CESSDA Member Country Representative **Matthias Reiter-Pázmándy** (Austria)

Matthias represents the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science and Research, and acts as the Vice Chair of the General Assembly of CESSDA. He works in the department for Social Sciences and Humanities and focuses on creating optimal conditions for researchers in Austria, particularly regarding research infrastructures that support the whole Austrian research area. His mission is to improve data access for social scientists.

For Matthias, CESSDA works as a platform to find and develop synergies between National Data Archives and is an important European research infrastructure. It develops services for researchers that enable easy access to data sets they would otherwise not find, which brings added value to the European research area. CESSDA also acts as a knowledge hub, where National Archives can get advice and support.

According to Matthias, if CESSDA didn't exist, it would have to be invented. CESSDA connects data archives from different countries in Europe and gives researchers in Europe access to many more data sets than they would have without it. Austrian researchers profit from the growing data catalogue of CESSDA, which now has over 40,000 entries. This added value of having metadata from many National Archives in one place helps to develop services of higher quality on a much larger scale than without CESSDA.

In Austria, the Ministry of Education, Science and Research improves access to data for researchers where possible. For example, Austria recently reformed the rules of data access for researchers, enabling researchers to access administrative and statistical data for scientific purposes with strict data protection and security rules. The Ministry has enabled this reform, and the focus is now on supporting research to use these new data sources to analyse different societal questions.

In relation to the various CESSDA tools and services Matthias is most impressed by the CESSDA Data Catalogue. This catalogue has 40,000 data sets from a range of different countries, languages, and societies on various societal questions. It provides data for cross-country comparison, a very important aspect of the European Research Framework programme in Horizon Europe

Interview with CESSDA Member Country Representative **Olja Toljagic** (Norway)

Olja Toljagic represents the Research Council of Norway, which is also the Norwegian national contact point for the research infrastructure program in Horizon Europe in the EU. For Olja CESSDA plays an incredibly important role in the social sciences landscape in Europe and internationally. It not only provides large scale data services at the pan European level, but it also builds trust in data by providing reliable and sustainable data services for the researchers.

The importance of CESSDA lies also in the training aspect, which is available both for the users and archive or university staff. Building these skills and competences around such services is an integral part of research.

Norway has been an active member in CESSDA since the beginning, and the Main Office of CESSDA is in Bergen, Norway. CESSDA provides a broad network for social scientists in Norway which helps them to stay at the forefront of their field. CESSDA has been essential to showcasing the importance and benefits of research infrastructures in Norway.

During the interview Olja also highlighted how CESSDA contributes to EOSC in many ways. Firstly it is active in several key projects within the EOSC landscape. Secondly much of the work that is done in CESSDA on data services are in accordance with EOSC's general goals, such as providing data services and tools to researchers for innovation and education.

The Ministry of Education and Research in Norway has a plan for higher education and research and it puts EOSC in focus as an important system which the national infrastructures should align to both now and in the future. Finally the Research Council of Norway is a mandated organisation in the EOSC association on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Research.

Interview with CESSDA Data Community Representative **Emiliano Degl'Innocenti** (DARIAH-IT)

Emiliano Degl'Innocenti is the National Coordinator for Italy of DARIAH-IT and works at the Italian National Council for Research. DARIAH-IT brings together a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and digital humanities, including literary scholars, but also philosophers, historians, lexicographers, art historians, archaeologists and several other disciplines. Thus the DARIAH-IT Research Community represents a large community of scholars in Europe, covering a wide spectrum of traditional and digital humanities disciplines.

Emiliano found several resources provided by the CESSDA tools and services portal that he believes are useful for the Dariah-IT Research Community. One such resource is the CESSDA Vocabulary Service. The vocabulary service enables users to discover, browse, and download controlled vocabularies in a variety of languages.

The service also contains an Editor, where authorised users create, manage, and translate the vocabularies. He sees these controlled vocabularies as a very interesting link between the work that DARIAH-IT is doing and the possible connections that can be made at the national and international level to establish interoperability alignment or reuse of specific components.

Emiliano found the CESSDA Data Management Expert Guide to be a valuable resource for professionals involved in the data management life cycle of digital resources. In particular he highlighted the FAIR data perspective that comes from CESSDA and believes that everyone working in the data field would find something of interest in the guide.

Overall it is clear that the CESSDA tools and services portal and the CESSDA Data Management Expert Guide actively support the valuable work of interdisciplinary research in the humanities and digital humanities.

Interview with CESSDA Data Community Representative
Alìz Horváth (OPERAS)

Alíz Horváth is an Assistant Professor in East Asian History and Digital Humanities. She is a scholar whose research focuses on East Asia (China, Japan, Korea) with a particular interest in intellectual history, cultural studies, and interdisciplinary approaches with a digital component. She holds a University of Chicago PhD in East Asian Languages and Civilisations, and is currently teaching Japanese, Chinese, and Korean history and digital humanities at the East Asian Institute of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest.

Alìz's research predominantly relies on archival and textual data, but she also leverages annotated textual data that is machine-readable, allowing for quantitative and qualitative analysis. She strongly encourages her students to explore various source materials and diverse types of data, including statistical data and survey data.

When exploring the CESSDA Data Catalogue, Alìz found it to be a wealth of rich and versatile data sets. Of particular interest to her was the data set on the reception of art in Asia and its profound influence on both Asian and European cultures. Furthermore, the International Social Survey Program National Identity data set proved invaluable for her transnational research endeavours within the realm of East Asian studies.

While discussing the CESSDA Data Management Expert Guide, Alìz was impressed by its comprehensive nature and user-friendly format. She particularly found the chapters on planning, organising, documenting, archiving, and publishing to be of utmost relevance to her work as a digital humanist.

Finally, among the several tools and services which are provided by CESSDA, Alìz highlighted the CESSDA Vocabulary Service, which she considers a valuable tool for individuals exploring unfamiliar research fields or grappling with unfamiliar terminology. Additionally, she found the CESSDA Metadata Validator to be highly beneficial for students learning the importance of providing accurate metadata for their data sets.

Interview with CESSDA Data Communities Representative **Ahmad Wali Ahmad-Yar**, The Hummingbird Project (Migration research community)

Ahmed Wali is a PhD researcher affiliated with the Interface Demography Research Group at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). Additionally, he plays an integral role in The Hummingbird Project, an ambitious initiative supported by Horizon 2020 funding and actively engaged with the CESSDA Data Community. The Hummingbird Project aims to comprehensively investigate migration flows in Europe by employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, fostering collaboration among experts from diverse fields such as sociology, computer science, statistics, and demography.

The project gathers an extensive range of data, encompassing inputs from national statistical organisations, big data sources, mobile phone data, and even satellite data. Moreover, it is attempting to integrate insights from various disciplines, for example the project is merging the data gathered by sociologists and social scientists with that collected by computer scientists.

Wali underscores his experience of the advantages and benefits of interdisciplinary research, emphasising that researchers with different backgrounds bring unique perspectives and innovative solutions to the table. The Hummingbird Project has actively fostered collaboration among experts from varied fields, leading to captivating discussions and groundbreaking research. Indeed, the project's interdisciplinary nature has yielded fresh insights into the challenges surrounding migration flows in Europe.

Central to these achievements is the meticulous management of data, accompanied by the inherent challenges associated with data management in research projects. In this regard, Wali commends the CESSDA Data Management Expert Guide for providing a comprehensive framework for creating effective data management plans and indeed stated that "[o]n the CESSDA Data Management Expert Guide I liked everything because as a researcher who likes data, who works with data, everything was very relevant".

Furthermore, Wali highlighted the invaluable tools and services offered by CESSDA, with particular emphasis on the European Question Bank and the CESSDA Metadata Validator. These resources have proven highly beneficial in his own research endeavours, he said "the CESSDA Tools were very interesting and they were not only tools but also the answers to many questions, for example the European Question Bank for when you want to compare questions or look at what other countries are studying or what sort of questions others have".

Overall, this interview sheds light on the interdisciplinary research conducted by The Hummingbird Project, underscoring the significance of data management in research projects as well as the importance of the support provided by CESSDA in terms of tools, services, and training for research communities like Hummingbird.

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