

IMPLEMENTING RDA OUTPUTS FOR... ETHNOGRAPHY



PECE implements RDA Practical Policy recommendations for experimental collaborative ethnography

The Platform for Experimental, Collaborative Ethnography (PECE) was designed to address the need for collaborative ethnographic research and interpretative data analysis. PECE is a Free and Open Source platform that supports multi-sited, cross-scale ethnographic and historical research. The platform links humanities and qualitative social science researchers enabling new kinds of analyses and data visualizations, and activating researchers' engagement with public problems and diverse audiences. While supporting a number of specific projects in the "empirical digital humanities," PECE is also a research project in itself, exploring how a digital infrastructure can be designed to support open-ended, collaborative hermeneutics.

RDA helped PECE by providing the technical guidelines for implementing a set of data management policies which respond to the specific needs of ethnographers in the context of digital humanities.

The PECE design team implemented the RDA Practical Policy WG (WG-PP) for Data Management output so that data management would be automatically built into their digital platform.

The Challenge

Many web platforms are designed and implemented without proper data management provisions. This leads to future difficulties, when third party solutions have to be integrated to perform data management tasks, complexifying the workflow, introducing potential points of failure, and expanding the attack surface for security breaches.

"In particular", Luis Felipe explains, "we addressed three interrelated problems with support from the RDA community: 1) development of a web platform to support interdisciplinary collaborations (with proper data management capabilities built-in) meant to help solve the issue of scarcity of adequate institutional repositories for the humanities and social sciences; 2) specification of a flexible, basic data model for

ethnographic projects which allows for large-scale data exchange (with proper metadata descriptors) across ethnographic collections; and 3) translation of open standards and best practices from Free and Open Source development as practical policies for the PECE digital platform, including provisions for open formats, open licenses, multiple authorship, and open interfaces for automated data management."

RDA Recommendations Adopted

Machine Actionable Policy Templates: used to enforce management and automate administrative tasks. Input from the Ethics and Social Aspects of Data (ESAD) group was also important, given the crucial need of incorporating security provisions into PECE due to the sensitive nature of ethnographic data.

Answering Community Needs

Researchers in our community both collect and produce data (such as interviews, field notes, and archival documents) and then interpret them according to diverse genealogies of humanities and social science theory. To address emerging, complex techno-scientific problems, our research community has only recently begun to advocate for data sharing - not necessarily so that researchers can reproduce analysis, but instead that data can be interpreted from diverse perspectives.

Why RDA

RDA's practical policy recommendations can be used to enforce data management and automate administrative tasks. The benefits of using DM policies include minimization of the amount of labour needed to manage a collection and the ability to share data, while publicizing the rules that are being used for different collections.

Find out more

Visit RDA @ rd-alliance.org

Email: enquiries@rd-alliance.org

The Implementation

The PECE design group implemented the recommendations of RDA's "Practical Policy" Working Group (WG-PP) on data management into a digital platform designed to support collaborative ethnographic research projects and developed following a Free and Open Source approach. RDA's best practices in data management were implemented to 1) protect and anonymize (often sensitive human subjects' data), 2) enable, enrich, and incentivize data sharing in the ethnography research community, which has traditionally not shared primary data, and 3) to ensure that the data stored can be contextualized with metadata about its creation and complex chains of custody. In total, 11 practical policies for data management were adapted and adopted by the PECE project and incorporated into its digital platform.

Implementing RDA's practical policy recommendation allowed various features to be designed and implemented to facilitate the work of curating ethnographic data in a collaborative mode (such as providing basic metadata descriptors, automated and encrypted backups, public API for data harvesting or data sharing across PECE instances, persistent storage of web links with Perma.cc addressing, among several other capabilities for collaborative work among ethnographers).

Dr. Luis Felipe R. Murillo

PECE Platform for Experimental, Collaborative Ethnography PECE has been built and is governed by an interdisciplinary design group centered first in the Science and Technology Studies Department at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Troy, New York, USA), and now in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine.



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Lesson Learnt

Disciplines in the humanities and social sciences often do not have the available technical expertise to take the tasks of data management into their own hands. Being able to automate and simplify the process of data management is of crucial importance.

At RDA, adopters will find the necessary guidance from experienced

data professionals but the capacity to operationalize their guidelines will depend upon their local capacity (available expertise and resources).

Adopters would benefit greatly from more substantial feedback on their implementations early on: following-up with adopters regularly might help speed-up the process of adoption (as

well as early identification of pitfalls and difficulties in the implementation phase). Further, this follow-up could serve to highlight areas where the recommendation may need to be made more specific or more flexible to meet the specific needs of certain domain groups.