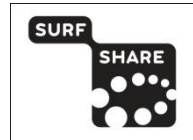


This is the translation of chapter 7 in the book 'Toegang tot Onderzoeksdata', which appeared in July 2011 as one of the products of the SURFshare programme. In this Dutch book various aspects of providing access to research data in the Dutch landscape are discussed.



Data in Australia and the Netherlands: perseverance and dedication is required

Interview with Andrew Treloar and Jeroen Rombouts on 29 July 2010 by Lilian van der Vaart.

Andrew Treloar en Jeroen Rombouts must both know how persevere. Way back, Andrew studied Germanic languages; he still speaks a little Dutch. Since the mid-90s he has been involved with electronic publishing, designing the technical architecture for big repository projects, VRE's and data projects. Since its start in early 2009 he's director of technology for ANDS, the Australian National Data Service and he hopes to realise the vision they have for ANDS for 2018 (if ANDS is still going then!). He knows about nurturing growth: he grows vegetables, fruit trees and chickens.



Andrew Treloar (PhotoA)

Jeroen started out in industrial/environmental research, moved to managing innovation projects at TU Delft Library, and is now managing director of the 3TU.Datacenter. He knows the deep waters: he sails and dives.

The facts about ANDS

- Focus on data management at the **national** level
- Point of engagement: universities and research institutions
- Aus\$122M for data management, of which Aus\$ 72M for ANDS, Aus\$ 50M for data storage (to be handled by a separate centre)
- 7 programmes, on national framework, data management policies and plans, and infrastructure projects – e.g. software for data and metadata capture from a variety of instruments, in sciences and arts & humanities

<http://ands.gov.au>

The Australian situation

The level of funding and commitment to data management are enviable, Andrew agrees when asked about this. The last two governments have been highly committed to developing an excellent research infrastructure – partly as a response to the crisis, to give Australian researchers an “unfair advantage” and make them attractive partners internationally. Large amounts of funding are devoted towards development of instruments and information infrastructure, and Australia now has the largest investment in data management in the world. ANDS have been fortunate in being able to work with

senior government officials who have a thorough understanding of the importance of the subject. The focus on the national level is deliberate: it is more sustainable than working at discipline level.



Andrew Treloar and Jeroen Rombouts (PhotoA)

Comparing the data landscapes

Comparing the Australian and Dutch situations, Jeroen finds that the most conspicuous difference, apart of course from the level of funding, is the “divide” in data management between Arts & Humanities (DANS) and Sciences (3TU.Datacenter). Historically understandable, there’s hope for a move towards greater cooperation. Despite the size differences, Jeroen and Andrew conclude it is as difficult to get a clear picture of the complete data landscape in Holland as it is in Australia: a lot is happening at the local level – at individual institutions or among groups of researchers who also buy a lot of ‘infrastructure’ themselves, especially in the sciences.

Probably quite similar is the difference between the various disciplines in attitude and behaviour towards data management. Andrew notes, though, there is growing general awareness of the importance of data as such. Research funding agencies are starting to consider publication of data as research output of funded projects. There’s also a growing movement towards open government data. He feels Australia is catching up with Europe and the UK here. There’s probably sufficient recognition at government level now for the importance of quality data management services to ensure continued funding, in some form or other; and he hopes universities will experience the benefits for themselves and will continue. Jeroen doubts The Netherlands are that far yet. A service like DataCite, of which both ANDS and TU Delft Library are founding members, will help to raise the visibility of data and enforce the idea that data are “first class citizens”; researchers need to get credit for their data as such, rather than just for the research done on them.

Crossing the great divide

Crossing the disciplinary divide has advantages e.g. by supporting multi- and interdisciplinary research, offering economies of scale and funding. Andrew and Jeroen agree that it does pose challenging questions with respect to organization, whether the approach is national, institutional or (inter)disciplinary. Andrew feels that having the institution as point of engagement is more sustainable, but it means support for many different formats. ANDS is considering the possibility of ‘data overlays’, with universities specializing in disciplines, without it being visible to the researcher. But these are only ideas for now. Close contact between researchers and metadata specialists is a necessity, however, to achieve better understanding, and being close physically helps. Jeroen notes that researchers are also asking for other types of support, like help to gather data or to improve survey methods, or with presentation (visualization and visibility), etc. At the TICER [Summerschool](#) it was recognized there’s a need for a new kind of professional - with a combination of information/IT skills and people skills. These are hard to find – and, or because, there is no career path for them. A possible approach may be the ‘dual career path’ as developed in industry for discipline specialists who grow and receive promotion in their line of specialism, rather than by moving into management.

Applying the data curation continuum model

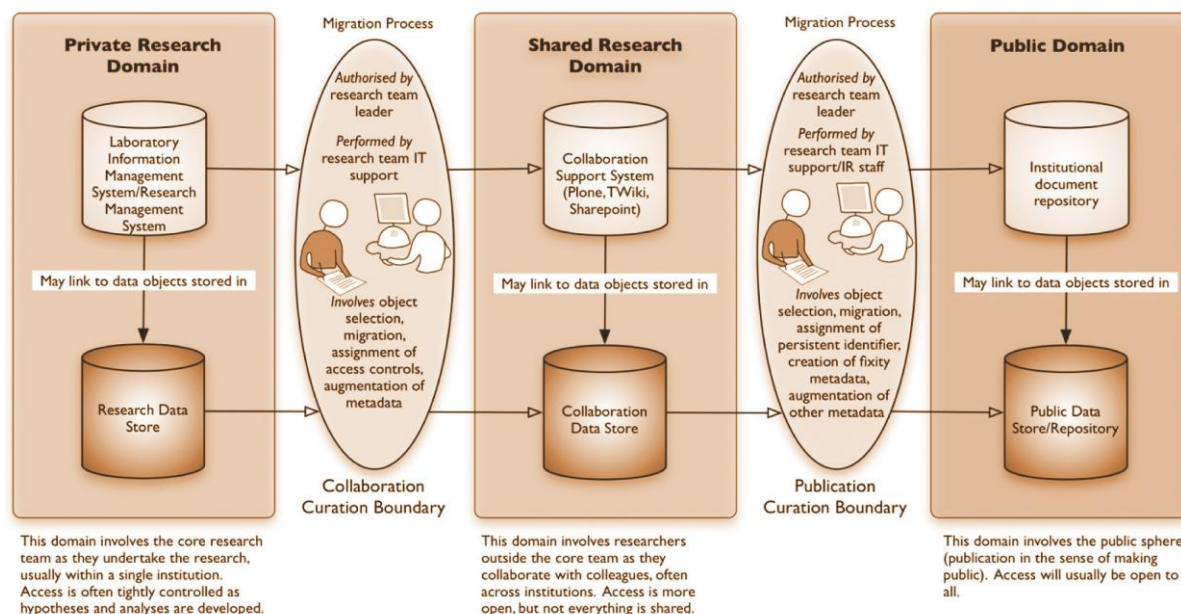


Figure 1: The data continuum model (from: <http://ands.org.au/guides/curation.continuum.pdf>)

"Ah, the model..." When asked about the model developed in recent years, Andrew appears most pleased to find it seems to map pretty well with what people do. He stresses that the research workflow doesn't necessarily have to move through the three stages: it's a model, not a prescription. Most of the work ANDS funds is in the private research domain; and some in the public domain. The 'shared research domain' needs more work; researchers want it, but much better and easier tools are needed to make them the preferred option over the present familiar but far from robust tools ('some use Facebook for data...'). And there are two areas to work on: the software and the services. It is perhaps the most difficult domain to facilitate: the problem space for research collaboration is international, but solutions need to be found at the local or national level. Jeroen concurs: the dilemma for institutional IT Directors is what solutions can be provided only by institutions, and what had best be solved outside, taking into account institutional financial, legal and security aspects. Researchers don't hesitate to use cloud services, but are less aware of the drawbacks. It's an area that needs collaboration between institutions, and even with industry; there's a trend to move to the European level for finding solutions (and funding). In terms of the model, Jeroen says, 3TU.Datacenter works mainly in the public domain, and somewhat in the shared research domain; at a recent round table the conclusion was that support at the private research level is desirable. The issue here is how to get involved at an early stage from the relative distance of a centralized service. Andrew quotes a colleague who says: I want to work with people who have 'data pain'. At ANDS they work with the ready, the willing and the able, and that's already more than they can handle...

Parting thoughts?

'All those interested in unlocking data, must know how to persevere'

Data management is certainly not for the faint-hearted. Andrew: `it takes time to get to work with researchers, and you have to manage their expectations.` Jeroen: `the nature of the problems they face, has not changed these last ten years.` It takes a gardener's patience to bring things to fruition, a diver's stamina to deal with long-term problems...

What Andrew envies The Netherlands for:

- Small country but very focused, that has real advantages; they cannot sit in the same room so easily...
- Some wonderful assets in SURF, DANS, 3TU.Datacenter – they don't have the equivalent of either of those

and what he encourages us to do:

- Keep working on the idea to create a national layer across disciplinary boundaries; the division by discipline is not always helpful, after all there's also more cross-boundary research these days.

What Jeroen likes in Australia:

- the sheer size of things: the ideas, the numbers of people involved
- support in the private research domain

and what he'd encourage them to do:

- provide funding and support to collaboratories, because they are early adaptors and good ambassadors.