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Reflecting on Digital Scholarship through Activity Visualization

Nyíri (2003) has described the kind of knowledge society that new developments in information and communication technologies can enable, and that shared visual representations of knowledge are key to this. New skills and forms of practical knowledge related to digital networking and mobile technologies allow new possibilities for scholarly activity, but it remains the case that many academics have been reluctant to adopt “digital scholarship” as a core part of their work. Drawing on Weller (2011) and Pearce et al. (2010) we offer a description and defence of digital scholarship which highlights the importance of broader notions of scholarly value which take digital activities into account. We propose (and demonstrate) a number of data visualisations used to facilitate meaningful reflection on scholarly activity through visual learning; including network diagrams of online connections, and interactive charts showing use of online services over time. We discuss ways in which these visualisations can be used to support reflective research in scholarly activities, such as stimulating focus group discussions, at The Open University in the UK. We conclude by advancing the thesis that data visualisations which focus on the digital activities of scholars facilitate self reflection through recognition (or, seeing oneself through the eyes of others). In addition, these visualisations can be used to augment the sharing of approaches to digital scholarship with colleagues across an institution.

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