



## Micropublications

*Panel B3- Zurich*

*21.10.21, 15h45 - 16h30*

*Panel suggested by Moritz Mähr, ETH Zurich*

*Reporter: Gabi Wuethrich*

### **Discussion leader and core topic presentation:**

After a short procedural instruction and an introductory round among the participants, Moritz Mähr, a doctoral student at ETH and project manager for the digital history of Basel, first defined the term "micropublication":

- ☐ They may be short self-authored texts, sources, images, maps, etc.
- ☐ They are hypertextual, i.e. they contain links to other resources
- ☐ They have their own URF (Unified Resource Identifier) like DOIs, URLs, etc.

One example is [www.cache.ch](http://www.cache.ch), a collection of annotated sources, with short texts that contextualise them.

For the Basel project, Moritz's job is to secure the research data, something historians usually do not think about. Thus, we have to transfer information to data, and vice versa, to share the information used within the respective research project. How this can be done in the context of historical research is not clear. In that context, micropublications may be one way to do it, and they could be referenced.

### **Main arguments in the discussion:**

Three core questions emerged in the discussion:

#### *1. What is research data, at all? What to report?*

It seems rather absurd to provide lists of book searches, HLS-searches, Wiki-articles, browser histories, note taking tools, etc, because they are often unorganised. And a research journal on procedures quickly becomes redundant, trivial, and boring. Meanwhile, transparency and reproducibility would be the one argument in favour of such an undertaking. Contrary to other disciplines, however, there is no general methodology in the Humanities. It is only a posteriori that we can rationalise the results.

Still, while working on a monograph, smaller publications could be published when they come up - things that often tend to be forgotten or lost in the process, e.g. in the form of a blog. Blogs also enable the researcher to publish their (interim) findings in a different, and sometimes freer, form.

#### *2. What is the status of micropublications? Who has the authority to fix things?*

The blog topic directly led to the question of the status of this form of micropublications.



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Micropublications surely still do not have the same epistemic value as a printed publication. As it was the case with a Festschrift in blog-form in Basel (<https://mhistories.hypotheses.org/>): they provide a platform where texts can be published for which there are no other forms of publication - even though some of the Basel authors admittedly delivered classical scientific texts, and thus partly turned the blog into more of a journal. One concession to some of the authors was that the blog was institutionally fixed at Uni Basel, and that they were able to add them to their list of publications.

In such an institutionalised context, the idea of a blog as a flexible micropublication gets blurred, however. In many cases, blogs rather serve to follow the thoughts of researchers, to mark their territory, or to influence the debates on certain topics, i.e. they have a rather "temporary" character - and are often in a "sad" state regarding layout. If that form still can be defined as publishing, remains to be debated, but the distinction between a free and an institution-based blog form is clearly related to the question of repositories.

### *3. What repositories should be used?*

In general, something is published if it has a DOI - but are gatekeepers needed to administer them? Repositories for collective annotations like <https://web.hypothes.is/> provide low entry barriers in that respect.

In contrast to these low barrier offers, books are usually nicely typeset, i.e. the presentation becomes a part of the published product, This is probably why we are so fixated on the moment of the publication in print. However, the publishing process will probably become much more fluent in the digital era. To provide some flexible format where researchers can add things to their publication is something the publishers must be forced to accept in the future.

### **Proposed solutions:**

In the final "wish list" round regarding the future of (micro-)publications, the participants hope for more flexibility regarding the forms of publications, and more acceptance of these new forms. More concretely, hybrid forms of publications ought to become the standard, and the authors should have more freedom in the form they choose. This demand is surely related to institutional questions: research institutions should provide platforms, but who is to take care of them administratively? In general, the question when and where valuation of a publication happens, remains to be determined in the future.