Evaluation: What makes DSE a good one?

James Cummings (and various others)

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SDE best practice and open methodological questions

- Guidelines for reviewing SDE's is based on our traditions of print editions and the 'digital incunabula' we've seen in the last few decades. As such, any guidelines are a moving and developing target.
- Best practices in digital editing have been established for many editorial tasks.
- Reviewing SDEs will help to disseminate and canonize approved methods and approaches.
- Many questions are still under discussion: evaluation of SDEs should be seen as yet another contribution to ongoing methodological discussions

But, that said, there are certainly general principles that have been around for some time.

8 Principles by Michael Sperberg-McQueen (1994) [1-4]

1. Electronic scholarly editions are worth having. And therefore it is worth thinking about the form they should take.

2. Electronic scholarly editions should be accessible to the broadest audience possible. They should not require a particular type of computer, or a particular piece of software: unnecessary technical barriers to their use should be avoided.

3. Electronic scholarly editions should have relatively long lives: at least as long as printed editions. They should not become technically obsolete before they are intellectually obsolete.

4. Printed scholarly editions have developed their current forms in order to meet both intellectual requirements and to adapt to the characteristics of print publication. Electronic editions must meet the same intellectual needs. There is no reason to abandon traditional intellectual requirements merely because we are using a different medium to publish them.

8 Principles by Michael Sperberg-McQueen (1994) [5-6]

5 On the other hand, many conventions or requirements of traditional print editions reflect not the demands of readers or scholarship, but the difficulties of conveying complex information on printed pages without confusing or fatiguing the reader, or the financial exigencies of modern scholarly publishing. Such requirements need not be taken over at all, and must not be taken over thoughtlessly, into electronic editions.

6 Electronic publications can, if suitably encoded and suitably supported by software, present the same text in many forms [and type of reader][...]In this respect, they may face even higher intellectual requirements than print editions, which typically need not attempt to provide annotations for such diverse readers.

8 Principles by Michael Sperberg-McQueen (1994) [7-8]

7 Print editions without apparatus, without documentation of editorial principles, and without decent typesetting are not acceptable substitutes for scholarly editions. Electronic editions without apparatus, without documentation of editorial principles, and without decent provision for suitable display are equally unacceptable for serious scholarly work.

8 As a consequence, we must reject out of hand proposals to create electronic scholarly editions [merely as plain text or word processing files].

In sum: I believe electronic scholarly editions must meet three fundamental requirements: accessibility without needless technical barriers to use; longevity; and intellectual integrity. (Sperberg-McQueen 1994)

RIDE

- RIDE: A review journal for digital editions and resources
- `http://ride.i-d-e.de/`
- Published by: Institut für Dokumentologie und Editorik
  `http://www.i-d-e.de/`
- Guidelines: `http://www.i-d-e.de/aktivitaeten/reviews/`
  `criteria-for-reviewing-scholarly-digital-editions-version-1-1`
- `http://www.i-d-e.de/aktivitaeten/reviews/`
  `kriterien-fur-die-besprechung-digitaler-editionen-version-1-1`

RIDE: Scope of Scholarly Digital Editions

- Criteria for evaluating:
  - scholarly editions following a methodology determined by a digital paradigm
  - a variety of documents and the variety of academic schools in scholarly editing
- based on:
  - established methods of the print-era
  - new digital methodologies
- contributing to ongoing methodological discussions:
  - requirements
  - best practices

A lot of this talk is based on the work of Patrick Sahle, Georg Vogeler, Franz Fisher, the IDE, DiXiT, and RIDE amongst others.

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RIDE Evaluations: Schools of editing, limitations, basic criteria

There may be sound methodological reasons to refrain from textual reconstruction or emendation, to use no critical apparatus for the documentation of textual variance, or to select a particular perspective during the transcription. Hence, there are only three necessary conditions for an SDE:

- Be scholarly: a justification of the editorial method; clear description of the principles of the edition,
- Compliance with scholarly requirements towards content and quality, which includes that the self-stated rules are followed, and editions acts as a surrogate for the original as much as possible
- Follow a 'digital paradigm': i.e. editorial concept that is not restricted to the technological limitations of print technology

RIDE Evaluations: Details of the resource

In any evaluation of a DSE, the details of the resource should be available and recorded:

- Title
- Editors; Principal investigators; Institutions; Project roles;
- Related projects; earlier developments; standing on the shoulders of what giants?
- Responsibilities of those involved; Workflows and project processes
- Resources; Funding sources; Personnel; time resources
- Any project-wide limitations

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RIDE Evaluations: Transparency

- Are the general parameters easily accessible?

- Does the SDE provide an imprint? Is it detailed?

- Is there a colophon with addition details?

- Institutional and/or personal contact information?

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RIDE Evaluations: Selection

- How relevant is the SDE to current and future research?
- What sources and documents have been selected and why?
- Are there principles of selection (or sampling)?
- Is the selection or sample complete within the context of the corpus?
- What is the broader topical context of the sources?
- Is the selection understandable?

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RIDE Evaluations: Project's Achievements

- What does the SDE contribute to the current state of knowledge of the topic?
- What has been taken from earlier works (e.g. printed editions)? What has it added that is new?

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RIDE Evaluations: Content

- What does the SDE publish? Quantify and characterise the information presented (e.g. images, transcriptions, full texts, comments, context material, bibliography etc.). Is relevant content missing? Is any omission explained and/or justified?

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RIDE Evaluations: Documentation

- Is there a description of the aims and methods of the SDE?
- If not, is this self-evident from the content and its presentation?

RIDE Evaluations: Scholarly objectives

- What academic questions does the SDE address?
- To which fields of research does it contribute?
- To what extent does it support specific research interests?

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RIDE Evaluations: Mission

- What does the SDE want to accomplish?
- Does it achieve its objectives? What does the SDE promise explicitly?
- What does it merely suggest by self-classification (e.g. 'edition', 'critical edition', 'portal', 'collected works', 'digital archive', 'virtual archive' etc.)?
- What is the SDE's target audience?

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RIDE Evaluations: Method

- Which editorial school does the SDE follow?

- Which methodological approach does it take?

- Does it apply e.g. a materialistic or an idealistic / platonic understanding of text?

- Is it focussing on "works" or on "documents"?

- How does it assess the textual tradition: Are there preferred manuscripts or are all documents considered to be of equal value?

RIDE Evaluations: Representation of documents and texts

- How does the SDE deal with the documents and the texts they bear?

- What is the role and quality of digital images?

- What perspective on the text informs the transcription rules applied?

- How detailed is the transcription?

- Where would you locate the transcribed texts on a spectrum from document-centric to interpretative representation?

- Does the SDE provide amendments and a reconstruction of ideal text versions?

RIDE Evaluations: Text criticism, indexing and commentary

- What kind of textual criticism is documented in the SDE (e.g. a stemma, detailed description of the manuscripts)?
- What kinds of indexing, commentary and description of the documents and texts are applied?

RIDE Evaluations: Data modelling

- How is the editorial method technically implemented?

- What data model is applied?

- Is the documentation of the data model sufficient?

- Which data formats are used?

- Does the SDE follow common standards (e.g. TEI guidelines)?

- If not, is the deviation from existing standards sufficiently justified?

- If yes, is the data modelling documented through a formal schema (like an TEI ODD Customisation file) available on the SDE's site?

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RIDE Evaluations: Technical infrastructure

- Which technologies are used for the publication of the SDE?
- Why are these technologies used (e.g. as decision between local conditions and best practices)?
- Is any non-standard aspect of their use explained in detail?

RIDE Evaluations: Interface and Usability

- Is the interface of the SDE clearly arranged and usable without much preliminary reading?
- Is the content effectively provided through the interface?
- Can the user quickly identify the purpose, the content and the main access methods of the SDE?
- Is the interface in line with common visual patterns?
- Is the user at any time made aware of what content is currently displayed, of their position in the in the overall architecture of the SDE, and how other content can be accessed?

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RIDE Evaluations: Browsing the site?

- Is it possible to browse through the entirety of the content?
- Is browsing access easy to understand and allow for fast access to any part of the content?
- What is the nature of the browsing (page-by-page, date, thematic facets, etc.)

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RIDE Evaluations: Search

- Is there a simple and/or a complex search interface?

- How can you constrain your search?

- How does the user find information on search options and possibilities?

- Does the search provide feasible results when searching without specific knowledge of the content?

- Are there support functions, like informative help texts, indexes or auto-suggestion?

RIDE Evaluations: Indices

- Is the content represented in any other formats which provide an overview of the edition and support access to the material, such as compilations, indices or registers?
- Are the indexes, commentary or description used in the presentation of the content?

RIDE Evaluations: Quality of the presentation

- If there are images, are they of sufficient quality for the main research interests in the material?
- Can you find significant errors in the transcriptions?
- Does the SDE contain critical commentary on the textual tradition or the interpretation of the texts?
- Can the user change the presentation of the material, e.g. from a diplomatic transcription to a normalized version?

RIDE Evaluations: Metadata

- Is there metadata for description of and interlinkage between objects in the edition?
- How are the various constituent parts and objects of the edition described?
- Are they described clearly and comprehensively?
- Are the single parts interlinked?
- Are different text surrogates linked (e.g. text and image)?
- Are there internal links to further contextual information?
- Are the single parts linked to external resources?

RIDE Evaluations: Identification and citation

- Are there persistent identifiers for the objects of the SDE?
- Which level of the content structure do they address?
- Which resolving mechanisms and naming systems are used?
- Does the SDE supply citation guidelines?

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RIDE Evaluations: Technical interfaces

- Are there back-end technical interfaces like OAI-PMH, REST, APIs etc., which allow the reuse of the data of the SDE in other contexts?
- Can you harvest or download the data easily?
- Can you use the data with other tools useful for this kind of content?
- Can you integrate the content in other systems, e.g. aggregating content from several sources?

One type of SDE is a well-documented API on top of the academic data -- with different views and presentations of that data

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RIDE Evaluations: Social integration

- Does the SDE integrate with social media and / or virtual research platforms
- Does the SDE easily allowing sharing/discussion of particular parts? (Citable, hackable, URLs)
- Does the project have a social media presence in their community?

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RIDE Evaluations: Export formats

- Are there alternative display or presentation formats available?
- Can the SDE materials be exported to other formats?
- Are there versions optimized for print?
- Are there versions suitable for other devices?
- Is the SDE designed to be responsive to different screen layouts?

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RIDE Evaluations: Access to basic data

- Is the basic or underlying data of the edition accessible (e.g. in XML) and if so, how?
- Is it provided for each single object and/or for the whole SDE?
- At what granularity is markup provided?
- Is the access part of the SDE's user interface or part of an external repository?
- If you cannot access the basic data, is a justification provided?

If someone else can not take your data and run the same analysis on it, then they are unable to reproduce or test your results. If this is the case, your results are questionable.

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RIDE Evaluations: Rights and licences

- Does the SDE provide sufficient information on rights and restrictions for the reuse of different parts of the SDE (e.g. images, transcriptions, editorial comments)?
- Does the SDE utilize a rights model feasible for scholarly reuse of the data?
- Is a specific internationally-recognised licence model (e.g. Creative Commons) in use?

Wherever possible work funded by public money should be made fully and completely publicly available. Open data is an academic moral imperative.

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RIDE Evaluations: Additional features

- Does the SDE provide features that merit special attention because they are particularly useful and/or unusual?
- Are there visualisations, interactivity, image manipulation, options for annotations, commentary notes and personalisation etc.?

RIDE Evaluations: Documentation

- Does the SDE provide an introduction or explanatory texts?

- Is there a help system?

- Is there sufficient documentation of the project, the edition, and the technical implementation of the SDE?

- Are the source and the selection of the material described?

- Are the editorial principles extensively and clearly explained?

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RIDE Evaluations: Long term use

- What are the SDE's prospects for long term use?
- Is the edition complete or does it promise further modifications and additions?
- Is there institutional support for the curation and sustainment of the SDE?
- Is the basic data archived?
- Is there a plan to provide continuous access to the presentation?

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RIDE Evaluations: Terminology

- Can you classify the project as an "SDE", and if so, by what definition of an SDE?
- How would you describe the digital resource as the outcome of an editorial project briefly?
- If the published results do not fulfill some of the minimal requirements (such as the documentation of the textual tradition, rule based representation, transparency of the editorial decisions, scholarly quality), should it be considered an SDE?

RIDE Evaluations: Realisation of aims

- To what extent has the SDE successfully accomplished its original stated aims?
- What obstacles has it had to overcome to do so?
- Or why did it not reach these aims?

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RIDE Evaluations: Fulfillment of general requirements

- Does the project fulfill the requirements of a state of the art SDE?
- Does it fulfill the two basic requests for creators of a SDE:
    1. State what you do and act accordingly
    2. Keep to the common scholarly standards

- Is the edition sufficiently documented?

- Is it citable and transparent?

- How is the quality of the content (images, texts, indexing, commentary, context information)?

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RIDE Evaluations: Contribution of the SDE to scholarship

- What does the SDE contribute to current scholarship in its target field?
- What does the SDE contribute to best practices in digital scholarly editing in general?
- What does the SDE accomplish which surpasses the possibilities of a printed edition?
- Which features merit special attention for noteworthiness and/or innovation, even if they are beyond the scope of these general criteria?

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RIDE Evaluations: Usability, usefulness, quality

- Is the SDE easy to use?
- Is it a useful contribution to a specific field of research?
- How would you describe its academic quality?

RIDE Evaluations: Suggestions for improvement

- If the project is not complete and finished, what should be considered for further improvement?
- What would be nice and useful additions?
- Does the project solicit feedback?
- What would be the most desirable steps for an already terminated project?

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Your own SDEs?

- How should the RIDE Evaluation Guidelines affect your own creation of SDE?
- When there is failure to meet these criteria -- most existing SDEs don't meet all of them -- at what point does it stop being a SDE (or stop being scholarly, or digital, or an edition?)
- What limitations might apply to the SDEs you will create?

Imagine you have full and complete funding to do the project you desire? What will you mark up? What features are important? How reliably and consistently can you encode these?

Now, imagine the funders cut your funding in half! How does this affect what you do? How does this affect how you'd meet these criteria for SDE?