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**Joint user meeting and final evaluation report**

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*Note: The official starting date of EHRI is 1 October 2010. The Grant Agreement was signed on 17 March 2011. This means a delay of 6 months which will be reflected in the submission dates of the deliverables.*

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Abstract (for dissemination)	This deliverable discusses the results of the evaluation of the transnational access which EHRI has offered since 2010. The evaluation took the form of a virtual user meeting. Overall, the EHRI Fellowships Programme can be considered a success. Finally, the report formulates recommendations for a potential follow-up of the Trans-national Access Programme in the near future. The keyword here is flexibility.
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## Joint user meeting and final evaluation report

In order to allow as many users as possible the opportunity to take part in the user meeting and not expose the review to a selection bias, the user meeting took place as a Skype meeting. All EHRI Fellows were invited. Those who could not attend at the given time had the opportunity to send in feedback in written form over and above their post-Fellowship reports (four users responded in this manner; more than two thirds of all users responded positively or negatively to the invitation). Overall, eight users (male and female) participated in the meeting, covering each of the five EHRI institutions offering trans-national access and each of the three years during which EHRI Fellowships were offered.

During the meeting on 4 December 2014, the following questions were discussed:

### Application process

The users were asked how they became aware of the EHRI Fellowships opportunities, whether they considered the application prerequisites appropriate, and whether they were satisfied with the duration and the manner of the response from EHRI.

Generally the users responded positively to these questions, but one user stated that a delayed announcement of successful applications reduced the time available to her for the preparation of her stay.

### Preparing the stay

Next the users were asked to comment on how the preparations of their stay (and the related support from the respective inviting institution) went – particularly as pertains to the organisation of travel to the host institution, the acquisition of visas (if applicable), and the booking of housing during the stay.

Overall the users expressed their satisfaction on how the preparation phase went. Most users were responsible to undertake these preparations themselves, but received the necessary support from their host institutions. Finding affordable housing emerged as a common challenge for some fellows in Paris.

### During the stay

Here EHRI enquired whether the structural / financial and topical support the users received at their host institutions was adequate in their view. Also, the question was asked whether the users perceive the duration and choice of institution as suitable.

All users responded that they felt they had applied for the right institution. All users also reacted very positively to the idea of more flexible fellowships (regarding duration and the possibility to combine institutions). All former EHRI Fellows described a productive and pleasant working atmosphere, and most highlighted a high level of support (logistical, regarding knowledge of the archives, and in helping with contacts to other relevant institutions close-by) and regarding feedback for the users chosen subject of study by qualified expert researchers at the host institutions. Many users mentioned that preparing the stay well with the help of online finding aids was crucial to a successful stay, even though surprises at archives (good and bad) are of course part and parcel of any researcher's life. Some EHRI Fellows investigated angles or perspectives which have only recently emerged as subject of research. For these users, it was not always easy to find relevant material, where the keywords of course have been in use for many years, if not decades, and thus cannot reflect these recent research trends. Sometimes this can also be true for the archival staff. Some fellows mentioned that they worked on collections which had not yet been fully processed, meaning that they had to sift through unpaginated boxes. All of these did, however, mention that there was no issue in accessing this material. This once again highlighted the importance of a contact within the institution who is fluent in the local archives.

Most users mentioned the importance of also being given the opportunity to visit adjacent institutions. They lauded the support the host institution staff offered in helping arrange these visits.

### After the stay

Here the users were asked about any publications they had published or were planning to publish which make use of their research during the EHRI Fellowship. They were also asked whether they had established contacts during their stay (with researchers and with their host institution) and how these contacts had developed.

Given the longer preparation times before publication in history than in some other disciplines, not many articles or monographs written with the support of an EHRI Fellowship have appeared as of yet (at least two articles have recently appeared<sup>1</sup>, and one monograph will be published early next year<sup>2</sup>). Most of the users are working on publications, meaning that the impact of the EHRI Fellowships will continue to become visible in publications in the next few years. Some users have publication plans with their former host institutions. Most users are still regularly in touch with their former host institution and new contacts made there.

### Summary / suggested improvements

All users desired more contact between all of the EHRI Fellows, for instance for joint publications. All users were extremely grateful for the opportunity provided to them by the EHRI Fellowships. Some highlighted that they were able to improve their foreign language and culture skills through the stay.

### Final evaluation

Generally the user meeting results show that the EHRI Fellowship programme can be described as a success. Individual difficulties will always arise in any such program, but overall the structures and procedures succeeded, not least due to the infrastructural and experiential support the participating institutions could bring to bear. The adequate funding by FP7 even allowed some partners to convert some left-over budget into additional Fellowships in 2014. The only point where funding was an issue in individual cases was the housing issue in some particularly expensive locales (esp. Paris).

While the selection procedure established by EHRI (five external expert judges, each nominated by one of the participating partners) produced a fair system, it remained vulnerable to delays, as the last votes had to come in before all the Fellowships could be announced and the planning of stay could begin. Having external (un-remunerated) judges evaluating dozens of (despite page limitations) proposals may have to be re-considered in the future.

Pre-payment and pre-organisation of up-front costs (travel, sometimes housing), as some partners were able to practice, would be desirable, especially for users from countries where self-funding these costs up front is very difficult given the economic situation of graduate students there. This is of course not possible for all host institutions due to their fiscal regulations. Also, pre-booking of housing by the host institution itself not only imposes fiscal, but also organisational tolls on the host institution.

Bad luck with housing cannot be completely avoided, unfortunately (one EHRI Fellow, for example, did not feel completely safe in his otherwise very pleasant lodgings due to the surrounding neighbourhood – something that was only mentioned long after stay).

The EHRI Portal, which will soon become fully operational, will allow for easier contacts between users in the future. Some EHRI Fellows also had the chance to meet up in person during other EHRI events.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23256249.2014.985885#.VICfg3-HNvk> and <http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/ZIMOS/forum/docs/forumruss19/13RAdchenko.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> [http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/5144/1/Bertolini\\_Frida\\_tesi.pdf](http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/5144/1/Bertolini_Frida_tesi.pdf) - soon to be published as a monograph with Mimesis publishers.

The main field from which users took part in trans-national access in EHRI was history. While a number of representatives of other, related disciplines (such as law, sociology and musicology) were included, a further broadening in this regard is highly desirable in the future (archival science comes particularly to mind).

Both the EHRI partner institutions as well as the participants in the user meeting felt that greater flexibility regarding the duration of the stay as well as combined fellowships – user visits to more than one institution – seems desirable. Also, the number of institutions offering trans-national access should be increased. Finally, institutions of a different character (such as digital archiving specialist institutions) should be included in the future in order to provide for needs in the Holocaust research community arising from new methodologies.