



WESTFÄLISCHE
WILHELMS-UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNSTER

EVANGELISCH-THEOLOGISCHE FAKULTÄT
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Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)

Nationale Forschungsdateninfrastruktur (NFDI)

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Letter of Intent

As the responsible speaker and representative of the leading applicant institution of the NFDI Consortium "Theologies and Religious Studies" (TheoReS) I hereby express the intention of TheoReS and myself to submit an application of TheoReS for the National Research Data Infrastructure. We plan to submit the application in the third call in autumn 2021.

On the following pages more details about TheoReS are given, according the Template for Submission of Letters of Intent.

1 Binding letter of intent as advance notification or non-binding letter of intent

<input type="checkbox"/>	Binding letter of intent (required as advance notification for proposals in 2020)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-binding letter of intent (anticipated submission in 2021)

2 Formal details

- Planned name of the consortium
Theologies and Religious Studies
- Acronym of the planned consortium
TheoReS
- Applicant institution
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- Participant

Consortium RESILIENCE (Religious Studies Infrastructure: tools, experts, connections and centers) – Applicant for the next ESFI Roadmap, Prof. Dr. Alberto Melloni, Director of the Fondazione per le scienze religiose ‘Giovanni XXIII (Fscire) Bologna, alberto.melloni@hotmail.com

3 Objectives, work programme and research environment

- Research area of the proposed consortium (according to the DFG classification system: 11 (Humanities))
- Concise summary of the planned consortium’s main objectives and task areas

Long term objectives of TheoReS

- **Detecting and creating nodes of excellent research in theology and religious studies** with excellent human resources covering all fields of the theologies and religious studies, with an availability of all relevant research data (materials, sources, literature, etc.), and with a high standard production of new basic research data on influential, relevant and normative texts, materials and practices of the religions resp. the faith communities.
- **Creating a dynamic standard access to research materials and metadata** by providing user friendly interfaces as well as standardised APIs that increase the uptake of technology in theology and religious studies.
- **Developing and using new techniques** to reconstruct and present basic research materials (like religious normative texts) in a radical new way in order to make new frontier research results possible.
- **Boosting access** to cultivated linguistic diversity, philosophical complexity, historical depth and theological arguments often written in so-called “dead” languages;
- **Providing an enhanced content-oriented approach**, which considers the depth and the polymorphic aspect of religious experience as a part of the shaping of a **reflective society**.
- **Inserting (inter-)religious expertise and intercultural competence** into the public discourse to reduce corrupted data and prejudices.
- **Creating, selecting and testing digital infrastructures** capable of generating, preserving and transmitting knowledge between academics, members of religious communities, and the many groups on whom religious studies have a consequential impact.

Short term objectives of TheoReS

- **Formulating a Data Management Plan (DMP)**, which addresses the relevant aspects of **making data FAIR – findable, accessible, interoperable and re-usable** – including what kind of data the consortium is generating, whether and how they are accessible for verification and re-use, and how they are curated and preserved. Through this DMP the members of the consortium are defining certain datasets to remain closed according to the principle "as open as possible, as closed as necessary".
- **Interviewing the consortium about techniques, methods and underlying data processing**, which are already in use (or even have developed) in their various digital projects. There is a process of sharing the experiences with techniques, methods and data processing, including a critical analysis.

- **Building a central storage** (respective a net of storages) for research data and a system of easy access to it.
- **Establishing a programme of courses** for researchers in the theologies and in religious studies in the use of DH. This programme addresses especially researchers with a high lingual competence in the languages of the texts and practices of the religions (like Ancient Greek, Hebrew, Arab, Syrian, Sanskrit, etc., but as well modern languages).

Short explanation of the objectives and the purpose of TheoReS

The **purpose** of TheoReS is to improve substantially the existing infrastructure in Germany for research data on religions in past and present in a global horizon. The aim of TheoReS is to contribute to and even to prepare a national research data infrastructure, which makes new frontier research results in the theologies and in religious studies within various subject areas possible (like: in religious studies in a narrow sense, in philosophy, law, social sciences, history, oriental studies, ethnology, cultural studies, sinology, etc.).

TheoReS is **focusing on all data about religions**. Religion is not understood with a single, restrictive definition, but rather in a wide, inclusive sense. Data about religions often have the form of texts, but they have other forms as well (artefacts, practices, buildings, liturgies, music, persons, statistics, surveys, etc.). From the beginning of European universities – and even before – theology has been collecting, creating and analysing data especially about Christianity in its diversity. In the further course of European history, there has been the collection of many data, first on Judaism, then on Islam and later on in the modern times on further religions worldwide. Beyond this, there has been a massive production and collection of data within the religions themselves. Today's research data infrastructure has neither been able to integrate all these data and to work with them, nor to make all these data accessible for a wider (academically educated) public (like teachers or pastors or imams or rabbis). As Germany nowadays is a religious diverse society, this lack of knowledge and lack of access to knowledge and data applies to all religions present in Germany, including Christianity. This is especially a problem in respect to Islam and Judaism. The general level of information on Islam and Judaism in the German population is very low, which causes all the problems in society, which have their roots in poor information and knowledge. This is a consequence from the deficits in the data infrastructure concerning research on Islam and Judaism (concerning Christianity there are less massive but similar deficits – not to mention the other religions).

TheoReS is developing a research data infrastructure for the theologies and religious studies, which is directed to the academic world, but as well to the faith communities and the wider public in society. As the theologies are involved into the discourses and practices of present-day faith communities, access to TheoReS will not be limited to pure researchers, but as well be possible for the faith communities within society (and to further interested parts of society as well). The double context of theology – the academia and society resp. faith communities – has consequences for the understanding of research data. On the one hand there are specific data traditions in the history of faith communities, which need to be included into a research data infrastructure. On the other hand, there are specific research data related to the present-day faith communities, which also need to be included into a research data infrastructure. In the history of the religions we find especially normative texts and practices, which cannot be treated in an historical way, because they have consequences for the lived faiths today. Although there is a dominance of texts among the data, artefacts or statistical surveys or interviews are as well research data in the theologies and in religious studies. Research on a normative religious text has always consequences for the daily discourses and practices of the respective faith communities. Therefore, a research data infrastructure on theologies and religious studies has to include and combine normative texts with actual contexts, which enables new interpretations of normative texts. In fact, such an infrastructure **makes fully new interreligious processes of interpretation and discourses possible**.

- Brief description of the proposed use of existing infrastructures, tools and services that are essential in order to fulfil the planned consortium's objectives

TheoReS plans, first, to manage and administer in a national research data infrastructure all available research data in such a way, that they are accessible for all researchers (and even beyond). Till now no such management of research data exists in the theologies and in religious studies. Such an intelligent research data management will improve research in the theologies and in religious studies a lot and will make new frontier research results possible. Second, with a national research data infrastructure TheoReS will be able to create research data, which are a necessary condition of further research and of new research results. This understanding of a research data infrastructure is especially relevant in the theologies and in religious studies. With the methods and techniques of Digital Humanities the normative texts of various religions in the world can be opened and edited in a radical new way. These new types of research data in respect to the normative texts of religions enable very new research about the respective religions and their traditions. In all the research organisations of the members of the TheoReS consortium there are groups who are already contributing to the creation of this digital infrastructure made of central research data. TheoReS will coordinate and support all the activities of its members – in fact, all research in Germany in the theologies and in religious studies – concerning the production and provision of all the research data on normative texts and practices of the religions with the best techniques and methods of DH. This includes the production and availability of further texts and practices, which are central, influential and highly relevant for the various traditions of the religions and present-day faith communities. TheoReS will as well coordinate and support all the activities of its members concerning the production and provision of research data about the present-day realities of the active faith communities.

TheoReS will elaborate a systematic mapping of the structural starting points and will summarise desiderata in order to create synergy effects within the present elements of research infrastructure and between consortium partners. The main objectives here are therefore: identifying the needs of researchers in the field of the theologies and of religious studies and its infrastructures especially regarding access to research data, (digital) collections and tools, but as well regarding the production of digital essential research data; acquiring the users' perspective and clarifying the given conditions and resources on which TheoReS has recourse to; creating a basis of material, that can help for infrastructure design and data management and for a permanent adaptation to the user's needs, but as well to the innovations in the field

- Interfaces to other proposed NFDI consortia: brief description of existing agreements for collaboration and/or plans for future collaboration

Establishing inter-connections and exploring cross-values: TheoReS will establish relationships with other Research Data Infrastructures that are interested in sharing their services based on agreed-upon programming language and user and access policies. TheoReS will benefit from the latter's already-established sets of data and metadata and services, and in return they gain from TheoReS focus on the theologies and on religious studies.

There are inter-connections of TheoReS in the research data infrastructure with many research areas in the Humanities: with the cultural studies (in all directions), with history, with ancient studies (like archaeology), with social studies, with modern and ancient philosophies, with literature studies in general, and many more. At the NFDI workshop of the DFG in May 2019 in Bonn, the inter-connections of TheoReS especially to the consortia of NFDI4Culture, NFDI4Objects and the NFDI4Memory became clear, but also with the consortium Text+ and with the consortium NFDI Small Disciplines (as some small disciplines are very important for

the theologies and religious studies, like the oriental languages). Agreements with these consortia do not exist at the moment. The communication with the other consortia will be part of the working out of the full and mature application – now, that DFG is going on with the process.

TheoReS is strongly connected with a European Research Infrastructure on Religious Studies. TheoReS is coordinating its activities with the European research infrastructure consortium RESILIENCE (RELigious Studies Infrastructure: tooLs, Experts, conNEctions and CEnters). RESILIENCE exists since 2016 and has submitted an application to the EU Call H2020-INFRADEV-2018-2020 (“Preparatory Phase of new ESFRI projects and early phase support to ESFRI high strategic potential areas”) in March 2019. RESILIENCE will apply for the next ESFRI (European Strategic Forum on Research Infrastructures) Roadmap 2021 (Speaker of RESILIENCE is Prof. Dr. Alberto Melloni, Director of the *Fondazione per le scienze religiose “Giovanni XXIII” [Fscire]* in Bologna). RESILIENCE has 13 partners from 11 different countries.

TheoReS is strongly connected with Section 5 on “Sciences Religieuses” of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) in Paris, which is one of the leading institutions in the Study of Religion in DH and in research data infrastructures worldwide (like some of the German members of TheoReS). EPHE is an associate partner in TheoReS.

With further European outstanding places in the theologies and in religious studies – similar to EPHE – TheoReS is in contact in order to cooperate.

Cross-cutting topics

- Please identify cross-cutting topics that are relevant for your consortium and that need to be designed and developed by several or all NFDI consortia.

This needs to be discussed with the other NFDI consortia in the Humanities. Without discussion the identification of cross-cutting topics will be one-sided and abstract.

- Please indicate which of these cross-cutting topics your consortium could contribute to and how.

This needs to be discussed with the other NFDI consortia in the Humanities. Otherwise it will become one-sided and abstract. This indication can be given only after the preparation of a mature application. As TheoReS is applying for NFDI in 2021, there is still time to do this.