How digital archiving can help research: the example of ARCHE

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More and more research is being carried out in the humanities by means of digital methods. This means that we find ourselves with an immense amount of data being produced by individual projects. These data may pose challenges that cannot be overlooked: they may be organised according to criteria that, although known internally to the group of researchers who produced them, are not immediately transparent to external users; they may be difficult to access, as they are stored on physical media or in platforms with limited access; above all, they are at risk of being damaged or lost, or at least could become difficult to read due to technological changes over time. These challenges are even more pressing in the case of the digitisation of graffiti, because not only are the data obtained from the physical objects (e.g. photographs) easily corruptible, but the objects themselves are in most cases ephemeral and subject to change.

This paper aims to show how such challenges can be met through the use of best practices in research data management and digital archiving. More specifically, it will focus on the digital repository ARCHE, which will archive the data collected by the INDIGO project. Developed and hosted by the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage, ARCHE is a repository for humanities-related research data created in or connected to Austria. It fulfils the dual purpose of preserving data for the long term and providing easy and sustainable access to them for the community (both academic and non-academic). At the heart of ARCHE are the so-called FAIR principles (Findability - Accessibility - Interoperability - Reusability), which ensure that the archived data can make a greater contribution to research beyond the individual context in which they originated.

The presentation will detail how some of ARCHE's features make it able to cope with the particular challenges posed by graffiti archiving. For instance, different versions of a single resource can be archived (with reciprocal links allowing navigation through the timeline); metadata not covered by the schema on which ARCHE is based can be stored together with resources, allowing discipline-specific information on a given object to be provided; dissemination services and APIs allow resources to be served to various external services, facilitating the development of web applications for visualising and searching the archived data as well as allowing centralised data management.

Such features allow the INDIGO project to use ARCHE as one of the main pillars of the architecture and workflow on which it is based. More broadly, this paper aims to show how digital archiving and research data management are not only requirements to comply with the obligations set by funding bodies, but also (and above all) integral tools to the research process. They facilitate the work of the researcher at every stage, from data collection to dissemination and re-use by the community.