20 febbraio - Representing vagueness of historical objects in Digital Humanities

Abstract:

Digital Humanities (DH) aims not only to archive and make available materials (in particular historical artefacts) but also to introduce a better scientific reflexion into humanities by propagating computational methods. However more than ten years of consequent mployment of computer-aided research did not lead to a hermeneutic-adequate digital modelling of historical objects. The main crux remains in most DH-attempts the storage of objects in database architectures designed for natural science application, the annotation with very general metadata, the mark-up with shallow linguistic information no after the language or the purpose of the document and the quantitative analysis. Not only images and texts become artificially precise, but the mutual illumination of texts and other media loses its traditional hermeneutic power.

Vagueness is one of the most important, most significant but most difficult features of historical objects, especially texts and images. Whereas ambiguity – several distinct but clear meanings – and uncertainty – conceptually clear but unknown or forgotten data – are relatively well describable phenomena, vagueness is undefined by semantics or pragmatics.
In this talk I will present current research performed in our group with the aim to develop methods to model vagueness and uncertainty in a way that keeps historical values and the potential of explanatory relations among media.