

# DH for Breakfast

Wednesday Lectures in Digital Humanities



# 18

## February

9.00–10.00 am

DEPARTMENT OF  
DIGITAL HUMANITIES

Elisabethstraße 59/III,  
Lehrsaal SR 81.31

From Card Indexes to Clicks:  
Digital Research Paths into the South  
Tyrolean Option and Re-Option

**Eva Pfanzer**

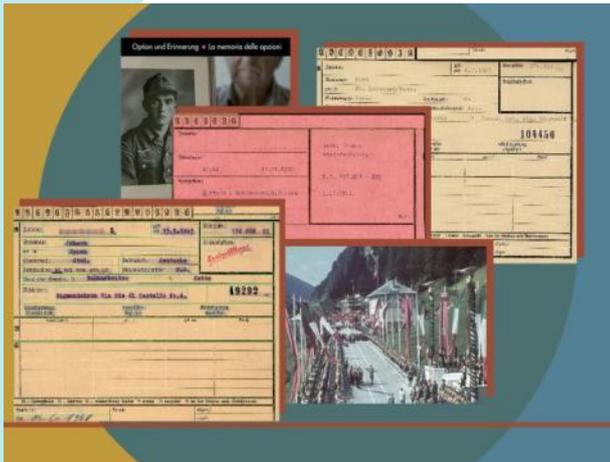
Department of Contemporary History  
University of Innsbruck

In recent decades historical migration research has been shaped by two major developments: the growing emphasis on transnational perspectives and the profound impact of digital technologies on sources, methods, and research practices. These trends converge in the concept of *Digital Historical Migration Studies* (DHMS), which explores how digital tools and large-scale digitized data transform the study of past migration.

This talk applies the DHMS framework to the case of the South Tyrolean Option and Re-Option between approximately 1939 and 1955. Drawing on two collaborative research projects carried out between 2021 and 2025, it examines the digitization and partial digital analysis of administrative sources, in particular personal card indexes originally created as analogue instruments of migration governance. Once transformed into structured databases, these sources enable new forms of quantitative analysis, data linkage, and the reconstruction of migration and return trajectories across national borders.

Focusing on the South Tyrolean case, the presentation demonstrates both the analytical potential and the epistemic limits of

mass digitization and database-driven approaches. Particular attention is given to the challenges of transforming analogue administrative data into sustainable, accessible digital resources and of making these materials available to a wider public. Despite this focus, the talk argues that DHMS gains its greatest explanatory and societal relevance from the careful mediation between large-scale datasets, qualitative sources, and public-oriented modes of access and interpretation.



Eva Pfanzer is Professor of Contemporary History and Digital Humanities at the Institute of Contemporary History at the University of Innsbruck, where she also serves as Deputy Head of the Institute and Head of the Research Center for Digital Humanities of the University. She studied at the University of Innsbruck and at Eastern Illinois University (USA) and held research fellowships in London, Washington DC, Rome, and Vienna. She has been a visiting professor in New Orleans (USA) and Leiden (Netherlands). Her research focuses on transnational contemporary history, migration history, (digital) Holocaust studies, memory cultures, history politics, and digital history.

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