



Workshop of the UNESCO PERSIST Content and Best Practices Working Group

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Attendees

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Polish National Commission for UNESCO	Tomasz Komorowski
German National Library	Peter Leinen
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German National Library	Elisabeth Niggemann
University of British Columbia	Ingrid Parent
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National Library of the Netherland	Barbara Sierman
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1. Introduction

This workshop, organised by IFLA and hosted by Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, was set up in order to scope the mandate of the Content & Best Practices Working Group of the Unesco PERSIST programme. PERSIST is a collaborative effort under the auspices of Unesco to strengthen global

collaboration among memory institutions, governments and ICT-industry in the area of long term preservation of digital cultural resources. The participants of the workshop were digital preservation experts from across the world, representing both the public and the private sector.

2. Setting the scene

Elisabeth Niggemann, the general director of DNB, opened the workshop by welcoming all participants to Frankfurt and stressing the need to jointly work, as an international community of digital preservation experts, on a better understanding and promotion of the necessity of our work, especially with policy makers and the ICT industry.

Ingrid Parent, Librarian at the University of British Columbia and, on behalf of IFLA, main organiser of this workshop, provided the participants with some background information on the Unesco PERSIST programme and the need for a Content & Best Practices Working Group within PERSIST.

Marco de Niet, director of Digital Heritage Netherlands, acted as the moderator of this workshop. He explained the goals and the desired outcomes of this workshop.



3. Added value of a Unesco PERSIST C&BP working group

In order to determine the mandate of this new working group in digital preservation, it is needed to better understand the current landscape of global collaboration in the area of digital preservation. There are already different international communities active, such as OPF and IIPC. The global perspective is mostly relevant for knowledge exchange about technological and service developments. Work on ISO standards has contributed to a shared vocabulary and comparing

issues and solutions is considered to be very useful. In this respect, the relationship between (academic) researchers and the ICT industry deserves special attention, as it does not appear to be strong. Commercial suppliers are usually kept at arm's length in research projects, but the outcomes of research projects are often not fit for widescale implementation. More communication between these communities is needed to come up with practical and affordable solutions and to be able to respond quickly to future changes in the global ICT infrastructures.

Many professional actors in these communities, such as libraries and archives, work under national legislation or sectoral mandates. As modern information infrastructures are international by setup and as content is available in a wide variety of formats, stronger international crossdomain collaboration is needed. Unesco is seen as a useful organisation to build bridges across national mandates and professional domains.

Strengthening the crossdomain understanding of digital preservation would be a useful activity of this working group. There seems to be a gap in public thinking in general and the major ICT companies in particular regarding the topic of digital preservation. The professional DP community is in need of better narratives to increase commitment and support from governments, the ICT community and the general public (and sometimes still their own institutional managers). Digital preservation should not be seen as a professional issue to be addressed by memory institutions, it is in essence a societal issue that, when not adequately addressed, can lead to massive digital amnesia. If users of digital services like social media would voice their concerns about the long term availability of their data stronger than they currently do, they would be excellent ambassadors for digital preservation. In essence, the challenge is to enhance digital literacy and changing a mindset at the global level.

To summarize: there is room for PERSIST to help strengthen a global mindset that supports crossdomain collaboration on digital preservation, especially with governments. If PERSIST would be able to connect the interest of memory institutions at the political level, this may affect the awareness and sense of urgency with all stakeholders, both public and private.

4. Digital preservation as a public mission

Tobias Steinke of the German National Library prepared a background paper for this workshop to identify key issues of digital preservation from the perspective of public memory institutions and what is needed to increase the awareness of the urgency of this public task. The issues as presented in this background paper structured the remainder of the workshop, to guarantee that all relevant topics were discussed as a preparation for the scoping of the mandate of the PERSIST working group.

The first issue addressed was selection policies for (born) digital content. What digital data will eventually end up in the digital archives of public memory institutions, to be preserved and curated for future generations? The participants of the workshop agreed that only a small portion of all the

digital data that exists in online digital infrastructures (such as the web) or in private storage facilities will become a curatorial responsibility of archives, libraries, museums or other types of memory institutions. This implies that the majority of digital information will get lost, or at least will not be kept based on long term preservation plans. In this respect, special attention is required for research data, big data and dark archives, which are usually not curated by libraries or archives. The large scale and the international character of academic research require international policy frameworks to safeguard this type of data for future use.

It was also agreed that the memory institutions should make the effort to make their digital archives as open as possible, so the content could be accessed and re-used as much as possible. This is an important aspect of the valorisation of investments in digital public archives. However, current legal frameworks dealing with copyright are seen as an obstacle to achieve a good level of openness. Copyright laws, dating from the pre-digital era, are not in line with the (legal) mandates of archives, libraries and other memory institutions to provide access to their digital collections. However it was also agreed that the mandate to collect and curate should be treated differently than the mandate to provide access. While the collecting of data may need immediate action at the risk of losing important cultural content, the providing of access to specific curated content may be postponed to a later date (which is sometimes done with physical collections in memory institutions as well).

While proper data curation requires a good level of knowledge of technology, it is expected that the memory institutions will not transform into ICT-driven institutions, owning and managing large scale digital facilities. Their long standing expertise on collecting cultural content, providing access for users and safeguarding authenticity and access conditions will remain the essence of these types of institutions. For this reason, the participants do not expect that digital archiving of cultural content will be taken over completely by private companies. However, it was stated that a stronger business attitude in memory institutions would be favourable for them to become more economical and efficient in their digital archiving.

5. Understanding the challenges

After the discussion on the core values of digital preservation as a public mission, the workshop members addressed the most important challenges that memory institutions are facing, both individually and collectively.

A major internal challenge for many memory institutions, especially the smaller ones that don't operate within the context of legal mandates, is the changing relationship between the physical and digital realities. Many memory institutions do not yet have clear policies on digital preservation, even though they may have large digital collections, as they are not digitally mature enough to have sound internal workflows for managing digital collections or even to balance the use of internal resources for both physical and digital services. Many institutions are not up for the major digital challenges, such as large scale webarchiving, which can only be done using sophisticated

levels of automation. This lack of maturity also hinders the creation of strong international partnerships in digital preservation that are needed to address the issue of global content, such as large scale international websites with cultural content. Memory institutions have the ambition to be more in control when it comes to archiving web resources, however, they are not able yet to set rules or steer developments in a direction that supports their public mission. In this respect, international professional platforms such as IFLA, ICA, ICOM, CDNL etc. could invest more in advocacy among their members and stakeholders, including the developing countries.

This relates to another major challenge, the awareness of policy makers within governments that proper digital preservation is an essential element of the digital content lifecycle and needs active support. In many countries there are now extensions to archival and library deposit laws to safeguard the national intellectual or governmental digital output, but these legal frameworks only address very specific collection types as curated by national institutions. The majority of memory institutions, such as art museums, audiovisual archives or local history institutions, need additional or renewed policy frameworks, addressing issues like copyright, open data, privacy and standardisation, to enable them to fulfill their public mission and document society for future generations. With regards to international or global content, the national policy frameworks need to be more aligned with each other to support international activities in the area of digital preservation, e.g. through Unesco or WIPO. In this way, memory institutions can truly become local nodes in a global network of digital preservation.

A third challenge relates to public awareness. Almost half of the world population has access to the internet and create and share digital resources. Not everything that is created needs to be preserved for perpetuity, but many individuals (both professionals and amateurs) have their own small scale digital archives and would like to pass those on to public institutions, as is done in the physical world with personal collections of letters or books. Memory institutions could help train individuals to improve their own personal digital archives. A common misconception of preservation is that most people only think about short-term-preservation ('storage') and presume that they have also solved the issue of long-term-preservation. Memory institutions could explain to them the importance of adding licensing information to guarantee the proper use of their digital archive once it has been transferred to a public institution. The general public can also be a major force to increase the awareness of the importance of digital preservation with the big ICT companies. There have been examples of popular websites that collapsed, such as GeoCities, causing a massive loss of personal data. Users of widely used software and services can drive the market to find solutions for preserving content and make the owner of data platforms more preservation aware.

This leads to the final big challenge that was addressed in the workshop: setting up stronger collaborations with the ICT industry, especially the major players in global information infrastructures or services. The core message to those ICT companies is that they should start to consider digital preservation as an integral step in the content life cycle. It would be a major step forward if, for instance, content management systems would include a digital preservation layer, where users of such software could actively act to keep their digital data alive, for instance when

their hardware or software context changes drastically. Digital preservation should be seen as information management and treated as a crucial element of establishing continuity and thus support sustainable business and brand value for companies. Innovation is needed for short term benefit, but standardisation is needed for long term benefits.

6. Scoping the mandate of the Unesco PERSIST Content & Best Practices Working Group

During the workshop, some major issues were discussed that have a high impact on the future information society and knowledge economy. During the final part of the workshop the focus was narrowed again to arrive at a practical outlook on activities that can be taken on board by the PERSIST Content & Best Practices Working Group.

Having concluded that there is an additional value for Unesco PERSIST to build bridges across governments, ICT industry and memory institutions, it was agreed that this Working Group could support this goal by providing good examples of how digital preservation can be integrated into everyday life and by showcasing best practices and tools that can put digital preservation strategies into practice in a cost effective way. The Working Group should liaise with parties like W3C to promote standards that are used on the web and that support digital preservation. Awareness raising of standardisation is crucial in an increasingly digital world.

The WG could also pay attention to performance indicators and impact factors that are currently in use in the cultural heritage domain. Most performance indicators that are currently in use, often prescribed by governments or funders, relate to physical onsite services. The workshop participants sensed that there is an undervaluing of the role of digital in the daily operations of memory institutions.

Finally, it was mentioned that the working group should also pay attention to 'community knowledge management' within the preservation community. Ironically, even digital preservation as a research area suffers from poor digital preservation, as a lot of research is done in projects that have no sustainable base for continuation. It was obvious from the discussions in the workshop that advocacy, awareness raising and training among all major stakeholders are still crucial activities to arrive at better digital preservation policies and practices.