

Preservation Plea

Getting digital preservation back on the European agenda

Introduction:

The time has come, after 25 years focussing on the challenges of sustainable access of digital information in an *expanding* digital world, to address this plea to you expressing our concerns about the maintenance, maturity and continuous development of digital preservation knowledge and tools in Europe.

Our members are all working on records management and digital preservation to keep our digital data useable and reliable through time. The Open Preservation Foundation (OPF) brings together cultural heritage, research, government, education and software vendors with the shared interest of sustaining technology and knowledge for the long-term management of digital information.

State of affairs

Our members key task is providing current and future generations with reliable and reusable digital information. Everyday work puts forth new risks, such as vulnerabilities documented in the Atlas of Digital Damages¹ and cases of disappearing or non-contextual information. We learned that the cause of this vulnerability isn't limited to the technical level but expands to records management procedures, software business models², changing semantics up to general human behaviour.

The OPF and our members have collaborated on several big projects funded by the European Union (EU)³ in the last decades resulting in valuable results, best practices and preservation tools⁴ for the community. Unfortunately, in light of rapid technology changes, and the fact that digital preservation is still a niche area, these results are subject to quick obsolescence if maintenance isn't guaranteed.

Case of urgency

In the near future the challenge in digital preservation is the chain of dependencies from the moment software is selected by our producers, digital information is generated, to when it is presented to our customers. In this chain it is our job to manage trustworthy and reusable information. In essence we adapt continuously to new technological environments by developing preservation tools and knowledge. This work is complex, time consuming and depends on a few individuals in science and heritage institutions. Consequently, we are concerned about the uptake, the cohesion with related topics⁵ and the sustainability of our preservation efforts, especially in light of the fact that preservation has not yet become a mainstream activity.

Our plea:

The need for the EU to support and stimulate scenarios for the development, maintenance and dissemination of digital preservation tools and knowledge is significant.

1. The digital preservation community is now in a position to expand, and further efforts and funding are necessary to extend the framework for preservation and make tools and knowledge robust. Preservation is 'here to stay'. We urge the EU to put digital preservation **back on the agenda** of the EU (connected to cultural heritage, research, government, education and private partners).
2. It is time to broaden our audience and share our knowledge with small heritage institutions, museums, research and government agencies on every level. It is time to acknowledge the shared responsibility for preservation knowledge and tools by **developing scenarios for the maintenance, continuity and sharing of this knowledge and tools**.
3. Preservation will become a topic in Horizon 2020 projects when a **questionnaire** on the topic of preservation and long term usability of information (in relation to the Guidelines on FAIR Data management) will be added to every project and project managers are **accountable**.

On behalf of the Open Preservation Foundation, the chair of the Board of Directors,
Ross King

¹ <https://www.flickr.com/groups/2121762@N23/>

² <https://unesco.nl/digital-sustainability>

³ <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.227.9406&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

⁴ http://www.ipres2016.ch/frontend/organizers/media/iPRES2016/PDF/IPR16.Proceedings_4_Web_Broschuere_Link.pdf

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/oa_pilot/h2020-hi-oa-data-mgt_en.pdf