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ELECTRONIC RESOURCE PRESERVATION AND ACCESS NETWORK

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Executive Summary

The Council of Europe has an archives policy that guides the establishing of the organisation's collective memory under the responsibility of the archives unit. (Exempted from this are the European Court of Human Rights and the European Pharmacopeia that both have independent archives.) In particular this serves the Council's key concern for accessible information.

Despite their inclusion into the archives policy, digital information and records are not preserved in the strict sense of the word. Given the lack of digital preservation policies and strategies, few efforts are undertaken to move digital records into the archives' custody. Rather, digital documents tend to be printed out or kept live on the organisation's servers.

Chapter 1: The ERPANET Project

The European Commission and Swiss Confederation funded ERPANET Project[1] (Electronic Resource Preservation and Access Network) works to enhance the preservation of cultural and scientific digital objects through raising awareness, providing access to experience, sharing policies and strategies, and improving practices. To achieve these goals ERPANET is building an active community of members and actors, bringing together memory organisations (museums, libraries and archives), ICT and software industry, research institutions, government organisations, entertainment and creative industries, and commercial sectors. ERPANET constructs authoritative information resources on state-of-the-art developments in digital preservation, promotes training, and provides advice and tools.

ERPANET consists of four partners and is directed by a management committee, namely Seamus Ross (HATII, University of Glasgow; principal director), Niklaus Bütikofer (Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv), Hans Hofman (Nationaal Archief/National Archives of the Netherlands), and Maria Guercio (ISTBAL, University of Urbino). At each of these nodes a content editor supports their work, and Peter McKinney serves as a coordinator to the project. An Advisory Committee with experts from various organisations, institutions, and companies from all over Europe give advice and support to ERPANET.

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[1] ERPANET is a European Commission funded project (IST-2001-32706). See www.erpanet.org for more details and available products.

Chapter 2: Scope of the Case Studies

While theoretical discussions on best practice call for urgent action to ensure the survival of digital information, it is organisations and institutions that are leading the drive to establish effective digital preservation strategies[2]. In order to understand the processes these organisations are undertaking, ERPANET is conducting a series of case studies in the area of digital preservation. In total, sixty case studies, each of varying size, will investigate awareness, strategies, and technologies used in an array of organisations. It is anticipated that upwards of 500 organisations, institutions and public bodies will eventually contribute to this research. The resulting corpus should make a substantial contribution to our knowledge of practice in digital preservation, and form the foundation for theory building and the development of methodological tools. The value of these case studies will come not only from the breadth of sectors included, but also through the depth at which they will explore the issues.

ERPANET is deliberately and systematically approaching disparate sectors from industry and business to facilitate discussion in areas that have traditionally been unconnected. With these case studies ERPANET will broaden the scope and understanding of digital preservation through research and discussion. The case studies will be published to improve the approaches and solutions being developed and to reduce the redundancy of effort. The interviews are identifying current practice not only in-depth within specific sectors, but also cross-sectorally: what can the publishing sector learn from the aeronautical sector? Eventually we aim to use this comparative data to produce intra-sectoral overviews.

This cross-sectoral fertilisation is a main focus of ERPANET as laid out in its Digital Preservation Charter.[3] It is of primary importance that disparate groups are given a mechanism through which to come together as best practices for digital preservation are established in each sector.

Aims

The principal aims of the study are to:

- build a picture of methods and match against context to produce best practices;
- accumulate and make accessible information about practices;
- identify issues for further research;
- enable cross-sectoral practice comparisons;
- enable the development of assessment tools;
- create material for training seminars and workshops; and,
- develop contacts.

Potential sectors have been selected to represent a wide scope of information production and digital preservation activity. Each sector may present a unique perspective on digital preservation. Organisational and sectoral requirements, awareness of digital preservation, resources available, and the nature of the digital

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[2] Chapters 2 and 3 are taken from 'Cross-sectoral Development of Digital Preservation Strategies: ERPANET and the Expansion of Knowledge', given at *Preservation of Electronic Records. New Knowledge and Decision-making*, Symposium 2003.
[3] The Charter is ERPANET's statement on the principles of digital preservation. It has been drafted in order to achieve a concerted and co-ordinated effort in the area of digital preservation by all organisations and individuals that have an interest and share these concerns. Hhttp://www.erpanet.org/www/content/documents/Digitalpreservationcharterv4_1.pdfH.

object created place unique and specific demands on organisations. Each of the case studies is being balanced to ensure a range of institutional types, sizes, and locations.

The main areas of investigation included:

- perception and awareness of risk associated with information loss;
- understanding how digital preservation affects the organisation;
- identifying what actions have been taken to prevent data loss;
- the process of monitoring actions; and,
- mechanisms for determining future requirements.

Within each section, the questions were designed to bring organisational perceptions and practices into focus. Questions were aimed at understanding impressions held on digital preservation and the impact that it has had on the respective organisation, exploring the awareness in the sector of the issues and the importance that it was accorded, and how it affected organisational thinking. The participants were asked to describe, what in their views, were the main problems associated with digital preservation and what value information actually had in the sector. Through this the reasons for preserving information as well as the risks associated with not preserving it became clear.

The core of the questionnaire focused on the actions taken at corporate level and sectoral levels in order to uncover policies, strategies, and standards currently employed to tackle digital preservation concerns, including selection, preservation techniques, storage, access, and costs. Questions allowed participants to explore the future commitment from their organisation and sector to digital preservation activities, and where possible to relate their existing or planned activities to those being conducted in other organisations with which they might be familiar.

Three people within each organisation are targeted for each study. In reality this proved to be problematic. Even when organisations are identified and interviews timetabled, targets often withdrew just before we began the interview process. Some withdrew after seeing the data collection instrument, due in part to the time/effort involved, and others (we suspect) dropped out because they realised that the expertise was not available within their organisation to answer the questions. The perception of risks that might arise through contributing to these studies worried some organisations, particularly those from sectors where competitive advantage is imperative, or liability and litigation issues especially worrying. Non-disclosure agreements that stipulated that we would neither name an organisation nor disclose any information that would enable readers to identify them were used to reduce risks associated with contributing to this study. In some cases the risk was still deemed too great and organisations withdrew.

Chapter 3: Method of Working

Initial desk-based sectoral analysis provides ERPANET researchers with essential background knowledge. They then conduct the primary research by interview. In developing the interview instrument, the project directors and editors reviewed other projects that had used interviews to accumulate evidence on issues related to digital preservation. Among these the methodologies used in the Pittsburgh Project and InterPARES I for target selection and data collection were given special attention. The Pittsburgh approach was considered too narrow a focus and provided insufficient breadth to enable full sectoral comparisons. On the other hand, the InterPARES I data collection methodology proved much too detailed and lengthy, which we felt might become an obstacle at the point of interpretation of the data. Moreover, it focused closely on record-keeping systems within organisations.

The ERPANET interview instrument takes account of the strengths and weaknesses from both, developing a more focussed questionnaire designed to be targeted at a range of strategic points in the organisations under examination. The instrument was created to explore three main areas of enquiry within an organisation: awareness of digital preservation and the issues surrounding it; digital preservation strategies (both in planning and in practice); and future requirements within the organisation for this field. Within these three themes, distinct layers of questions elicit a detailed discovery of the state of the entire digital preservation process within participants' institutions. Drawing on the experience that the partners of ERPANET have in this method of research, another important detail has been introduced. Within organisations, three categories of employee were identified for interview: an Information Systems or Technology Manager, Business Manager, and Archivist / Records Manager. In practice, this usually involved two members of staff with knowledge of the organisation's digital preservation activities, and a high level manager who provided an overview of business and organisational issues. This methodology has allowed us to discover the extent of knowledge and practice in organisations, to understand the roles of responsibility and problem ownership, and to appreciate where the drive towards digital preservation is initiated within organisations.

The task of selecting the sectors for the case studies and of identifying the respective companies to be studied is incumbent upon the management board. They compiled a first list of sectors at the very beginning of the project. But sector and company selection is an ongoing process, and the list is regularly updated and complemented. The Directors are assisted in this task by an advisory committee[4].

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[4] See www.erpanet.org for the composition of this committee.

Chapter 4: The Council of Europe (COE)

The aftermath of the Second World War gave rise to many new initiatives and agreements aimed at restoring peace and unity in Europe. The Council of Europe was among them. Ten countries signed the treaty constituting the Statue of the Council of Europe on 5 May 1949 in London. The seat of the organisation was established in Strasbourg, where it remains to this day, centred around the *Palais de l'Europe*. The Council's steady growth led to the affiliation of all Western European countries by the 1980s and was continued by the accession of most Eastern European countries during the 1990s. Today, 45 member states with a combined population of 700 million take part in the COE[5].

The Council of Europe focuses on work to increase European unity and collaboration, and to foster common European heritage. A special interest lies in protecting the human rights and democratic stability. The Council's decision-making body is the Committee of Ministers, comprised of the member countries' foreign ministers. The deliberative body is the Parliamentary Assembly, comprised of delegates of all member states' national parliaments. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe is a consultative body representing the federative Europe. The COE's administration of about 1800 employees is headed by the Secretary General. Funding is provided by the member states.

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[5] Note that the Council of Europe and its institutions should not be confused with the European Union and its institutions, although the two share the same flag. The former is an intergovernmental organisation that embraces almost all European states, including Eastern European ones, while the latter is an economic and partly also political union with fewer member states.

Chapter 5: Circumstances of the interviews

The Council of Europe's press unit kindly assisted ERPANET get in touch with the Council's Archivist, Mr Tim Lisney; the Head of the Library and Archives Division, Ms Eva Sodomova; and Mr Francis Dangel, the Head of Information Technology Services. These three representatives agreed to take part in the study, and telephone interviews were conducted with them on July 17 (Mr Lisney and Ms Sodomova) and July 21, 2003 (Mr Dangel). The interviews all lasted for around one hour.

Chapter 6: Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the data collected during the case study. It is organised to mirror the sequence of topics in the questionnaire.

- Perception and Awareness of Digital Preservation

- Preservation Activity

- Compliance Monitoring

- Digital Preservation Costs

- Future Outlook

Perception and Awareness of Digital Preservation

All interviewees agreed that throughout the Council of Europe the recognition of the value of information is high. Access to information is a key concern and is achieved primarily through an extensive information distribution through the Internet. Open access to information is also viewed as a key support of the international framework of rules the Council promotes.

On the other hand, the risks that are at stake for the authenticity and perennity of information that is born digital or held in digital form are not acknowledged to their full extent. The awareness of the value of information thus has not translated into high awareness of the importance of digital preservation, and even less into policies, strategies, and appropriate funding to approach digital preservation in a comprehensive way. In particular, it has proved impossible to make digital preservation a management agenda item. Awareness is only prevalent in the units directly concerned with preservation, namely the archives.

Responsibility for preserving information and records of all the Council of Europe's departments lies mainly with the Archives Unit. Exempted from these are the European Court of Human Rights and the European Pharmacopeia, which both have their own independent archives and therefore fall outside the scope of this study. The small-staffed Archives Unit belongs to the Library and Archives Division (formerly known as the "Documentary Information Section") in the Directorate of Communication and Research. The Archives staff are also responsible for managing and preserving the Council's official documents. Staff from the library and the now disbanded indexing unit contribute to this work by creating bibliographic data for current records. The division cooperates with Documents and Publication Production Department that operates the central printing and distribution of documents to assure the archiving of electronic documents produced via the PRIDE central printers, and it seeks cooperation with the IT department to approach the management of digital resources, as detailed below.

The archives' mission is guided by the general Council of Europe Archive Policy. This involves constituting the organisation's collective memory by ensuring the long-term preservation of records.

Two general observations succinctly characterise the Council's approach to digital preservation: the preservation of information relies largely on paper; and there is no digital preservation programme in place. Although the archives policy specifies that archival materials be preserved in all their formats and explicitly addresses electronic materials twice, the archives' work focuses almost exclusively on paper documents and records. Because of the lack of adequate strategies and the consequential inability to offer a viable and secure solution they tend to avoid taking over digital documents and records. Also, much of the focus of the archives' work lies on assuring the paper heritage, since only around 60% of the paper records eventually are transferred to the archives, and much work remains to be done to raise this number. Also, to meet legal

requirements, documents with an official value have to be kept on paper. The archives engage in a scanning programme for all core documents, which however is aimed at fostering access and is not primarily viewed as a preservation approach.

There is no universal policy and responsibility for electronic documents and records. As a general rule, it is the IT section that takes care of everything associated with the digital world. The IT section has not embarked on steps and policies towards digitally archiving digital documents. Rather, all documents on the internal servers are being kept live and online for the time being. Also, there is no particular preservation effort applied to other kinds of documents that might qualify as records, such as email, websites and databases.

Asset Value and Risk Exposure

The statements of the interviewees reveal that the value of information is at the centre of the archives' work at the Council of Europe. In fact, the archives are viewed as the services responsible for guaranteeing the delivery of authentic information to stakeholders. The two main uses of the information held in the archive are to support business procedures and processes, and to facilitate international law-making. The gravity and power of official documents impose the strictest standards of authenticity.

However, the value of this information is not directly associated with a sense of the risk it is exposed to and potential counter-measures that should be taken. No risk assessment has been conducted to evaluate these risks.

Regulatory Environment

As an international organisation the Council of Europe acts beyond national legal frameworks. Ultimately it is the Committee of Ministers that creates the major guidelines for the COE's work. Consequently it is to the Committee of Ministers that the Council of Europe is accountable.

Preservation Activity

Policies and Strategies

As mentioned above, the COE has adopted an archives policy to guide the mission and work of its archives unit. At the outset, this policy has been established mainly by archives staff. The ministers' deputies, to whom the document had been submitted through the rapporteur on information policy, took note of it and entrusted its implementation to the secretary general in 2001. However, this policy has only very partially been translated into guidelines and practical work. The policy is available on the Internet. [6]

The policy's main characteristics are as follows:

- The COE Archives are entrusted the constitution of the Council's collective memory.

- The Archives are to preserve archival materials in all formats.

- As for electronic materials, they shall be stored in an accessible format and reformatted if necessary. Collaboration with the IT department is called for.

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[6] It can be found at Hhttp://www.coe.int/t/E/Communication_and_Research/Library_and_Archives/About_us/Partner s/2001rapinf6_extract.aspH.

- With each department the archives shall conclude an archiving agreement, specifying the collection policy, disposal schedules, depository and access issues.

- A network of archive correspondents within the departments is established to assure the coordination of activities.

The policy therefore can be regarded as the backbone for the archives work at the COE, and much work is being done to implement it throughout the organisation. In particular the archive correspondents prove to be a valuable means of raising awareness of the policy, and also promote collaboration between archives and other departments. The disposal schedules are an important part of the policy's implementation. They will be discussed below.

Although the archives policy explicitly addresses electronic records, preservation of these resources is not currently emphasised. Since there are no facilities and procedures in place to assure the treatment of electronic records, the archives do not encourage departments to deliver electronic records to them, but rather try to find low-level, temporary alternative solutions.

There is no collaborative effort to tackle digital preservation issues together with other bodies. However, there is a continuous exchange of information on a general level. Most important are the contributions by government agencies, other archives, and the ICA (International Council on Archives).

Selection

Currently one of the archives' main tasks is the implementation of retention schedules for all sections and departments of the organisation. These are established according to the archives policy and in collaboration with the respective archive correspondents, and their completion is expected by the end of 2004. To facilitate implementation, these retention schedules are available via the Internet. [7] However, their main focus is again on paper records. As has been explained above, for the time being electronic records are not scheduled for delivery to the archives. Therefore, no precise statements on the appraisal of digital records can be made.

Preservation

Several methods and technologies are used to preserve digital documents and records.

Official printed documents are preserved in a digital version as well. The archives capture the documents in TIFF and convert them to PDF, while preserving the original version in the office software format alongside the converted one. It has to be highlighted, however, that this is directed by access rather than preservation concerns, since the official paper version is preserved anyway.

For certain categories of records, print to paper is the only means of preservation available. This holds especially true for email, where no possibility of digital archiving exists and important emails have to be printed out and filed by staff.

Digital documents on the servers are being kept active and on-line for the time being. Annual document volume has almost doubled over the past couple of years while the costs of digital storage have dropped by about 50% each year. As a result, the IT department has been able to maintain the budget spent on their document servers.

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[7]

Hhttp://www.coe.int/t/E/Communication_and_Research/Library_and_Archives/Services/Archives/deposit.aspH.

Continuation of these trends can be expected, but of course is by no means secure, and therefore the immediate future rests on unsafe grounds. As yet, no alternative plans and approaches have been developed. The director of IT suggested that an actual digital preservation solution would have to be produced should this trend be broken in the future. Again, these procedures are not the result of thorough risk assessments and cost/benefit-analyses, but have been introduced in a rather ad-hoc fashion.

Standard backup processes apply to the data stored on the servers. To assist this method staff have CD-ROM burners at their disposal to safeguard parts of their documents. However, it is acknowledged that this is mainly a matter of convenience and not an actual archiving solution.

For certain kinds of digital documents there is no preservation at all. The website, although crucial to the Council's policy of information and visibility, is not being preserved.

Access

As stated in the archives policy, access to preserved materials is a key requirement for the archives. While this can be sufficiently handled for paper records, access to digital resources is hampered by the lack of a central system. There is no transversal access to all the files stored on the organisation's servers, and access is through the authoring department.

A key area of interest of the Secretariat is the Council of Europe's visibility on the Internet. Consequently, the website is comprehensive and detailed, providing access to a range of core documents and information.

Compliance Monitoring

As has become evident from what has gone before, there are no digital preservation activities beyond those of standard backup processes, and therefore there is no monitoring. However, as the COE's internal audit team is usually keen on archiving issues, monitoring could lead to the promotion of digital preservation policy development. Even while there is no audit of the implementation of the archives policy, the head of the archives unit estimated that the audit team makes an important contribution to raising awareness for archives issues throughout the organisation.

Digital Preservation Costs

Since there is no digital preservation programme, costs cannot be defined. Current responsibilities are provided for in different parts of the budget, namely the budget accorded to the archives unit, to the documents service, and to the IT service.

Studies have been undertaken about outsourcing parts of the preservation activities, but the access requirements, that are of paramount importance to the COE, would have raised the costs prohibitively high.

As has been outlined above, the budget for keeping digital documents active on the servers has remained static over the last years.

Future Outlook

For all interviewees it is beyond doubt that the current method of dealing with digital records and documents is not sustainable. While major problems have been avoided so far, they acknowledge the existence of risks. However, it is difficult to direct senior management's attention to these risks.

ERPANET's interviewees stressed the importance of off-the-shelf solutions. Since the COE is not big enough to develop its own digital preservation solution, commercial packages appear to be the most viable solution. In fact, it is expected that once digital preservation packages become common, reluctance towards their implementation will quickly fade.

Recently, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe have adopted a recommendation to member states on archiving of electronic documents in the legal sector[8]. While this in no way implies any change of practices in the Council's secretariat, it might endorse the efforts to improve digital preservation at the Council of Europe.

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[8] Hhttp://wcm.coe.int/rsi/common/renderers/rend_standard.jsp?DocId=65483H

Chapter 7: Conclusion

A number of conclusions can be drawn based on the research that led to this study. Although all staff involved in the preservation and management of information assets recognise the importance and value of digital information, little progress can be made to safeguard its preservation as long as senior management refuse to merit its importance. It is therefore a major task for archives staff to lobby senior management and raise awareness of the potential benefits involved with digital preservation as well as the pitfalls that could result from apathy. Their argument should be based on the crucial value of information and quick access to it. However, this approach has been tried before, so prospects are not very bright.

A more promising approach may be to pursue the informal collaboration already partly established with the organisation's departments. In this light, the structure that is put forward in the archives policy and has been implemented already, namely the network of archives correspondents throughout all departments, is promising and can certainly be built upon to diffuse new ideas and approaches. At the present stage, however, it cannot be determined how useful this will prove for more extended digital preservation solutions.

The need for close collaboration between the archives and IT is acknowledged at the Council of Europe. However, the lack of sufficient harmonisation of terms and concepts is noticeable.

Resources

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According to the Council's general policy of providing as much information through the Internet as possible, the COE archives put substantial information at the general public's disposal. Through the archives homepage at http://www.coe.int/t/E/Communication_and_Research/Library_and_Archives/Services/ Archives/, besides the usual reference and practical information, the archives policy can be accessed as well as the retention schedules for the different departments.

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