

## **Managing bequests and digital estates: new challenges for libraries – Summary of the LIBER Forum for Digital Cultural Heritage Workshop in Patras (Greece), 5 July 2017**

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper contains a summary of the LIBER (League of European Research Libraries) Workshop on Digital Cultural Heritage, held on 5 July 2017 in Patras, Greece. The workshop addressed questions around who should manage digital materials and how, the necessary tools, the challenges posed by specific formats, and whether there are simple solutions to these. Participants drawn from across Europe explained their own experiences of organising digital preservation efforts, the opportunities to work with tools from outside, the need for rapid action to avoid loss, the value of ensuring easier flows of data between countries in order to support research, but also the privacy issues linked to archiving personal information.*

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Preserving the literary, musical and scientific heritage of the past centuries has always been at the core of national, regional and academic libraries' missions. Today's writers, composers and scientists are no longer using the pen, but the computer to compose their work, challenging libraries to develop the appropriate strategy in order to preserve the digital manuscripts and all other kinds of documents related to the act of creation, from the basic text file until the e-mails and even the text messages sent and received by the author.

Together with CERL, the Consortium of European Research Libraries, the Forum for Digital Cultural Heritage of LIBER, the League of European Research Libraries, organized a 3-hours workshop on this issue during the LIBER general conference in Patras, Greece, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 2017. The workshop was held under the title "Managing bequests and digital estates: new challenges for libraries". It invited contributions from libraries that are exploring operational solutions to address the management of digital estates, meaning all documents created by a person through her/his professional activity. The questions which were addressed in the call for papers were following: should the traditional "manuscript department" now also be in charge of managing the "digital manuscripts", or should a new service be formed specifically and where would it be located within the institution's organisation? What kind of

competences are required and how is the competent staff trained or recruited? Are the catalogues the same for analogue and digital manuscripts and archives? Are specific bibliographical formats or metadata required? Are the tools used to manage the files the same that those which are used for the digital library or the institutional repository? What specific challenges represent e-mails, text messages, or other social contents? Do easy-to-use technical solutions exist that could be shared among libraries? Does literary creation present the same issues as scientific or musical creation? How are copyright challenges addressed?

Six speakers, from five European countries, presented diverse experiences and thoughts about the issues of preserving the digital cultural heritage. After a welcoming speech by M. Ulf Göranson, Chairman of CERL, M. Frédéric Blin, Director for Heritage Collections and Preservation at the National and University Library Strasbourg (France) introduced the workshop by setting the definitions of the concepts involved, and by listing the main issues libraries face when confronted with digital preservation. He suggested that, even if the definition of the words “bequests” and “estates” refer quite precisely to objects related to the act of intellectual or artistic creation, with a strong notion of propriety, other types of items, like research data, websites, or legal deposit documents, share the same kind of organizational, technical or professional challenges, and that – in a constrained environment – the approach to managing digital cultural estates should therefore not ignore solutions found by other professionals not working with heritage collections, but with technology or for instance research data. He then gave a rapid insight into the situation of his library, where digital preservation still has to be organized. He underlines that an opportunity for a national collaboration to build a network of cultural and scientific born-digital estates could be developed within a national research infrastructure called “CollEx-PERSEE”, which principal mission is digitizing collections in libraries to foster research.

Dr Spiros Agorgianitis, Head of the Hellenic Archive of Scientific Culture, Athens, Greece, then reminded the audience that “digitization is not the nostrum”, the perfect solution. Working on audiovisual documents, he claimed that, if digitization is a necessity to preserve the information, the original material always keeps a value and needs to be dealt with appropriately. In the case of audio-visual documents, he insisted that “The time is now!”, and “how postponing leads audiovisual heritage to irrevocable loss”. The workflow for managing cultural estates, which may include audio-visual documents on a physical device, should therefore consider the material preservation of the object as well as of its digital version.

The link with research data was made by Dr. Paolo Budroni, Paolo Budroni, Head of Department at the Library and Archive Services of the University of Vienna. Stating that “research libraries have become industry leaders in the development of digital infrastructures on a national scale”, P. Budroni provided the audience with insight into the world and components of research data in particular and digital objects in general. He presented the requirements of a good structure of a digital object (integrity + identity = authenticity), and schemes for building a workflow for an effective management of digital assets, including the services and certification layers, for with trust and openness of data (M. Budroni pledged for a “Schengen area for research data”) as central elements. He concluded by telling that libraries can assume these missions only if they develop the necessary competences, eventually by recruiting new types of profiles, and if they with others (researchers, data scientists, computer specialists...) in the University.

Ms. Alix Bruys, Curator at the National Library of France, then gave a presentation of a project that just got its first visible results. The project AD3, “Acquisitions and Donations of

Digital Documents”, means to integrate born-digital documents into heritage collections, by ingesting born-digital photographic items into the Gallica infrastructure, Gallica being the library’s digital library. Ms. Bruys presented the workflow, including an ingestion tool called Frontin that has been developed internally, the structuration of the bibliographical data in RDA format, with preservation metadata (METS, DC, Premis) as well. She strongly insisted on the importance of copyright clearing, involving the systematic signing of a contract with the rightsowner and the building of a special database linked to the catalogue to manage the contract files. People in charge of these digital collections are the same who are in charge of physical collections. But they have a new role: that of “process manager”.

The next intervention by Dr. Stefan Wiederkehr, Head of the archives and special collections at the ETH Zürich (Technical university) in Switzerland, was quite a practical synthesis of the questions and ideas touched upon by the previous speakers. The ETH library has the responsibility, not only on the heritage collections but also on the administrative and scientific archives of the institution. In order to respond to this duty, they implemented a significantly staffed “Digital curation office” within the library, keeping as well ancient hardware in a sort of “computer museum”, in order to be able to read software and research data from the 1980s onward. Their main challenge is now to preserve born-digital documents and research data built with proprietary tools and formats in the last 30 years, and to do it fast in order to prevent obsolescence. In doing this, Dr. Wiederkehr mentioned that archival norms and practices are more adequate for digital documents than traditional library bibliographical formats. And of course, all preserved data should be made open as much as possible.

The last speaker, John McColl, University Librarian & Director of Library Services at the University of St Andrews (Scotland), presented the Scottish organizational response to the challenge of digital preservation, based on collaborations and joint projects between research institutions. His main point was however questioning the “professional home” of the “digital archivist”: is it within the curators of heritage collections within the library, within the archival associations, the digital humanities field, the research data management or the digital preservation communities? It seems to him that young archivists are turning their back on the digital, and that there is less hybridity than 10 years ago. This is a difficulty if we consider that the appropriate response to management of digital cultural heritage requires hybridity and diversity in competences.

Ms. Helen Shenton, Librarian and Archivist of Trinity College in Dublin (Ireland), concluded this very interesting session by reminding that if a good preservation plan needs a thoughtful approach at best already before the creation of the item, by closely working with the creator him/ herself whose archives the institution is interested in, there is a commercial market for literary or artistic archives: heritage institutions may be in competition with private vendors or collectors in this field. Ms. Shenton also mentioned another issue that was not cited by the speakers. The mission of cultural institutions to preserve cultural digital estates is not more important than the right to be forgotten that is the legitimate right of every individual: there is here an ethical dimension of digital preservation that needs to be remembered.

The LIBER Forum for Cultural Heritage and CERL will continue their joint activities by organizing the 4<sup>th</sup> Digital Curation Workshop in the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen on 13-14<sup>th</sup> November 2017. The theme of this workshop will be “Data Stewardship and Data Curation”.