Short report of the Q&A following the PERSIST Session at the *World Library and Information Conference* (WLIC), Columbus (Ohio), 15 August 2016

Discussion

The discussion started with addressing terminology and definitions of digital archives. It proved that this is still an issue that is very hard to agree upon: some consider digital archives to be equivalent to all digital heritage, while some archivists consider digital archives to be restricted to born digital material.

Have you connected with any of the UNESCO Depository Libraries?

VW: So far, there has not been direct contact contact with them. This is a good suggestion to follow-up.

MP: There were two speakers in the previous session that worked at Unesco Depository libraries, who talked about digital archives in a UN setting. We will contact them afterwards.

Response from the audience: Do keep in mind that UNESCO Depository Libraries and UN Depository libraries are two different things.

About the involvement of the ICT-industry, it is important to collect success stories, but I'm waiting for the kick which could help with getting over the current gap – i.e. different infrastructures and different practitioners. Could businesses (e.g. IT companies) be involved in a more sophisticated way in the digital archive ecosystem?

MdN: It's been really difficult for PERSIST to get the ICT parties to the table. Microsoft and the Chamber of Commerce have been keen from the start, other actors not so much. We tried to find out how they are organised – organisations representing industry for example. It's difficult to get people together even if these people are keen. We now know that we need a separate legal entity to discuss about licensing issues etc. Basically getting the Adobes and Corels of this world around the table is what we need. There's currently a trench between industries/private sector and public institutions and we hope that the PERSIST Software Foundation can act as a mediator.

VW: We can't use software that is not from companies that are solid as rock because of preservation issues. This is a problem in this specific context.

IP: The Executive Director of ACM (Association of Computing Machinery) was interested, as well as Google. They are waiting for more concrete models from us. We can't let the private sector determine the business model alone, we have to take into account both private and public sectors.

MP: We're also interested in talking to the digital preservation industry, that already works closely with memory institutions. We don't want to develop anything from scratch that already exists. We need equitable assets around the world but this does not mean that we want to compete with them.

You talked about governments being pro digital preservation, but there is also legislation in the making that may hinder digital preservation, such as EU legislation on privacy – how is this responded to in policy?

MdN: This is a good point that we will take with us for further investigation. We see that especially archives, with their large collections on genealogy, are facing difficulties in this respect. As archives are often government organisation, it is also in their interest to help resolve these conflicting policy developments. But for now, the two main issues hindering further discussion on digital preservation at governments are lack of priority and lack of awareness.

You're gathering information and talking to stakeholders, but everything is constantly changing, how do you deal with that? At some point you have to say stop to be able to create a material and some delimitations? At which moment do you set a limit?

MP: Even a few services, if they are good services, would be a good service to the community. ICA (International Council of Archives) is discussing this: how quickly can they make a decision on a technology before they start implementing it? The organisation of the legal entity is the first step. The step after that is to do small things that are useable for people. We are still exploring different avenues, but we have not yet settled on the best one.

What would a national policy entail? I can't imagine it in the US.

MdN: The Netherlands has one since last year. The Netherlands is a small country, which helps, but another factor is the open-mindedness of our Ministry of Culture towards digital developments. The new Director General for Media and Culture understands the disruptiveness of these digital developments. But you say you can't imagine it for the US, but you do have DPLA in the US, so you have found a way to collaborate at the national level. Also, the Library of Congress archives Twitter – this is interesting, because now that they do this, why should any other institution do that? So this choice has implications on the national and even international level.

On working with other institutions – how's the relation between smaller institutions and national institutions?

MdN: If we can get smaller public institutions involved that's very good, because it shows that shared and scalable solutions are good investments based on public funding. In practice, It's often up to one or two people to make the connection and decide to collaborate on this.

MP: US has no Ministry of Culture – so lack of this leads to ALA and SAA (Society of American Archivists) sometimes playing a bigger role.

Can you explain practically what it means? Will PERSIST play a bridge between GLAM, development groups, industry? It needs a good overview of what's going on worldwide. Does UNESCO support this programme in the long run? Is PERSIST a sustainable project?

MP: It's not clear yet how it would work and what would work best in this collaboration in the long run.

VW: We placed PERSIST outside UNESCO protocols on purpose because of sustainability reasons, as Unesco is a poor organisation and cannot commit structural funding to PERSIST. We are now looking for other countries to fund PERSIST project, the Netherlands has been doing it so far. It's essential to have financial support from other countries to be able to continue.

IP: Money seems to be one of continuous stumbling blocks. The PERSIST committee needs to work on finding a sustainable solution.

What can you do about the 'unknownness' of PERSIST?

IP: We need to promote it more. We have to work with promotion and communication to find stakeholders to make them understand the system, our perspectives, and make sure they share our core values.

MdN: UNESCO has a convening power when it comes to talking with e.g. Microsoft and Google. What IFLA and ICA can't achieve by themselves they can collaborate with UNESCO to realise. PERSIST has been very much a bottom-up project so far. That has been part of it's charm so far, as it is great to work with people driven by the passion to address the challenges that PERSIST is trying to address. But it is also obvious that we are now entering a new phase with PERSIST and it is important to make the collaboration more formal in order to keep the involvement of the major stakeholders.

MP: Finally, we would like to encourage people to consider the questions on the screen (see below). Please share your replies with PERSIST.

Questions from panellists to audience

- How can UNESCO/PERSIST support you in raising awareness on digital amnesia amongst policy makers in your country?

- Can we get implementational feedback on the Guidelines for the 2017 review process?

- What services would your institution find most helpful for the PERSIST Foundation to provide?