

Digital Preservation at Oxford and Cambridge

A collaborative research project to evaluate and provide sustainable recommendations for our digital preservation programmes

Operational Pragmatism in Digital Preservation: a discussion

Posted on [14 July, 2017](#) by [somaya](#)

From Somaya Langley, Policy and Planning Fellow at Cambridge: In September this year, six digital preservation specialists from around the world will be leading a panel and audience discussion. The panel is titled Operational Pragmatism in Digital Preservation: establishing context-aware minimum viable baselines. This will be held at the iPres International Digital Preservation Conference in Kyoto, Japan.

Panellists

Panellists include:

- Dr. Anthea Seles – The National Archives, UK
- Andrea K Byrne – Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, USA
- Dr. Dinesh Katre – Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), India
- Dr. Jones Lukose Ongalo – International Criminal Court, The Netherlands
- Bertrand Caron – Bibliothèque nationale de France
- Somaya Langley – Cambridge University Library, UK

Panellists have been invited based on their knowledge of a breadth of digital creation, archiving and preservation contexts and practices including having worked in non-Western, non-institutional and underprivileged communities.

Operational Pragmatism

What does 'operational pragmatism' mean? For the past year or two I've been pondering 'what corners can we cut'? For over a decade I have witnessed an increasing amount of work in the digital preservation space, yet I haven't seen the increase in staffing and resources to handle this work. Meanwhile deadlines for transferring digital (and analogue audiovisual) content from carriers are just around the corner (e.g. [Deadline 2025](#)).

Panel Topic

Outside of the First World and national institutional/top-tier university context, individuals in the developing world struggle to access basic technology and resources to be able to undertake archiving and preservation of digital materials. Privileged First World institutions (who still struggle with deeply ingrained under-resourcing) are considering Trusted Digital Repository certification, while in the developing world meeting these standards is just not feasible. (Evidenced by work that has taken place in the [POWRR project](#) and [Anthea Seles' PhD thesis](#) and more.)

How do we best prioritise our efforts so we can plan effectively (with the current resources we have)? How do we strategically develop these resources in methodical ways while ensuring the critical digital preservation work gets done before it is simply too late?

Approach

This panel discussion will take the form of a series of provocations addressing topics including: fixity, infrastructure and storage, preconditioning, pre-ingest processes, preservation metadata, scalability (including bi-directional scalability), technical policies, tool error reporting and workflows.

Each panellist will present their view on a different topic. Audience involvement in the discussion will be strongly encouraged.

Outcomes

The intended outcome is a series of agreed-upon 'baselines' tailored to different cultural, organisational and contextual situations, with the hope that these can be used for digital preservation planning and strategy development.

Further Information

The Panel Abstract is included below.

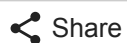
iPres Digital Preservation Conference program information can be found at: <https://ipres2017.jp/program/>.

We do hope you'll be able to join us.

Panel Abstract

Undertaking active digital preservation, holistically and thoroughly, requires substantial infrastructure and resources. National archives and libraries across the Western world have established, or are working towards maturity in digital preservation (often underpinned by legislative requirements). On the other hand, smaller collectives and companies situated outside of memory institution contexts, as well as organisations in non-Western and developing countries, are struggling with the basics of managing their digital materials. This panel continues the debate within the digital preservation community, critiquing the development of digital preservation practices typically from within positions of privilege. Bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds, the aim is to establish a variety of 'bare minimum' baselines for digital preservation efforts, while tailoring these to local contexts.

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ONE THOUGHT ON "OPERATIONAL PRAGMATISM IN DIGITAL PRESERVATION: A DISCUSSION"

somaya

on [14 July, 2017 at 13:38](#) said:

I should add... this panel was developed in consultation with others in the digital preservation community including Michelle Lindlar, Ross Spencer, David Rosenthal and Erin O'Meara. William Kilbride also played an important role as a connector.

Without the recent work of Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez and Ashley Blewer, the concept for this panel would never have arisen – I can't thank them enough.

I'm deeply indebted to all of these individuals – and more – because these things always arise from the needs and discussions of a community.

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