UNESCO

Information
for All
Programme

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

IFAP Working Group on Information Preservation

Proposal 1 for the Preparation of the Draft Programme and Budget for 2012-13 (36 C/5)

World Report on Information Preservation

Background

Systematic preservation is the basis for the continuous dissemination of information from one generation to the next. This transmission of information from generation to generation forms the backbone of humanitarian progress. Consequently, throughout history, repositories of information - libraries and archives – have been the focal points for the progress of civilizations.

It is a paradox, however, that as technical development advances, information preservation becomes more and more complex and difficult. While documents on papyrus and parchment have survived for millennia and rag pulp paper for many centuries, digital content is unlikely to survive 10 years without active logistical and financial input.

UNESCO has addressed this issue systematically over the past decades. In the course of its biennial programmes and budgets, the work of libraries and archives has been supported by a variety of initiatives in awareness raising, capacity building, development of open source software and the drafting of resolutions like the Charter on the Safeguarding of the Digital Heritage. Additionally, to enhance document preservation, the *Memory of the World Programme* has been established and has become one of UNESCO's flagship programmes.

The issue

Despite all of these endeavours, it seems that information preservation cannot keep pace with the technical and societal development. Information production develops exponentially and demand for access grows rapidly as electronic networks expand. UNESCO has to ensure that in this mainstream of development the preservation of and access to information in its specific fields of competence, *Education, Science, and Culture*, is not lagging behind. This includes not only the latest digital information, but also traditional knowledge, in all of its linguistic and cultural diversity. Much of this traditional knowledge is threatened with oblivion as a result of the present development of technology.

Nowadays the preservation process should involve not only traditional libraries, museums and archives, but also universities, private businesses and research institutes. Nevertheless, it must be noted, with much regret, that the acuteness, profundity, sophistication and scope

of preservation problems are all but unnoticed by most people. This lack of awareness affects all areas of society - governments, private businesses and civil society agencies. It also affects the majority of experts working at information institutions who are not engaged directly in information preservation activities.

Recommendation

In order to provide UNESCO with a solid tool for further planning in this field, the Working Group on Information Preservation makes this proposal to the Director General:

> The production of a "*World Report on Information Preservation*".

This could consist of short summarising reports addressing the typical information preservation problems found across member states and regions. The emphasis should be on specific regional and national problems and, *inter alia*, keep low cost and grass roots solutions in mind. UNESCO can use this work as a base from which more elaborate recommendations on the formation of national information preservation policy can be derived. The Organization can also highlight the seats of cutting-edge experience which cope efficiently with the various specific problems of digital information preservation at the legislative and political level. At a later stage, such centres can form a network of centres of excellence and hold training sessions for other institutions.

Measures need adequate funding and should be established in close inter-sectoral cooperation between Communication/Information, and the other sectors of UNESCO. Possible partners in the drafting of the plans are NGOs such as IFLA, ICA, and IASA. Additionally, partnerships should be established with the private sector; in particular with the software developers and the hardware industry. It should be noted, however, that the agencies mentioned and the private sector regard the problem not as politicians but as experts. They will formulate it in their professional language. For that reason, no one but UNESCO can clearly and convincingly demonstrate the profundity and vast scope of the problem and demonstrate the necessity of urgent measures to be taken.

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