

**International Conference Preservation of Digital Information in the Information Society:
Problems and Prospects
(Moscow, October 3-5, 2011)**

International Conference “Preservation of Digital Information in the Information Society: Problems and Prospects” was held in the framework of Russian chairmanship in the UNESCO Information for All Programme.

The event took place in Moscow on 3-5 October, 2011. It gathered over 150 participants from 37 countries – heads and leading experts of major libraries, archives, museums, research and educational institutions, international organizations, governmental bodies, mass media, publishing houses, centres for scientific and technical information, ICT industries and other stakeholders involved in long-term preservation of digital information.

The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications, Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO, Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme, Interregional Library Cooperation Centre (ILCC) and State Tretyakov Gallery were the conference organizers.

Greetings to the conference organizers and participants were received from Alexander Avdeev, Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation; Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Chair of the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO; Mikhail Seslavinsky, Head of the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications; Jānis Kārklīņš, UNESCO Assistant Director-General; Ingrid Parent, IFLA President.

The conference opening gala and the first plenary meeting at the State Tretyakov Gallery were chaired by Evgeny Kuzmin, Chair of the Intergovernmental Council and the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme and President of the ILCC.

At the conference opening the necessity of active comprehensive discussions on the issues of digital information preservation was highlighted by Vladimir Grigoriev, Deputy Head of the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications; Ekaterina Chukovskaya, State Secretary – Deputy Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation; Svetlana Zhurova, Deputy Chair of the Russian State Duma; Sanjaya Mishra, Programme Specialist of the UNESCO Communication and Information Sector; Grigory Ordzhonikidze, Executive Secretary of the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO; and Sinikka Sipilä, IFLA President-Elect, Secretary General of the Finnish Library Association.

The first plenary meeting provided a review of general approaches to the problems of digital information preservation and relevant activities in that field.

Dietrich Schüller, Vice Chair of the Intergovernmental Council of the UNESCO Information for All Programme, made a general statement on information preservation. Peter Lor, Extraordinary Professor of the University of Pretoria spoke on ethical and political-economic issues of the long-term preservation of digital information. Alexander Visly, Director General of the Russian State Library shared his view on searching for balance between rights and aspirations in digital preservation. Oleg Naumov, Deputy Head of the Federal Archival Agency, focused on coordination problems of archives dealing with digital content. The plenary meeting concluded

with a communication by Yakov Shraiberg who spoke on issues and options of digital information preservation in libraries.

The conference continued its work at the Atlas Park Hotel. Three plenary meetings were held:

- *Information Preservation: Digital Landscape* (chaired by Evgeny Kuzmin);
- *Policies and Education for Digital Information Preservation* (chaired by Peter Lor);
- *National Approaches, Solutions, Vision* (chaired by Winnie Witzansky, IFLA International Library Adviser, Member of the Danish National Commission for UNESCO)

Fascinating reports were present and discussed within two thematic sections:

- *Digital Preservation of Text Documents* (moderated by Yakov Shraiberg and Elena Kozlova, Director of the INFORMREGISTR Research and Technology Centre), and
- *Digital Preservation of Audiovisual Documents* (moderated by Dietrich Schüller)

The communications made during the conference pointed to the need for further in-depth studies on the subject. Their results should be present on national and international level in both political and professional context. All the participants united in the certainty that conference issues were of great importance and topicality.

The conference showed that traditional keepers of analogue information – libraries, archives and museums – are still unable to cope with the tasks of digital information preservation. And in fact they are the ones to raise the alarm. Policy-makers do not possess due understanding of the necessity of creating a new infrastructure for the preservation of digital information, probably on the basis of the infrastructure of information preservation on traditional carriers by modernizing and strengthening it.

The discussions made it clear that most countries of the world possess neither regulatory framework, that would oblige relevant institutions and structures to be engaged professionally in the process of information preservation in digital format, nor drawn up distinct policies that might lead to the creation of such a framework.

However both developed and developing countries are trying to determine what exactly should be preserved, and for what reasons, who, where and when should do it, by which means and to what extent.

The participants came to a conclusion that it is necessary to take urgent measures on political and practical levels. Otherwise we may soon face the fact that:

- Huge amounts of digitized information are lost either because the processes of its digitization were not properly provided, or it was not catalogued in time and in the right way and therefore may not be found, or it was unduly preserved.
- Huge amounts of network and other information were not gathered and were therefore irretrievably lost, including information on history, culture and research (content of portals and websites, blogs, social networks, e-mails of eminent personalities, private and institutional digital archives, etc.).

For that exact reason many world experts describe the time to come as “information dark ages”, using terms like “digital Alzheimer”, “digital amnesia” and so on.

The conference determined not only the problems but also new professional approaches to the preservation of rapidly growing amounts of digital information. Information production is

accompanied by ever growing variety of information presentation formats, types and kinds of digital objects, while constant IT changes reduce the period of those objects' existence.

The conference participants repeatedly pointed out that the UNESCO Information for All Programme, regarding information preservation as one of its five key action lines, should be used as an international, cross-disciplinary and interinstitutional platform for the establishment of policy frameworks, for discussions and best practice exchange.

The Conference final document – the Moscow Declaration on Digital Information Preservation – was unanimously adopted. The Declaration highlights the importance and relevance of the issues raised at the conference and offers a set of measures and efforts to be taken in such spheres as politics, awareness-raising and education, scientific research, economics, ICT industry, partnership and coordination. The draft document is now being refined by a working group that united a pool of high-level experts from Argentine, Denmark, India, Italy, Russia, South Africa, etc.

The conference became the first preparatory meeting of the UNESCO international forum on digital heritage preservation to be held in Vancouver, Canada, in September 2012.