

THE MOSCOW DECLARATION ON DIGITAL INFORMATION PRESERVATION

Final Document

International conference «Preservation of Digital Information
in the Information Society: Problems and Prospects»

Moscow, October 3–5, 2011

The preservation of digital information – a new problem of our era – concerns the whole world, and every man and woman. It arose at a time when electronic gadgetry is used in every sphere of life; when the volume of born-digital or digitized information is growing exponentially; when the variety of formats of information presentation, and the types and classes of digital objects is increasing apace; technology and software are being rapidly updated; the lifetime and reliability of present-day digital media do not meet the challenges of long-term information preservation; and last but not least, the virtual space of digital information impedes law enforcement and obliterates the borders between national jurisdictions. Despite all efforts, the preservation of digital information lags behind technical development and social changes.

For two millennia – ever since the Library of Alexandria was established – humankind has been learning to preserve information on analogue carriers. With that goal in view, all developed countries had established by the mid-20th century a ramified network of comprehensive and specialized libraries, archives, museums, and scientific and technical information centres. They shared basic functions and actively interacted on their own level and between levels nationally and transnationally. They all were parts of a sophisticated infrastructure comprising the press, research institutes, method-setting centres, the educational and personnel retraining system, national and international professional associations, equipment manufacturing industries, standardizing organizations, etc. The methods and criteria of information source selection, and sophisticated and globally standardized methods of information accounting and storing and metadata creation are regularly updated.

Unlike the situation in analogue data storage, a majority of countries have not yet:

- elaborated the philosophy of long-term preservation of digital information;
- established a regulatory legal basis and efficient policies leading to its establishment; and
- created an infrastructure for digital information preservation (all too often, its relevance is not even realized).

Traditional memory institutions of these countries – libraries, archives and museums – cannot cope with the snowballing amount of digital information, and are making their alarm public.

The international conference “Preservation of Digital Information in the Information Society: Problems and Prospects” was initiated to enhance the understanding of the importance, scope and topicality of preserving digital information in the professional milieu, at the political level and among the public-at-large; to promote the evaluation of priority problems and political and professional strategies in the sphere of digital information preservation and streamlining global, regional and national policies, legislation and practical activities in this field.

Convened in Moscow, the conference took place on October 3–5, 2011 to gather approximately 150 participants representing 37 countries: heads and leading experts of major libraries, archives, museums, research institutes, universities, international organizations, government bodies, media outlets, publishers, research and technical information centres, the ICT industry and other entities interested in the elaboration of the theme of digital information preservation.

The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications, the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO, the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme, the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre, and the State Tretyakov Gallery jointly organized the conference within the framework of Russia’s chairmanship in the UNESCO Information for All Programme.

The conference concluded on the necessity of urgent political and practical measures. Otherwise, the world may discover in the near future that:

- a huge amount of Internet and other information, including information pertaining to history, culture and research (the content of portals, websites, blogs, social networking sites, celebrities’ electronic correspondence, private and institutional electronic archives, etc.) has never been collected and so is irretrievably lost to future generations;
- a vast amount of digitized information has been lost because either its digitization had no adequate support or it was not catalogued correctly and in time, and so cannot be retrieved, or it was not properly stored or, again, was not transferred into new digital formats in due time.

By guaranteeing reliable passage of information from person to person and from generation to generation, we can prevent the advent of the so-called Dark Information Age, also described as “digital Alzheimer” and “digital amnesia”. Efforts to preserve digital information should start the instant an information object emerges.

Proceeding from the above, conference participants declare the necessity of the following measures in the following spheres:

1. **Politics.** Support of the formation and development of the philosophy, strategy and policy of preserving digital information at the national and international levels, which comprise the socio-cultural, ethical, legal, economic, administrative, personnel, technical, technological and other aspects. The preservation of digital information must become an inalienable part of cultural, educational, research and information policy, and the policy of information society building.

2. **Information/education.** Promotion of the awareness of decision-makers and the public-at-large on potential risks and basic principles pertaining to digital information storage, including long-term storage.
3. **Education.** Promotion of the elaboration, development and circulation of educational curricula and training courses of varying levels for the heads and experts of memory institutions (mainly libraries, archives, museums, and scientific and technical information centres) and other institutions that are (or should be) involved in activities toward the preservation of digital information. Inclusion of basic knowledge and competences connected with digital information preservation in activities/programmes/curricula enhancing the media and information literacy of professionals in the information field and the public-at-large.
4. **Research.** Promotion of research in the philosophical, political, economic, socio-cultural, organizational, legal, personnel, technological, methodological, method-setting, ethical and other aspects of the preservation of digital information. Support of national and transnational cooperation to elaborate decisions and standards, and experience exchanges for the preservation of digital information.
5. **Economy.** Elaboration of basic organizational principles of funding the long-term preservation of digital information by traditional memory institutions. Inclusion of the evaluation of efforts, approaches and decisions from the feasibility point in the number of mandatory components of strategies and activities in the preservation of digital information, and raising relevant public awareness.
6. **Cooperation.** Promotion of interdepartmental cooperation of memory and educational institutions and administrative bodies with private businesses and other stakeholders of digital preservation processes, including public and private initiatives and projects; development of international cooperation.
7. **ICT industry.** Establishment and strengthening of cooperation with the ICT industry to include procedures promoting/guaranteeing long-term preservation of digital information in operating systems and basic supplementary packages. Promotion of the elaboration and implementation of free and open software for the preservation of digital information.

The conference addresses the following proposals:

to UNESCO:

- To use the UNESCO Information for All Programme, which includes information preservation in its five top priorities, as an international interdisciplinary and inter-institutional platform for the formation of the political framework, for discussions and experience exchanges.
- To update the Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage, and upgrade it as a regulatory instrument of a high political level.

- To consider the preparation of a World Report on the Preservation of Digital Information with the following goals in view:
 - ▷ all-round and maximally comprehensive definition of problems and challenges connected with the preservation of digital information;
 - ▷ analysis of the present state of activities to preserve digital information that seeks to meet such challenges and addresses arising problems; identification of the perpetrators of these activities; assessment of their goals, and means and methods of such activities;
 - ▷ awareness of the actual/desirable patterns of coordinating relevant efforts at the national, regional and global levels;
 - ▷ assessment of the level of familiarity with and apprehension of the various aspects of information preservation by decision-makers, heads and experts of memory and other relevant institutions, and the public-at-large;
 - ▷ elaboration of action plans of various levels and on various approaches pertaining to the sphere of digital information preservation, and of a system of indicators of the success of such plans implementation.

to IFLA:

- In cooperation with UNESCO, to contribute to the elaboration and circulation of quality educational programmes and curricula on the preservation of digital information for library managers and personnel.
- To encourage the inclusion of components pertaining to the preservation of digital information in information literacy programmes and curricula.
- To actively participate in research aimed at:
 - ▷ elaboration of criteria for the evaluation and selection of electronic content for long-term storage;
 - ▷ responsibility delineation of memory institutions;
 - ▷ exposure of gaps (unprotected digital heritage);
 - ▷ creation of a regulatory framework for activities at various levels to preserve digital information; and
 - ▷ exchanges of work experience, methods and technologies.

to national governments:

- To include the preservation of digital information as an inalienable part of cultural, educational, research and information policy, and as part of any national information society policy;
- To support research in the various aspects of the preservation of digital information.

to governmental and non-governmental institutions which are involved in digitization projects:

- To include the long-term preservation of digital content produced by digitization projects as an integral component of project planning and execution.