A Digital Roadmap for Long-Term Access to Digital Heritage

Conference organized by UNESCO, ICA and IFLA
in The Hague, The Netherlands, on 5 and 6 December 2013

Preserving digital information for current and future use is a major challenge – in technological *and* organizational terms. For the past decade, UNESCO had undertaken several initiatives that aim to put this issue on the international agenda. Member countries agreed to develop a roadmap on how to ensure long-term preservation of, and access to, digital heritage.

In this context, a consortium of institutions based in The Hague, the Netherlands, organized a Digital Roadmap Conference, which was held in The Hague on 5 and 6 December 2013. On the first day, around 80 participants were in attendance, representing governments, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, academia and the private sector. On the second day, discussions continued in a smaller assembly to take decisions on the next steps for the roadmap. The conference was chaired by Miriam Nisbet, US National Archives and Records Administration.

At the end of the first day's discussions, participants formulated the following **conclusions and recommendations**:

About roadmap collaboration:

- We need more collaboration, but it takes creativity to find the right partners and representatives (and some compromising).
- We can't do everything together, so we need to define what the divisions are in the work needed for digital preservation.
- This dialogue can contribute to a better understanding (including metrics) of the needs for the use of data over time. That is where the business opportunities lie.
- We need a better contribution from content creators to the dialogue.

About domain perspectives:

- Memory institutions want to and should focus less on internal technological matters, and more on societal issues for establishing continuity of content.
- The focus of major ICT companies is on attracting more users. Content follows the users.
- Governments should look at information policies (including copyright) and sustainable funding, and contribute to the overall organization of the work (but should not interfere with business models).

About continuity of content:

- As this is a complicated topic, we need to be ambitious in our goals but pragmatic in our actions, and strive for more automation. It is not in the interest of any party to slow down innovation, even if it is disruptive.
- We should focus more on the continuity of data, and less on the continuity of media and software. We should also recognize that the majority of data that currently goes around is unstructured and not curated.

- We (i.e., society) need to define better what it is that we want to preserve (from a user perspective, both public and private) and identify how the roles in the information chains are changing.

On the second day, participants agreed on the need for a platform where different stakeholder groups get together to discuss digital preservation. In order to move this objective forward, they set up the following framework for action:

- **Goal:** enhancing the sustainability of the information society by establishing continuity of content (data, records, information);
- **Organisation:** a global platform with the convening power of UNESCO to bring together a policy arena, a content curation arena and a technical requirements arena, under the auspices of a Digital Preservation Board;
- **Proposition:** "What can I do for you and you for me?" (manifested in business models)
- **Method:** pragmatic, agile, quick-wins, open-minded, using existing channels of influence
- **Main questions to address:**
  - What are we going to preserve (balancing legal frameworks, institutional policies, and user-driven needs)?
  - Who is responsible for enabling the preservation?
  - How are we (the Platform) going to act on that responsibility (understanding that roles are changing)?
- **Time frame:** 1 year (with the next meeting in spring 2014)