

Creating a common vision and infrastructure for digital preservation

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ABSTRACT

Preserving digitally encoded information is difficult. There are very many research project across funded across the world and many courses being developed on the topic.

However the field is fragmented; there is no universally accepted way of doing it. Moreover there are several powerful forces at work which encourage that fragmentation. This paper describes those forces and ways in which they are being countered.

The key to this approach is the appreciation that none of the proposed methods of digital preservation can work for all types of digital objects. For example transformations to better supported formats may work very well for documents and images but not well for data where the semantics, which may be embedded in software, is important but may be scrambled if one transforms the format.

If that is accepted, and also given that most proposed approaches have at least some merit, it follows that what is needed is to identify more precisely the areas of applicability of each of the approaches to preservation.

This runs counter to one of the opposing forces, namely the need for projects to over-sell what they do in order to (i) be awarded the original funding and (ii) to obtain future funding. Therefore some objective test for each technique, to test claims and identify scope of applicability, is needed. This paper will describe how this is being done.

In addition, a new initiative is being funded to put in place some key items of infrastructure needed to support digital preservation. These are designed to counter the threats to digitally encoded information which were clearly enunciated through the PARSE.Insight (<http://www.parse-insight.eu>) surveys and Roadmap, and for which good prototypes have been implemented and tested in terms of their effectiveness for preserving digitally encoded information through the CASPAR project (<http://www.casparpreserves.eu>). The plans for putting production level implementations in place and creating the long term support for this infrastructure will be provided in this paper.