

Nancy Y McGovern, (ed.) *Aligning National Approaches to Digital Preservation*, 1st ed., Atlanta, Educopia Institute Publications, 2012. 342 pp. ISBN 978 0 982665 31 2. Available free to download from http://educopia.org/sites/educopia.org/files/ANADP_Educopia_2012.pdf.

This hefty (electronic) volume captures the results of the ‘Aligning National Approaches to Digital Preservation’ conference held in Tallinn, Estonia, in May 2011. The goal of the conference was to ‘explore how to create and sustain international collaborations to support the preservation of our collective digital cultural memory’ (p. 1). The opportunities and barriers for collaboration were considered from six perspectives: technology, law, education, economics, organisational frameworks, and standards.

Perhaps the most useful feature of the volume is in its review of the current state of play. The chapter on organisational alignment contains a review of examples of inter-organisational collaboration, ranging from the very large (for example, the US National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program) to the local. Aaron Trehub’s paper discusses how small- to medium-sized libraries in the United States used the LOCKSYS (Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe) application to build collaborative digital preservation environments referred to as Private LOCKSYS Networks (PLNs). This approach could usefully be considered by similar-sized Australian archives and university libraries. On a larger scale, Stoklasová (et al.) discuss the organisation issues of introducing digital preservation activities within the National Library of the Czech Republic. The chapter on standards alignment contains an excellent review of digital preservation standards. The chapter on legal alignment contains a good review of the legal issues surrounding digital preservation, but for Australian audiences the recent Australian Law Reform Commission discussion paper on copyright and the digital economy (<http://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/copyright-and-digital-economy-dp-79>) is more detailed and specifically addresses the Australian context. All chapters include an extensive bibliography that would be useful to readers interested in digging a little deeper on the issues or projects mentioned in the reviews.

Alignment of digital preservation is, to me, clearly a desirable goal on a number of levels. The benefits of alignment are clearly articulated in the book. Alignment on the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) model enables people in the field to accurately communicate about digital preservation. Alignment on high-level standards (such as ISO 15489 on Records Management) normalises expectations about behaviour. Alignment of approaches, processes and technologies allows organisations to reuse technology developed by others. Reuse is (and will continue to be) a driver in reducing the cost of digital preservation. So the work of organisational, national and international alignment is important.

Nevertheless, there are also a number of risks in alignment and these are not so clearly articulated in the book. First, there is the problem of monoculture. We still have very little experience in digital preservation, and it is quite possible (indeed likely) that some of our systems and processes will have flaws in them that will lead to loss of material. Premature alignment into one (or a small set of) approach(es) raises the possibility of catastrophic loss. Second, the lack of experience may lead us to align to a non-optimum solution. Standards can be particularly problematic here as they do set expectations, and consequently inhibit experimentation into significantly different approaches. I would question whether we are really, as a digital preservation community, at the stage where we can avoid these traps.

An important question, and one not touched upon at the conference, is where should the boundaries of alignment be?

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Adrian Brown, *Practical Digital Preservation: A How-to Guide for Organizations of Any Size*, London, Facet, 2013. 352 pp. ISBN 978 1 856047 55 5. UK£49.95.

Reading this book in the open air on a beautiful spring morning close to a beach, I lift my eyes to see gnarled banksias, fat-trunked palms, mellow brick walls, modest but impressive Georgian buildings. It is a perfect spot to sit and read about preservation and things that last.

But the setting also tells another story. The day is hazy with smoke: 40 kilometres away the bush has been burning for days and yesterday I drove through stands of naked, charred trees, ash-white ground and blistered road signs. The air around me is also filled with the noise of demolition and construction, as the Georgian buildings are one by one being replaced by 10-storey towers of steel, concrete, glass and balcony furniture.

It is indeed an appropriate setting for reading and thinking about preservation. As a former conservator and digital preservation manager, I am instantly reminded of two things: deterioration processes are often natural and may involve sudden, cataclysmic losses; while ‘loss’ phenomena are also often the result of changes in human expectations and preferences.

And so it is with digital preservation, that loose-limbed body of concepts, precautions, policy and actions aimed at maintaining the accessibility and utility of digital information resources despite the ravages of media deterioration, data corruption and the changing availability of technologies for presenting them.

Adrian Brown’s book on digital preservation is comprehensive, insightful and useful. I was responsible for preparing a guide on this subject for UNESCO more than a decade ago, and declare my envy that this book achieves much more of those virtues than we managed back in 2002. The author has long experience with digital information management. Through his work with the National Archives of the United Kingdom, as well as his involvement in a number of collaborations, he has been a key player and leader in digital preservation in the UK and Europe since the 1990s. In recent years he has served as Head of Preservation and Access for the UK Parliamentary Archives. His experience in both places has gone far beyond ‘end of life’ preservation salvaging. For example, he has published previously on the subject of archiving websites. In his current role, as well as preservation he is responsible for digitisation programs which produce much of the digital content needing to be managed, and the intellectual control systems that allow each straw of archival record to be distinguished in the vast haystacks that will, and already do, exist. Such processes are critical parts of digital preservation management for both policy and practice, and Brown’s breadth and depth of expertise are evident throughout this guide.