

# **SOME (PROVOCATIVE) CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT PRESERVATION, SYSTEMS AND PERFECT WORLDS (USING A LOT OF QUOTES)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The subject**

We are used to define digital preservation as, generally, the taking of measures and actions intended to assure that digital objects created nowadays can be interpreted at any moment in the future. This is a simple definition, and there is nothing wrong with it.

### **The (in many cases wrong) assumption**

The problem comes however when we try to put that in place. The actual references recommend looking to OAIS, and start addressing the problem from there. However, I believe that such attitude can be not only lazy but also dangerous.

The “OAIS perspective” is based on the assumption that the solution will be the building of a system for digital preservation. It means we should accept, implicitly and without question that the solution to the problem is to build a specific system for that purpose.

### **Making it costly (for nothing)**

Assuming that the solution is really to build a new system, it also means that we’ll have an extra cost (of building a new system)! That not only never is good, as in some cases we also might realize it will be “for nothing”. I stress this “for nothing”, because in fact digital preservation never will bring us any new value “per si”.

Let us imagine I want to communicate with someone else that is far away of me and that for such a purpose I want to use a simple, cheap and ubiquitous technology. Therefore, for that, I might consider using “email”. In this case I can claim that I’m making use of a valuable technology, with value for a natural human need, in order to surpass a human limitation, so it makes sense to build a specific technological system for that, an “email system”.

However, if we’ll have to build a “digital preservation system” we cannot claim that such system is an answer to any natural human need! In fact, such a kind of solution will be only a “patch” for what is really an imperfect technological paradigm. Concluding this claim, from the “OAIS perspective” we accept from the beginning that we need to build “digital preservation systems” because our other related technological systems are imperfect.

Is that wrong or is that right? Well, if we’ll have no other option, than that might be right. In fact, that has been what we’ve been advising traditional libraries and archives to do. But that has been because those are entities traditionally located close to the the end of the information production chain (or at least of the end of the first round of the circle). These

entities are in fact sub-systems of overall bigger systems where they to “patch” other “imperfect” sub-systems.

But not all the information produced nowadays in digital formats is intended to be curate by traditional libraries and archives. And neither traditional libraries nor archives are seen anymore as relevant entities. In fact, they are increasingly seen as simply costs! Stating it from a broader perspective, maybe we should start considering other ways information objects should be preserved, with or without libraries or archives.

Let us take for example to case of the corporate archives! In the traditional “physical information objects” world, they were sub-systems activated in the end of “production processes” executed in the scope of other sub-systems, with the purpose of specifically curate these objects. In some cases, in order to optimize that role, they also could be activated early, during the previous processes, but that was anyway to assure that some minimal requirements would be assured in the end to assure a better explicit curation.

### **The new paradigm**

But in a digital world we must raise the fundamental question: do we really need explicit curation in a digital world, especially if focused in the end of the chain? In a “physical world” we need curation mainly because our “production spaces” are also physical, so they are limited (or, alternatively, we only can increase them at a cost), implying we need to “clean” them periodically, in the end of each “round of the wheel”, to free room to the next production “round” (and thus save money, assuming that the cost of the “preservation space” is lower than the cost of the “production space”). But that might not be the case anymore, in a digital paradigm, where we already understood that we can afford to get storage space at a rhythm surpassing the rhythm of production of information.

Therefore, we should ask ourselves why, if our problem is not anymore the cost of the “space”, we should insist in assuming costs “for nothing”? It looks to me obvious that what we need is not anymore to build “preservation spaces”, but instead simply to assure that the “production spaces” should have “preservation properties”.

### **The claim**

Concluding, my position is that maybe we should not continue researching in building dedicated digital preservation systems, but instead we should focus on understanding what should they be the basic principles under which “systems” (simply that) could be designed in order to have, naturally, digital preservation properties.

### **The solution**

*Sorry, but I have no idea! I just have a vision... Anyway, if it is all becoming automatic, why should we not dream to be able to automate this too?*