

Participant Feedback on DELOS SS07: Summer School on Digital Preservation in Digital Libraries

Introduction

“In my opinion the course is perfect as an introduction to the field of digital preservation as well as providing an overview of the current developments going on, and also a great opportunity to get in contact with people directly involved with these newest developments.”

Participant from: Austria

The third DELOS¹ International Summer School on Digital Preservation and Digital Libraries was held at the Santa Croce in Fossabanda, an enchanting renovated former convent in Pisa (Italy) from the 3rd to the 9th of June 2007. The event brought together thirty-five participants from seven countries to investigate digital preservation challenges and approaches within the context of digital libraries. The event provided an excellent opportunity for participants to meet and share their personal experiences with researchers, experts, and practitioners representing a range of disciplines.

The attendees benefited from lectures by international experts, participation in practical breakout groups, and general discussion. These activities provided participants with an appreciation of the issues and challenges surrounding digital preservation; a grasp of current core research in the area of digital curation and preservation; a coherent and practical understanding of digital preservation activities; experience with workflow modelling, metadata definition, and ingest process management; an appreciation of the different approaches to selection and appraisal; knowledge of the approaches to repository design and deployment; an understanding of the issues surrounding assessment, audit and certification of digital repositories; knowledge of digital curation techniques and practices; a firm understanding of the issues of authenticity, integrity, and reliability in relation to digital libraries; and an understanding of how digital curation and preservation requirements can be integrated into digital library development.

Feedback From Participants

All participants, regardless of their level of previous experience, felt that the course had been tailored to their needs. The DELOS 2007 Summer School succeeded, for a third time, in the difficult task of providing a course that catered for both novices and experienced professionals.

“Above all, DELOS Summer School made it clear to me how crucial and

¹ DELOS Network of Excellence is a four-year project funded by the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme to synergize and foster technology for the next-generation of Digital Libraries. <http://www.delos.info>

important the problem of Digital Preservation is for our culture; our future understanding of history; science and industry”

Participant from: Germany

“Before attending the course I knew very little about digital preservation, so for me most things were new. It was really interesting to have lecturers from various backgrounds talking to us about different aspects of digital preservation. It was nice to see in the discussions that the lecturers did not always agree with each other.”

Participant from: Austria

One of the most highly valued benefits for attendees of the summer school was the opportunity to interact in the groups from divergent cultural, disciplinary and institutional backgrounds and professions. Participants felt that the different experiences and points of view brought to course by other attendees was a rich resource. They also reported that discussing the issues of digital preservation together widened their understanding and allowed them to examine their previously held assumptions in a new light. In their feedback attendees recounted lively and fruitful discussions facilitated by the group exercises throughout the five day training course:

“I found the breakout groups the most valuable aspect of the course, as it was in these circumstances that you were forced to engage with the questions and think of ways to solve them.”

Participant from: Scotland

“Most of us came there with quite different backgrounds, so it was very interesting to work in groups, to discuss and to look at the same issue from different points of view.”

Participant from: Lithuania

“It was great to meet a wide range of people from different types of institutions, all interested (and many involved in) digital preservation. Being from a Library, I particularly appreciated learning more about Archives, authenticity and appraisal.”

Participant from: England

“What I liked very much was that we had the opportunity to discuss the topics in small groups when we were doing the group works, even if we did not always reach a result, the discussions were worth every minute.”

Participant from: Austria

Having all the participants and lecturers accommodated in the same hotel as the course had a very positive impact on the atmosphere and socialising as well as providing attendees with access to the lecturers in informal contexts:

“I enjoyed the possibility of talking in an informal setting with important personalities in digital preservation - really the people who make it possible.”

Participant from: Austria

“The best thing was that we all stayed in the same place all of the time, therefore being able to interact and exchange info. Participants coming from different areas or practices was great as well.”

Participant from: Slovenia

This friendly and relaxed atmosphere was aided by the comprehensive social programme. On Wednesday afternoon lecturers and students were treated to a tour of

Lucca by a very entertaining local guide followed by a delicious meal of Tuscan specialities. On Thursday evening participants enjoyed an evening boat trip through Pisa along the beautiful Arno river.

At the close of the course each participant was asked to provide suggestions of ways the course could be improved. The comments received highlighted how much participants had enjoyed each others company, suggesting more time to socialise in the evenings and the desire to have worked in group exercises with a greater diversity of their fellow participants.

Many felt, that as they had enjoyed the discussions between the lecturers themselves, a panel session might prove a valuable way to conclude the course. As one participant noted:

“...lots of questions came up during the week and while you could discuss these with the speakers in the breaks, I think it would have been valuable to open the floor to discussion on the final afternoon ... I think a ‘Question Time’ style panel with the speakers being controversial to provoke discussion would lead to a lively and engaging debate which would be a good way to reinforce the teaching and round off the week”

Participant from: Scotland

As in previous years participants were also asked to provide a drawing or illustration which for them encapsulated something special from their experience of the Summer School. One such illustration which we particularly enjoyed was provided by a participant from Germany.

Figure 1: The Acme Preserve-O-Mat 3000



Conclusion

Feedback from participants indicated that the 2007 DELOS Summer School was a resounding success fostering a more complete understanding of challenges and opportunities presented by the topic of digital preservation. More importantly, by bringing together a group of young researchers and students from different backgrounds with leading experts and practitioners in the field the DELOS Summer School has fostered an understanding amongst its participants of the value and importance of cooperation and the sharing of knowledge across institutional, national and sectoral boundaries to meet these challenges.

“After DELOS summer school I understood not only how important, but also how complicated digital preservation process is, especially in terms of technological and legal points of view, it still requires many attempts and cooperative activities.”

Participant from: Lithuania