William Kilbride – speaking notes
COPIM Conference Scaling Small 21/4/23, Panel session on Archives and Preservation

Thank you very much for the invitation to join.

DPC has had a small role in COPIM but it's mostly been my colleague Paul Wheatley who has done the work and Sara Thomson who did most of the planning. So here I come claiming the glory. My name is William Kilbride and I lead the DPC. I am an archaeologist by training but also with some very small claim to have been an experimental publisher. I set up an electronic archaeology journal called 'Online Archaeology' when I was a post grad in 1994. Maybe the first web-based e-journal in archaeology? I was very excited about it when I was 22. Candidly had no idea what I was doing. It survived just long enough to be in the Internet Archive if you know where to look.

That was a long time ago. I work now for the DPC is a member organisation and we were set up 21 years ago primarily for advocacy in digital preservation. I won't say more about the DPC just now except to say you are all welcome to join and get involved in our work. But there's something from the history of the DPC that is important in the story I want to tell: because DPC was mostly set up by memory institutions.

Archives, libraries, digital repositories of all kinds have made the running in digital preservation and there's a lot to celebrate. 20 years ago it was common to hear threats of a digital dark age. Those claims were overblown, partly because of an observer effect: the predictions didn't take into account that the risk had been spotted and agencies like DPC and its members have been working hard to avoid it.

That could seem a bit smug - we've done a lot but there's no room to be complacent. Data volumes grow, content becomes more complicated, and user expectations continue to expand. So as a general rule the digital preservation challenge is getting harder through time, not easier.

There is a long tail of digital materials with no archival home and journals and open books are on that list. Published research and grey literature are on the Global List of Digitally Endangered species.

With expanding volumes and complexities in data so while most of the challenges are tractable at small scale, digital archaeology is horrifying at large scale. When there is so much we need to do why are we excited about COPIM? To summarise 20 years of experience: prevention is better than cure.

For years now we have been arguing that preservation is not an archive or library issue: if you leave it to the archivists it's probably already too late. So, DPC needs to stop preaching to the choir: we need to embed preservation in the objects at the point of creation; and even better in the infrastructures that create digital objects; and even more so in the planning of those infrastructures. So a small intervention early is going to make a big difference later. And that's why we're excited about COPIM. A chance not just to talk to data creators, but an invitation to participate in the design of the infrastructures that they use.

Preservation ready objects from preservation planned infrastructures. So thank you for making Ian's life easier …

But remember that the DP question is about more than publishing. It's about a lot more than it used to be. Any agency which offers products where the lifecycle of the product is greater than the lifecycle of the data through which it is designed and managed and delivered is in scope.   Therefore the implications here are wide and significant. Don't underestimate the impact you could be having. Publishing arrived at many of the DP challenges early. Let's think how the lessons from COPIM can be maximised.

And scaling small: a small effort with a big impact.