Digital Preservation in a Lunchbox

Launching a community of practice

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**Abstract – This poster presents the early days of a French-speaking digital preservation community of practice in Quebec, Canada. It showcases various considerations for defining its scope, organization, and development.**

**Keywords – Community of practice, knowledge sharing.**

**Conference Topics – Community; resilience.**

# Feeling Hungry [Introduction]

Even before the confinement era, the digital preservation community tried to find ways to connect. Mailing lists and conferences exists, but when we live and work in a different language than English, we long to discuss the topic in our own language.

In November 2021, a French-speaking digital preservation community of practice was launched in the province of Quebec, in Canada. Here will be discussed challenges, successes, and the future of this community.

# Launching a Community of Practice

## Lunch Prep [The Idea]

The need was there. Every time two or more French Canadian professionals met, they were so excited to find someone that understood them. Every time, the words “We must keep in touch!” or “Let’s get together soon!” were said, but little happened afterwards.

In one instance, a few archivists were planning to meet regularly, and create a public forum using Google, but most of them could not publicly associate with their employer. Time constraints did the rest.

Same as anywhere else, Quebec practitioners (and aspiring ones) are scattered amongst different professions and organizationstypes. Which meant that there wasn’t enough incentive for any of the professional associations to create chapters, committees or groups focused on digital preservation.

So, how to get in touch with people from universities, museums, archival societies, and libraries then?

## Great (?) Expectations

Quite simply, we wanted to be able to periodically bring together Canadian francophones involved with digital preservation to discuss the issues we are facing in our workplaces. This potential “audience” was targeted as we figured that there was no shortage of English-speaking digital preservation communities, and that Quebec and Canada’s legislation and structures will differ from other countries, such as France or Morocco.

The goal was obviously to share knowledge and tools, but also to break the isolation. We wanted to create a welcoming space that would nurture discussion, but where no one would feel required to intervene, most importantly, we didn't want to burden anyone.

## Let’s Grab Lunch! [The Beginning]

The impulse to launch the community was made by three people working in universities, and we invited people we know, thinking that they would invite people they know. It more or less worked, precisely because many of the professionals are isolated. We didn’t send an invitation to discussion lists because we wanted to gather practitioners, not just people interested in the topic. We also aimed to keep a balance between institution type. However, as of March 2022, we are about twenty and we don’t have anyone from archival societies or cities.

There has been no lack of practical considerations… Online or on site wasn’t a question, with virtual meetings being the new normal, but how frequently and how long? Did we need a moderator? Reports? Documentation? Discussion list? Subjects?

At the first two meetings, we discussed those questions. We decided on 45 minutes meetings the first Thursday of each month at lunch time since it’s usually the only free time left. Was it long enough or too long? At each meeting, we must cut short the discussions.

We started by using the institutional Zoom account of one of the participants. As for communication channels we created a discussion list, knowing it shouldn’t be too intrusive.

We also have reports and different files on Google Drive, though we haven’t had much success implementing collaborative note taking for the meetings.

Rapidly, we noticed two things: if we wanted useful and fluid discussions, we needed topics and moderation. Hence, we have been using Zoom’s survey function at the beginning of each meeting to decide on the next month’s discussion topic.

At the moment, facilitation is done by the participant who sent the Zoom invitation, but this is being questioned: meetings can’t depend on one person and perhaps other people are better suited or interested to do it.

# From A LUNCH to a Banquet [The future]

Oddly enough, given our common interest for long-term goals, the biggest challenge will be the sustainability of the group. As for any community project, the success comes if many people are involved. Unfortunately, another element for success appears to be that the community shouldn’t ask too much from its participants. Most of us don't have any professional incentive for such involvement, and in some cases, digital preservation is just one of many undertakings.

We’ll also need to question the functioning of the group to be sure it works and remains relevant. To get there, we involving other members of the group to deal with the logistics, and to reflect with us the need for further structure, such as a Code of conduct. Though we have not dived into the community of practice “best practices” literature yet, we believe that resources like the Open Science community starter kit1 can be most relevant to our journey.

Finally, there is the question of the growth of the group. Starting small, by word of mouth, felt like the right choice, but we’ve already realized that the group has representation issues. So we need to find a way to reach out to those who aren’t at the table.

We know the global digital preservation community is generous and altruistic, yet it was a bit of a (lovely) surprise to see displays of mutual support appear so early in the existence of our group. It’s certainly a good omen for this young adventure!

The table has been set, guests have started filling it and sharing their dishes. So let’s have a toast for present and future friendships!

# REFERENCES

1. « Open Science Community Starter Kit », 2022.<https://www.startyourosc.com/>.