

Conclusion

The acronym InterPARES was chosen as the working title for this project because the Latin expression *inter pares* means “among peers” and there was a strong desire among the researchers to build a truly collaborative research project. It was easier said than done. Academics of diverse disciplines, professionals from a variety of fields, industry representatives, institutional representatives, and students often look at research from radically different perspectives. They have specific individual interests, may have organizational agendas, and engage in research often using contrasting approaches and methods. It took great care and nurturing on the part of myself and the national and multinational teams’ chairs, and even greater open-mindedness, flexibility, intellectual curiosity, and sheer effort on the part of all researchers to achieve the impressive level of integration that made our granting agency’s site visit committee state in its report: “the team took the time . . . to build a state of mind that emphasized ‘we’ rather than ‘me.’ This is a significant accomplishment, bringing together a wide variety of disciplines and cultures.”¹

Several activities supported the development of a common mind and a strong feeling of ownership on the part of each and every researcher, unit chair, and student research assistant. First, the project began with the writing of an organizational policy, which established quite clearly the categories of membership in the project and the respective responsibilities; the structure and composition of the research units, the management units and the administrative centre; the function of the research workshops, their schedule and their procedures (including the voting procedure); the publication policy, the Web site policy, the intellectual property policy, the collaborative research and authors’ guidelines, and the human subjects and data protection guidelines; and the procedures for maintaining the InterPARES research material, data, and records. The organizational policy was discussed in face-to-face meetings of all researchers, till consensus was reached on all clauses.

Second, a great deal of time was spent defining the terms and concepts on which the research had to be founded, such as *record*, *authenticity*, *archives*, *file*, *attributes*, *components*, and *elements*. At the outset, there were almost as many interpretations of those terms and concepts as there were researchers, given the fact that the same term could have different meanings from one culture to another, one discipline to another, and one organization to another, and conversely, that different terms could have the same meanings across cultures, disciplines, and organizations.

Third, face-to-face one-week-long research workshops, held three times a year, allowed all researchers to engage in scholarly debate; to review and discuss research activities, methodologies, draft documents, and preliminary findings and reconcile them; to distribute among themselves tasks and responsibilities; to adjust the direction of the research according to the findings; to resolve any conflict that might arise; and to deliberate on any issue brought forward by any researcher. These workshops were the most effective mechanism for promoting team integration across geographical and cultural distances and often competing conceptual frameworks.

As a result of all the above, each researcher brought unique qualities, skills, knowledge, and perspectives to research results that truly are everyone’s work, as the individual contributions are so blended together and indistinguishable that the whole is indeed much more than the sum of its parts.

¹ Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Peer Review Committee, *Site Visit Report. The Long Term Preservation of Authentic Records. InterPARES. UBC File #412-1998-0002*. Unpublished report. Ottawa: SSHRC, 2001, p. 2.

In addition to a shared sense of the importance of their work, all researchers have demonstrated an exceptional ability to change the orientation of the research when it became clear that a certain direction was not viable. They have not clung rigidly to the framework established at the outset, nor have they sought or settled for the easy, but incomplete or disjunctured answer, and they have not hesitated to put into question again early findings, regardless of the significant risk of being unable to deliver the results by the scheduled deadlines. In other words, the intellectual rigour and courage of InterPARES researchers has been as remarkable as the collaborative spirit and the commitment to the research. And it has rubbed off on the students assisting in the research, who have been exceedingly enthusiastic about working on the project and, in the process, have developed an abundance of new skills and self-confidence. It is my belief that these characteristics of InterPARES researchers are evident in the work contained in the InterPARES findings. .

Of course, the problems presented by the preservation of the authenticity of electronic records have not been solved by the InterPARES research, but a significant step forward has been made by having developed a shared view of the issues, concepts, principles, and criteria on which solutions must be based, and of the methodologies that are viable with existing technology, and by having built a solid foundation from which further research can be launched without having to reinvent the wheel. It is also important that both the shared view and the foundation are international, interdisciplinary, and valid across sectors and organizations.

The findings and products of InterPARES contained in *The Long-Term Preservation of Authentic Electronic Records: Findings of the InterPARES Project* are complete and finished for the purposes of the first phase of the research project. However, as InterPARES continues into a second phase investigating more complex records generated in interactive, experiential, and dynamic digital environments and by activities that are yet to be regulated, that is, artistic activities (i.e., music, still and moving images, theatre, choreography), scientific activities (i.e., in the natural and social sciences), and electronic delivery of services by governments, these findings and products will be re-examined, refined, elaborated, and further developed. Moreover, several additional findings and products will be delivered. Therefore, stay tuned for a sequel!

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