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A Metadata Schema Registry for the Registration and Analysis of Recordkeeping and Preservation Metadata

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Abstract:

After many years of research and practice, most archivists now acknowledge that one key, if not the key to the creation, management, preservation and use of electronic records (that is, those records that are created and/or maintained in electronic form as evidence of business or personal activity) is metadata. The term "metadata," as used in this paper, is based upon how it has recently been applied in the archives and recordkeeping community to refer to all types of structured information, including archival description, which is created manually or automatically and captured by recordkeeping and archival systems. Such metadata serves to document the juridical-administrative, business and technical contexts within which records are created, managed and used; identify records; delineate how the records behave, their function and use; identify and describe the relationships within and between records and other information objects and the ways in which these relationships evolve over time; express and support how records should be managed, and what should happen to them as they age (e.g. destruction or preservation requirements); and provide audit trails of recordkeeping processes.

Many metadata schemas have been developed and applied in recent years by archivists and other professionals engaged in electronic recordkeeping and the preservation and archiving of digital materials, for purposes such as records management, collection description, digitization of items for online access, and digital rights management. However, there remains a need to focus much more attention on the creation, management, preservation and use of metadata that is demonstrably trustworthy, and that is sufficient, appropriate, and of high enough quality to demonstrate the continued authenticity of the electronic records or archived digital materials to which it relates. Moreover, trusted metadata in and of itself can provide end users with an additional valuable information resource. What is required is a delineation, not only of what metadata needs to be created, but also how its integrity is to be guaranteed over time, how much of it needs to be preserved and what eliminated, and, in each case, when, by whom, and how. The benefits of such attention are not only that the integrity of metadata as it is created and accrued across time, space and activity, is ensured, but also that a technical and descriptive metadata infrastructure will be developed that could underpin the development of automated metadata management and manipulation tools to better support activities ranging from current electronic recordkeeping to collection management and the creation of entirely new views of archived materials.

This paper discusses the development by the Description Group of the InterPARES2 (International research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems) Project of an XML-based prototype metadata schema registry and analytical framework for the identification, registration, and analysis of existing and prospective metadata schemas, sets, and application profiles relevant to electronic recordkeeping and digital preservation. InterPARES is an international multi-disciplinary research collaboration emanating out of the archival community that has been working since 1999 to devise new models, methods and automated tools for ensuring the creation of reliable, and preservation of authentic electronic records. The second phase of this project, InterPARES2, which is due to be completed in 2006, integrates the disciplinary perspectives and concerns of the scientific and digital arts communities, as well as those of e-government, and is focusing in particular on the preservation of records generated by emergent interactive, experiential and dynamic systems and processes.

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