2nd EPICo Conference "The Importance of Print in a Digital World" (Barcelona, 2024): Nothing is as constant as change (Heraclitus of Ephesus)

Wolfgang Mayer

1. Kuopio Conferences and EPICo

The Kuopio Conference was developed as part of IFLA's Universal Availability of Publications programme and was first held in 1999 in Kuopio, Finland. The European Print Initiatives Collaboration (EPICo) was founded in Vienna in 2015 by seven organisations (nine individuals) to promote international exchange on archiving issues. Initially, the focus was on collaborative project solutions, but with new members from national libraries, the scope of discussion has broadened significantly.

In 2018, during an EPICo meeting in Basel at the 6th Kuopio Conference, it was decided to take over the organisation of future conferences. In 2022, the 7th Kuopio Conference took place in Vienna, and in 2024, for the first time, it was held under the dual name 2nd EPICo (8th Kuopio) Conference in Barcelona. From 2026 onwards, only the name EPICo Conference will be used officially, with references to the Kuopio origin only in explanatory texts, as the original name requires increasingly clarification due to changing international venues. The scope of the conference has also expanded significantly since EPICo took over.

With the 2024 Conference, the number of EPICo participants has grown to 18 institutions and over forty individuals. In addition to the preparations for the conference, several working groups have been set up, making it necessary to restructure and professionalise cooperation within EPICo.

Terms of Reference were drafted for the first time in August 2024, outlining moderation (chair and co-chairs), membership (core membership) and extended structures. Special Interest Groups (SIGs) were established for specific topics, currently "Metadata", "High-Density Storage Facilities", and planned groups on "Collaboration with Publishers and Digitisation Providers", among others. Functional groups have also been set up for 'Conference Planning' and 'Communication and Website Updates'. The aim is to provide forums for experts without allowing the uncontrolled growth of EPICo members, while ensuring continuous and efficient work, independent of physical or virtual member meetings.

2. 2ⁿᵈ EPICo Conference "Importance of Print in a Digital World"

The conference took place over three days (25-27 September 2024), with each day starting with a keynote address, followed by six thematic sessions of three, four or six presentations, and ending with a panel discussion. In contrast to the Vienna 2022 conference, this time the keynotes were thematically linked, providing an outlook on projects and conditions outside Europe. This approach was chosen to provide a broader international exchange, despite EPICo's European focus.

Keynote 1 (Wednesday): Delivered by Stéphane Ipert (Director of Heritage and Documentary Projects at Caravane Earth Foundation), it focused on his previous role as Director of the Heritage Library at the National Library of Qatar (2017-2023). His presentation, "In the Middle East Libraries, Practice Trumps the Choice Between Paper and Digital Formats", highlighted four case studies that discussed the prioritisation of library buildings over the provision of scholarly content and the differences in reading practices compared to Western academic institutions.

Keynote 2 (Thursday): Jamie McCowan (CEO of CAVAL) presented the Australian national shared archiving project, "CAVAL, Australian Shared Print Collaboration". This included planned new builds, changing funding models and the transition from a shared collection to a collective collection with a new strategic direction.

Keynote 3 (Friday): Delivered by Heather Weltin and Anna Striker (Co-Chairs of the Shared Print Partnership - SPP). Their presentation, "The Importance of Metadata for Shared Print and Global Collaboration", introduced the SPP's initiative to develop a metadata standard for local and distributed archiving projects. The "Shared Print Actions: Terminology (SPA)" project, created with input from EPICo's SIG Metadata, was presented as a new global standard.

3. Thematic Sessions (The six thematic sessions were not directly related to the day's keynotes):

Session 1: "Library Architecture: New Innovations" (Wednesday morning, organised by Andy Appleyard, British Library) - presented new library building projects, including the new facility of the National Repository Library of Finland, the new Conservation Centre of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and strategic changes at the Cooperative Storage Library in Büron.

Session 2: "Planning for sustainability" (Wednesday afternoon, moderated by Dani Tschirren, Zentral- und Hochschulbibliothek Luzern) - Discussed sustainability in collaborative projects, including the UK Print Book Collection initiative and the Danish Vinge project.

Session 3: "Safety Plans" (Wednesday evening, moderated by Frédéric Brodkom, Université catholique de Louvain) - Addressed disaster prevention and emergency planning in libraries.

Session 4: "Access to Print in an Age of Mass Digitisation" (Thursday morning, moderated by Eoin McCarney, National Library of Ireland) - Explored the role of print collections amidst digitisation trends.

Session 5: "The Future of Print from a Publisher's Perspective" (Thursday afternoon, moderated by Brigitte Kromp, University Library Vienna) - Included insights from publishers discussing the future of print publishing.

Session 6: "Collaborations: Lessons Learned" (Thursday evening, moderated by Amparo Llorente, CSIC) - Highlighted experiences from various institutional collaborations in print preservation and archiving.

4. Panel discussion and outlook:

The conference concluded with a panel discussion chaired by Wolfgang Mayer (University Library of Vienna), bringing together experts from a variety of backgrounds, including academia, libraries and publishers. The discussion focused on the role of printed scholarly literature in the past, present and future.

As an official conclusion, the chairs Dani Tschirren and Santi Balagué i Linares announced that the next EPICo conference will take place in autumn 2026 at the British Library in London. A post-conference excursion was organised to GEPA, the Catalan cooperative archive.

A post-event survey showed a high level of satisfaction, with 93.75% of respondents rating the conference as 'very good' or 'good'. Suggestions for future topics included "collection development and preservation strategies", "impact of digital products and AI", and "international collaboration on print archiving".

The results of the survey will be used in the planning of the next EPICo conference in 2026.

All presentations are freely available via University of Vienna's repository, PHAIDRA: https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/detail/o:2107718. Most talks have been recorded on video and will be made available soon, too.