

## Photos as part of the digital legacy of a client of a residential social service

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*Who of you has ever wondered what kind of mark you will leave on this world one day? Children, friendships, shared experiences... But what about the digital space? So in the following lines you can read a reflection on how to approach memories captured by the lens of a camera and stored in the "virtual".*

### Straight into the topic

Imagine a short scene from a movie screen. One of life's most difficult situations unfolds in it. In a room with long out-of-date furniture, we see relatives whose eldest member has been taken away by death. Someone from the police carefully pulls out a box of photos from a shelf. Grandma is so present in them! The camera zooms in on a close-up of one of the photographs, in which an old lady is standing, leaning almost gracefully on a French cane. Smiling, she points to a mushroom in the moss. *"That was her last trip to the cottage,"* says an moved voice in the background.

Here we can end our film clip and return to reality. When someone dies, there's a lot of them that's left in our world. Until recently, that was fairly clear to us. Everything that a particular individual left behind was material in nature. You could touch it. Valid and invalid contracts and bills, money in an envelope or in a deposit book, love letters tied with a ribbon. Little things kept as mementos. Albums and boxes full of photos, film cassettes. Things like this formed and still forms part of the documentation of everyone's life.

**Now, if we moved the scene from our film to a room in a nursing home, the family would have their grandmother's belongings in front of them, among which would be an envelope of photos from the last years of her life, which she spent in a residential service.**

And watch out. It is here that contemporary reality, which has long

since changed, enters energetically into the world of imaginary films. For digital technology has brought about a number of major changes. Moving the evidence of our lives from the material to the virtual world is just one of them.

In the near future, society will undoubtedly have to deal with the "digitisation of law" in the context of human activity, but also with the ethical aspect of working with digital data. This is a complex topic on which experts from a wide range of fields will have something to say. So let's at least lightly sketch out some of the context.

Among the changes that digitalisation has brought to our lives, there is no denying that we are all creating a digital footprint. Sometimes deliberately, sometimes a little unintentionally and in other cases even unconsciously. The issue of digital legacy is also related to this. If you belong to the group of people who haven't even thought about these issues yet, don't worry. The digital legacy is still one of the "thirteenth chambers" of digitalisation. We can try to peek into it together and try to look at the digital legacy of the social service client with an emphasis on passing it on and promoting a healthy continuity of life that stream in families. That is, through the lens of ethics.

### Now is a good time to go back to the introduction

Have you ever thought about the legacy your clients are leaving in the virtual world? Have you considered that their digital footprint remains "alive" even after they themselves have passed away? Have you tried to think about what happens to digital documents in your organisation - snippets of clients' lives that could one day be a precious memory, but remain in an imaginary "digital gloom", or locked behind usernames and passwords that no one else has access to? The answer to this question is certainly that they are not within the competencies of social services. It is up to the client to take care of these things, or to have their family help them.

If that's your answer, you're partly right. But let's move out of the realm of rights and responsibilities and move into the realm of human ethics. For it is this that

can serve as a good compass to help make decisions about how to treat the digital traces of the deceased in a meaningful way, with respect for their lives. When the topic is large and complex, sometimes it helps to break it down into small pieces. So today we can take the first small step and think about one type of documents - digital photographs.

Let's face it - a readily available "camera" on your mobile phone and storing photos in the cloud have changed the way we document events. Pictures and videos are now an essential part of activities in all industries, including residential social services. Thus, we have hundreds of photos of clients on storage media (disks, cards, cloud storage), and of course they have given their consent. So we have plenty of photos. This is certainly a good change, which we can mark with the letter A in our work.

As we know, if we say A, it usually comes to B. This is often contradictory, and this case is no different. The paper photo albums mentioned in the introduction are disappearing and we have not yet got used to replacing them with digital ones. These remain forgotten in the history of photo documentation in the organization. (If you are exceptional and do it differently, I bow deeply and let you know.)

The solution is possible and not complicated. All it takes is to change the way you think about photos and accept that they are part of the lives of those who are captured in them. Then choose a suitable photo storage system that allows tagging,<sup>1</sup> add a little patience and persistence, and tag a list of people who are captured in the photos so that the photos can be easily searched by name or unique codes.

**We will then be able to film an "update" of our opening scene, which presents the moment when the family of a client who died in residential social services says goodbye to her physical legacy. They have a few of their grandmother's belongings in front of them, and a staff member brings in a flash drive with her photo stored in a box. Or, in the envelope with the photo, access to information to download the photos from the organization's**

<sup>1</sup> Today, many systems have the ability to search by indexes (labels). Proof of this are the photo galleries on your mobile phones, where you can add tags to individual photos to sort

them. In the near future, we can expect AI (artificial intelligence) to step in and sort photos based on similarity. We shall see how our legislation copes with technical progress, but

also how quickly the developers of the information systems used in social services will be able to use the appropriate tools.

**secure storage. The family immediately receives information on where they can have the photos printed and receives an invitation to a farewell party for Grandma that will be held at the home. At this farewell, the photos will be projected on a large screen. If the family wishes, the organisation will then make sure they are deleted from her memory files.**

The above is just one possibility of what the transfer of photographs - part of a digital legacy - might look like after the death of a residential service client. And it may be quite different, because the speed at which technology has evolved in recent years and months is literally dizzying. This speed may be surprising, but it doesn't change the fact that we need to think of memories as an aspect that is important to keep our lives going. They should not disappear unnoticed just because they are not on paper.

### From photos back to digital legacy

This article is the first of its kind, and its text deliberately sticks to the easy-to-understand part of the digital link, the "collection" of photographs.

But the digital legacy itself is a multi-layered, complex topic of the future. It will certainly include textual documents that we create or that someone else creates about us, accesses to all sorts of systems - from email to social networks to accesses to e-banking and public administration systems.

Do you have a minute? Try taking a little internal inventory and write down which information systems you use and which services you access digitally. You might be surprised at how much change has crept into your lives. Once you have your list ready, you can think about what you would want to happen to your accounts if you suddenly lost the ability to control them.

Digital legacy is a new phrase and we need to learn to embrace it gradually. We do not yet make "digital wills", we do not express any wishes about how our data should be handled and who should take it over after our death. Neither the Czech Republic nor the European Union (EU) has yet reflected this new agenda in legislation or recommendations.

A cursory search of public sources indicates that, of the EU countries, France has attempted to address digital law through legislation. On 7 October 2016, after much discussion and many changes, the "Law for a Digital

Republic" (Loi pour une République numérique) came into force here, regulating a number of areas. Crucially for us, it introduces in a completely new way the topic of "digital death" and how the digital assets (accounts and data) of deceased persons are to be dealt with, including the right of individuals to determine in advance what is to happen to their data in the event of their death.

The Czech Republic does not yet have a comprehensive regulation in this area. This does not mean that thinking about our digital footprint should not become as common in our personal and professional lives as thinking about storing paper documents or automatically locking our homes, offices, cars and mobile phones.

Finally, don't leave out information so important that it could easily be the opening paragraph of this article. The impulse to open this topic was based on the research activities of the St@ndByMe project. This project is co-financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme and the Czech Republic is involved in it through the Association of Social Service Providers of the Czech Republic (APSS CR). The aim of the project is to support educational institutions and social service workers in improving the digital skills of seniors and the application of human rights in the field of digital technologies. St@ndByMe connects NGOs and educational organisations from Germany, Greece, Belgium, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Sweden at European level. Information about it can be found on the APSS Czech website in the Projects section. The Czech Republic's implementation team can thus not only participate in the project activities, but they can also develop interesting topics with pleasure, that emerge in the framework of the sub-activities, and it would be a great pity if they were to go unnoticed.

In conclusion, I dare to offer each reader two sets of questions to ponder.

### I.

Do you work in a service dedicated to the elderly? Do you take photos, videos, recordings? Do you collect pictures or other informal documents?

How do you handle the ones you don't print? Do you make them available in any way to the seniors themselves, but also to their relatives?

Do they get to them after their death or do they leave without reminders of the lives of their loved ones in their final years?

If so, isn't it high time to think about it and start looking for a way to give back to the relatives of "your" senior the most precious thing - proof that he or she lived a good life with you?

### II.

The second question is even more sensitive. Have you ever yourself thought about the legacy you are leaving in the digital world? Are you aware of which of your activities and agendas have moved completely into it and no one but you has access to them? Have you thought of creating something like a "digital insurance policy" or a "digital will", just an "Uncle Sam" procedure to make sure that someone else has safe access to your and your family's accounts? If not, I suggest you promise yourself that you will create a "digital fuse". Nice and easy, but preferably this year.