

Paradata

To make sense of data and use it effectively, it is essential to know where it comes from and how it has been processed and used. This is the domain of paradata, an emerging interdisciplinary field with wide applications. As digital data rapidly accumulates in repositories worldwide, this comprehensive introductory book, the first of its kind, shows how to make that data accessible and reusable.

In addition to covering basic concepts of paradata, the book supports practice with coverage of methods for generating, documenting, identifying and managing paradata, including formal metadata, narrative descriptions and qualitative and quantitative backtracking. The book also develops a unifying reference model to help readers contextualise the role of paradata within a wider system of knowledge, practices and processes, and provides a vision for the future of the field.

This guide to general principles and practice is ideal for researchers, students and data managers.

This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

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‘The book *Paradata: Documenting Data Creation, Curation and Use* is a remarkable contribution to the field, offering deep insights into the complex practices and processes behind data documentation. By exploring the multifaceted nature of paradata, the book emphasizes its crucial role in ensuring the clarity, reuse and long-term value of research data. The interdisciplinary approach, drawing from archaeology and information science, presents a comprehensive framework for understanding and managing paradata, making it an essential resource for researchers and practitioners alike. Paradata is something that we all need to embrace and understand in our data-driven world, and this book is a wonderful compilation, offering insights and invaluable context. Congratulations to the chief editor, advisory board members, all those who gave feedback, and the contributing authors.’

— Jane Greenberg, *Drexel University*

‘Huvila and his colleagues provide a much needed and timely analysis of “paradata”. Paradata help us to understand the processes by which data are conceptualised and made, and those processes are never neutral or innocent. Understanding these processes is crucial for the effective management, storage and re-use of data.’

— Sally Wyatt, *Maastricht University, The Netherlands*

‘If you are looking for an understandable and thorough discussion of how data is created and curated, *Paradata* is for you. Both a summation of the European Research Council-funded CAPTURE research project and a primer on the concept and complexities of what makes up paradata – including data creation, curation and use – this book is of interest to a wide audience of information professionals or everyone who works with research data in any stage.’

— Carol Tenopir, *University of Tennessee, Knoxville (Emerita)*

‘This insightful volume introduces the concept of paradata: documentation of the circumstances in which data is made, managed and used. Huvila and co-authors integrate comprehensive literature synthesis with robust empirical findings to produce an accessibly written, thought-provoking book. Scholars, practitioners and students of data practices, data management and data policy will find this book to be a rich and helpful resource.’

— Melanie Feinberg, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

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Documenting Data Creation, Curation and Use

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Preface

The story of this book goes back either a couple of years, half a decade or a quarter of a century depending on where the starting point of this particular process is set. The bulk of the text was written in 2023 and during the first half of 2024. The preparations for writing started sometime in 2021 or 2022, when the book proposal was submitted or accepted. Another reasonable point of time could be the time when Isto started drafting a research proposal for the European Research Council in 2017, or a few years earlier when the question of paradata – to put it simply, information on diverse practices and processes – started to reemerge in previous projects as a crucial question in archaeologists' information work. Going back in time, yet another starting point could be the time when Isto's interest in studying the documentation of archaeological 3D visualisations started in the late 1990s, a process that is partly documented and reported in his doctoral thesis from 2006. Some of the work in the middle can be found in the list of references of this volume and the lists of references of the cited references. At the same time, this volume is also a collaborative effort that builds in different ways on the studies we have done and the lengthy discussions we have had on the nature and practice of paradata since mid-2019.

You might wonder why we go into this much detail in outlining where this particular book process started. It is after all conventional in a preface to set a starting point whether it is the somehow real starting point or something that is convenient to mark as the beginning of a believable origin story without turning it into a research problem. For our book, however, this is important as it is what this volume and our work in the CAPturing Paradata for documenTing data creation and Use for the REsearch of the future (CAPTURE) project between 2019 and 2024 has been all about: to understand how processes and practices are understood, described and documented, and preserved.

Tracking the process (or practice – depending on perspective and theoretical framing) of writing this book provides an illustrative example of how difficult it can be to figure out when a process starts and ends not to mention how to trace them back in time and how to document them in such detail that is useful and makes sense for future use. However, it is also fair to note that even if writing this book was far from straightforward, it is not exemplary of a spectacularly complicated undertaking. The practices and processes we have been investigating in the CAPTURE project that this book builds on, have been often much more convoluted in terms of how they unfold, and how many actors, material and conceptual things are engaged.

In spite of the diversity of their nature, scale and complexity, a common denominator for both writing this book and the instances of data work we have studied as a part of our empirical work is that understanding practices and processes matters when trying to make sense and utilise their outputs and underpinnings. Paradata obviously plays a key role in conveying such an understanding. However, similarly to the practices and processes themselves, the paradata itself is complex and diverse, multimodal, deeply ingrained and relational to practices and processes and their constituting elements. The cover of the book is here to remind us of how it is itself a part of what it conveys. Without being able to identify, keep and convey relevant paradata – in all of its complexity, which we venture to exemplify in this volume – there would hardly be any use or reuse of data or, for that matter, anything that comes out of it.

Acknowledgements

Like all books, this volume on paradata is a group effort. All of the chapter authors have been working in the CAPturing Paradata for documenTing data creation and Use for the REsearch of the future (CAPTURE) research project, which has provided a productive, intellectually inspiring and thoroughly enjoyable environment for our work. Even those of our colleagues who have not participated in the writing of the chapters have not escaped discussions on the book and its different chapters. We are all grateful, for productive discussions on paradata, feedback and insights during the process, to Stefan Ekman, Amalia Juneström, Jessica Kaiser and Michael Olsson. Michael also undertook the daunting task of acting as a commentator of an almost final manuscript providing relentless critique and suggestions for improving both the context and language throughout the manuscript. We also thank Dr Maureen Henninger for helpful comments on Chapter 4. We further thank the advisory board of the project, Costis Dallas, Melanie Feinberg, Jeremy Huggett, Eric Kansa, Costas Papadopoulos and Sally Wyatt, for enlightening and intellectually rewarding discussions on paradata, documentation and ‘things appropriate as informative’ of practices and processes. In particular, the development of the theory of paradata and framing its contexts outside of the domain of archaeology have also benefited from the work of the paradata working group of the InterPARES Trust AI working group under the firm and friendly leadership of Professor Emerita Patricia Franks. Finally, even though we are unable to list everyone, we are also grateful to all the colleagues who have presented at CAPTURE Talks, our online and onsite seminars, workshops and panel discussions, listened and commented on our work so far, and engaged in lively discussions on practice and process documentation, and paradata. All of these longer and shorter exchanges of ideas have had an impact on our thinking and writing.

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