

DAC Summer School

July 1-3, 2026

Who cares?

Collecting, preserving, and curating in museums, archives, and organizations

Background and Scope

For the verb *to care*, derived from Old English *caru* (“concern, anxiety, sorrow, grief, trouble”), the Oxford English Dictionary lists 17 different meanings. Among them “to be interested or concerned,” “to give care,” or “to feel trouble or anxiety.” Within the rather vast semantic spectrum this every-day verb entails, the DAC Summer School 2026 aims at investigating “who cares?” in the context, museums, archives, and comparable institutions of cultural heritage as well as organizations in general.

Collections grow, material traces decay, organizations expand. Both analog and digital repositories are exposed to an ever-increasing flood of information and objects that require proper, sustainable, and long-term care. Museums, archives, libraries, and conservation professionals are confronted not only with new materials and technologies but also with managing fast-growing collections while ensuring their safeguard against processes of deterioration, obsolescence, disruption, and loss. Companies and public organizations face related challenges in knowledge stewardship, documentation, and long-term management of digital and physical assets.

Across these contexts, the accelerating circulation of data, materials, and responsibilities exerts continuous pressure on systems, people, and practices. Digitization—once celebrated for its potential to expand and democratize access to objects and information—has proven deeply ambivalent. The early optimism has turned into a sense of overload and fragmentation, leading to new demands for orientation, regulation, and sustainable models of incision and care.

Understanding the question “*Who cares?*” therefore also means asking:

- Who tends to the fragile, the ageing, the damaged, the forgotten?
- Who restores and safeguards cultural goods and material as well as immaterial heritage?
- Who navigates the ethical, ecological, and emotional dimensions of conservation and loss?
- Who is affected by our work and caring practices, and how do we care for the people beyond our heritage ethically?

Care, in this specific sense, encompasses material maintenance, conservation science, preventive strategies, curatorial decision-making, and the everyday labor of those who work with vulnerable collections, objects, and environments. It is also an attitude—one of responsibility, attention, and thoughtful engagement with pasts that demand stewardship,

presents that require selection, and futures that call for sustainable preservation and loss management.

Parallel tensions exist in other sectors, related, however, to the field of cultural heritage in many ways: health, child and elderly care, social work, education, or organizational knowledge management. Care practices include documentation, protocol duties multiply, however, and clash with other tasks. Digitization promises efficiency but raises ethical and ecological questions, including energy consumption, data longevity, and the carbon footprint of storage infrastructures. In all these situations, care becomes both a practical and relational challenge: it is about protecting something—people, data, objects, environments—while navigating the limits of attention, resources, and institutional priorities.

Questions and Possible Topics

We invite participants to explore discourses, practices, ethics, and politics of care in contexts of **collecting, preserving, restoring, curating, interpreting, and managing or organizing**, by asking:

- Who cares for objects, materials, data, and their histories – also in view of the social mission and responsibility of heritage institutions? How are decisions made about what is preserved, restored, or allowed to decay?
- How do we deal with fragile, ageing, damaged, repressed, or illegible materials—documents, artworks, artifacts with digital methods?
- How do we ensure the preservation of digitized records and how do we develop sustainable practice for managing born-digital texts and artifacts?
- What does “curating” or “restoring” mean from a perspective of care and advocacy for long overlooked agents, materials, or practices?
- How can we make mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion visible—also in restoration practices, conservation priorities, strategies, and heritage politics?
- How do organizations collect, maintain, repair, and sometimes erase knowledge, memories, and data and how can such collective memories and repositories be restored and investigated?
- How do climate change, environmental degradation, and resource scarcity transform conservation and restoration practices, and which strategies already exist? (e.g., climate proofing collections, dealing with mold, humidity, pests, extreme weather events)
- How do care concepts and practices differ across cultural heritage institutions, companies, communities, or activist groups?
- How can the societal actors be actively involved in care practices, especially through participatory approaches and/or Citizen Science?

We welcome contributions that approach/address these questions through cultural, organizational, conservation-oriented, or interdisciplinary lenses—ranging from theoretical reflections and empirical studies to case examples, artistic interventions, or practice-led research.

Possible Topics and Approaches

We invite contributions from the following (and related) areas:

Museum, Archive, and Exhibition Practices

- Strategies of collecting, selecting, and deaccessioning
- Digitization, documentation, and long-term stewardship
- Evolution of classification, cataloging, provenance work, and metadata care
- Emotional and ethical dimensions of curating sensitive or contested materials
- “Ethics of care” and caring for trauma and difficult heritage
- Inclusion

Restoration and Conservation

- Preventive conservation and risk management
- Material aging, damage, repair cultures, and conservation ethics
- Sustainable conservation: resource-efficient materials, low-energy infrastructures

Cultural Heritage and Everyday Culture

- How objects and practices become recognized as heritage
- Community-based conservation and citizen-led restoration projects
- Intangible heritage, maintenance, and intergenerational transmission

Organizational Memory and Knowledge Stewardship

- How companies and public institutions collect, select, and forget
- Documentation overload and the crisis of attention
- Care for digital infrastructures, records, and organizational routines
- Repair and maintenance as organizational competencies

Care, Labor, and Ethics

- Visible and invisible labor in conservation, archiving, and restoration
- Emotional and embodied dimensions of care work across sectors
- Ethical dilemmas in restoring vs. leaving untouched
- Data ethics, privacy, and ownership in digital collections

Artistic, Design-Based and Experimental Approaches

- Artistic research on decay, loss, and material transformation
- Speculative conservation: future scenarios for heritage care
- Practices of re-making, remediating, repairing, or upcycling cultural materials
- Design methodologies for sustainable archiving and restoration

Information Technology

- AI-assisted restoration, curation, and interpretation, and its ethical boundaries
- XR/VR and digital twins in conservation practice
- Digital decay, obsolescence, and emulation as preservation strategies
- Environmental footprint of digital archives and cloud storage

Call for Contributions

At the Summer School, we would like to shed new light on the topic from different perspectives with a mix of presentations, workshops, game prototyping sessions and informal discussions and exchange.

Participants are invited to submit their contributions in one of the following formats:

- Workshop (30 – 90 minutes): Engage participants with interactive activities (for suggestions see above).
- Academic Presentation (~20 minutes): Share and discuss your research findings.
- Project Presentation (~20 minutes): Present a curatorial project or your experience as a curator, archivist or collector or from a visitor's perspective, not necessarily backed by scientific evaluation.
- Poster Presentation (5-minute presentation, open discussion within a poster session): Showcase your ideas or projects through a concise and visually engaging poster.

Publication Options

For each presentation format, you can opt for one of the following publication choices:

- Presentation Only: Your abstract will be featured on the Summer School website, with no additional publication.
- Research Paper (6-12 pages): A comprehensive exposition of your research.
- Project/Experience/Position Paper (3-12 pages): Share insights from projects, experiences, or viewpoints in a brief format.

The contributions to the Summer School 2026 will be part of the annual journal "DAC - Digital Journal for Arts and Cultural Studies | Digitales Journal für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften", <https://dac-journal.at/>.

Review Process

- Research Papers: will be given the option of being peer-reviewed.
- Project/Experience/Position Papers: Will be reviewed by the editors (chairs).

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission Deadline: April 15, 2026
- Acceptance Notification: May 15, 2026
- Participation Registration: Juni 1, 2026 (for all participants)
- Event Dates: July 1-3, 2026
- First Draft of Paper Submission: August 1, 2026
- Iterative Review Process Completion: February 1, 2027
- Publication Date: Fall 2027

Submission Guidelines

Please submit your abstract via [this form](#) by April 15, 2026 and follow the guidelines below:

- Prepare an abstract summarizing your contribution.

- Choose your preferred presentation format and publication option.
- Ensure that your contribution aligns with one of the three thematic areas, or explicitly state, why another area is of great interest to the audience.
- Follow the specified format and length for your chosen publication option.

We look forward to your valuable contributions!

Chairs

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DAC Summer School: <https://www.donau-uni.ac.at/de/universitaet/fakultaeten/bildung-kunst-architektur/departments/kunst-kulturwissenschaften/summer-school.html>