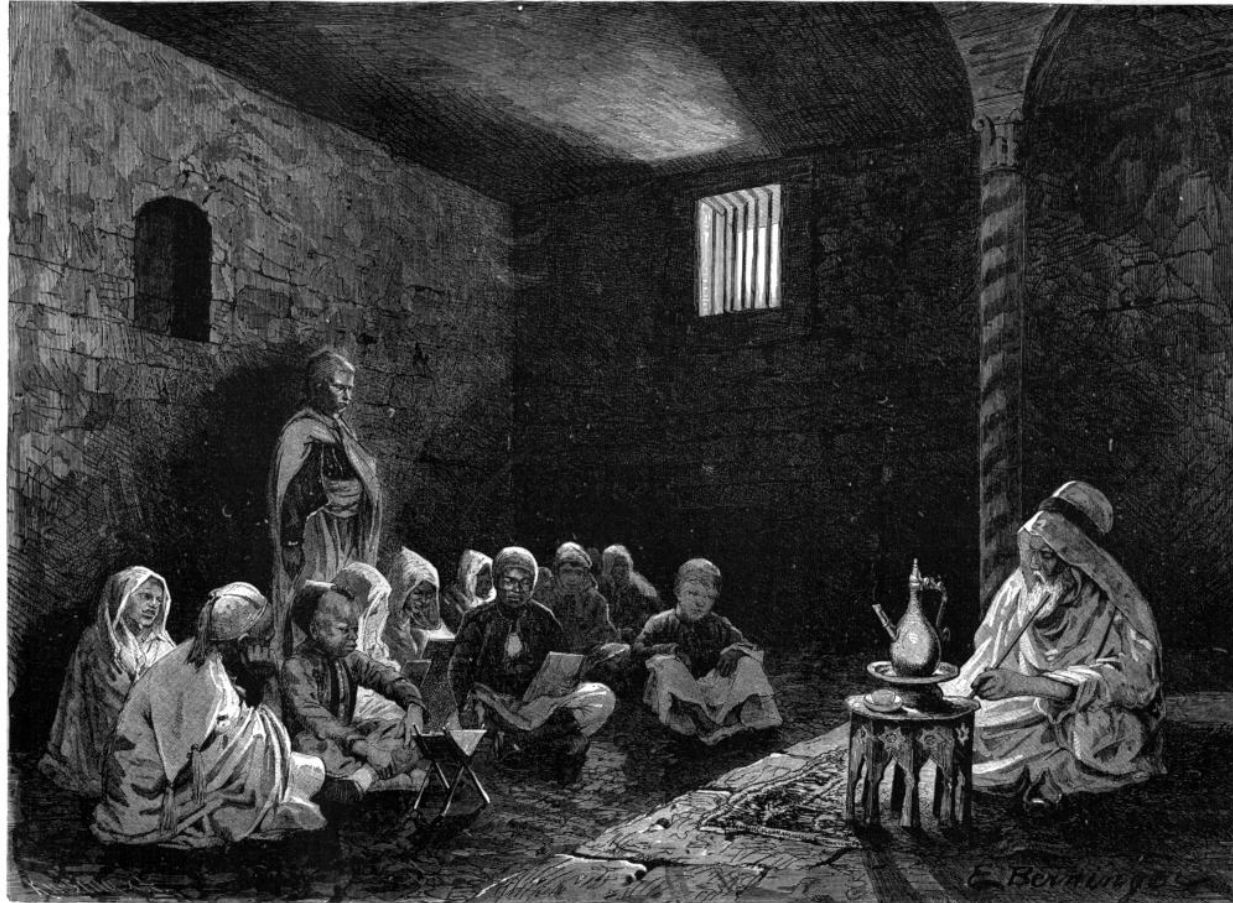


Preserving skills: Refining declarative markup for future generations

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Declarative Amsterdam 2025

Consulting & Training



Abstract

The document world is experiencing an ice age, a descent into tribalism and chaos, as the ideas behind declarative markup are forgotten and a leap has been made *from* What You See Is All You Get word processors and (worse) page layout software *into* the now-ubiquitous README.md markdown format, in which what you see is *less* than what you get and not at all what you *need*.

In twenty years, in ten years, next week some time, will the ideas behind declarative markup be forgotten? If so, who will keep the iron wheels turning in the mineshafts of technology?

What must we—you and I—record, write down, vlog, so that people who come after us can keep the system working, let alone make new systems?

Again

I'll say that again. More slowly.

Abstract

The document world is experiencing an ice age...

Abstract
a descent into
Tribalism
and
chaos

Tribalism

“Oh, *we* don’t do that XML stuff, *we* do nice modern HTML.”

Chaos

Web developers flit
from fad to fad like
moths in a lighting shop

Abstract

The document world is experiencing an ice age, a descent into tribalism and chaos, as the ideas behind declarative markup are forgotten ...

A giant leap backwards

from “What You See Is All You Get” word processors
and (worse) page layout software, anathema to accessibility and
reformatting

into the now-ubiquitous README.md markdown format
in which what you see is *less* than what you get
and not at all what you *need*.

Abstract

In twenty years,

Abstract

In twenty years, in ten years,

Abstract

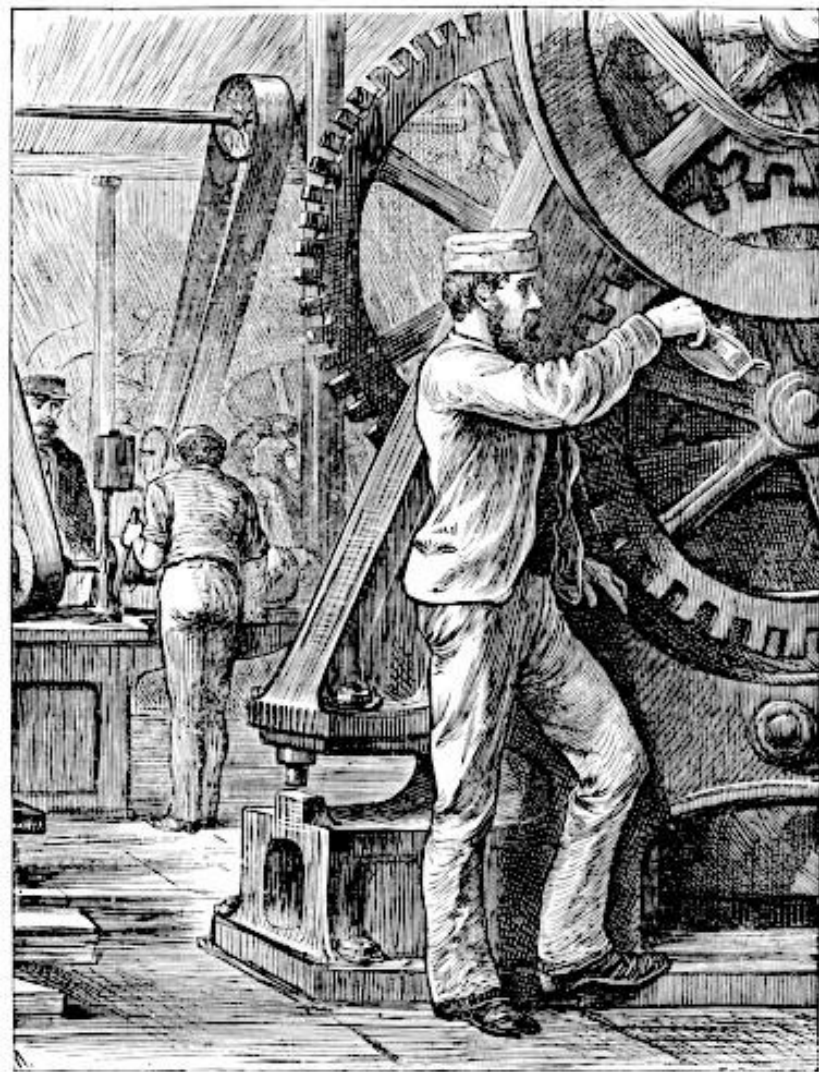
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In twenty years, in ten years, next week some time,
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**Who will keep the iron
wheels turning?**

Abstract

What must we—you and I—record, write down, vlog, so that people who come after us can keep the system working, let alone make new systems?

Talk Outline

1. Where were we a decade or two ago?
2. Where are we now?
3. Where are we going?
4. What must we do?
5. Discussion and Call to Action

Thirty Years Ago: Too Expensive

- Huge custom document analysis projects;
- Custom DTDS;
- High local semantics but poor interchange;
- Large companies & government

Today

- A few major vocabularies (tag sets, schemas);
- More reliance on custom metadata in interchangeable formats (Onyx, JSON-LD);
- Very few new XML systems are installed;
- The XML people are retiring or gone.

Soon

- Open Source is not the smart teen's cool hobby today—instead it's doomscrolling Truth Social;
- The XML world has been dominated by white het males & is not always welcoming to others;
- We're still needed, in academia, in business, in industry, in publishing;
- The XML people are retiring or gone.

Choosing a Direction



Where do we go next?

- Outreach—connecting to more people, especially to younger people and a wider crowd;
- Document—write down how projects work, how to do things. Make it easier to maintain projects than to replace them, because tearing down and rebuilding is always more attractive than mending
- Real projects—showcase the why, not just the what.

Outreach

- Post for #markupmonday
- Blog about why declarative markup is useful and cool
- See Bethan's Declarative Markup Discord for more discussion around outreach

Document

“I would write it down on the wall,
just for you, just for you”

Document

- Make sure every transformation, every XProc file, every script, every css file, says at the start what it's for, and what else it needs, succinctly and plainly;
- Make sure there are clear instructions on how to run things. Make scripts say what to do next;
- Include tests, to help switch to a different xslt engine (for example).

What else?

Your turn....

