



topotheque Graz - a platform of local, historical relevant material in private hands accessible online

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Type of best practice

Innovation (including 3D, AI, Big data, Metaverse, etc)

Keywords

citizen science, collection, participation

The Topotheque (a project by ICARUS - International Centre for Archival Research) is a platform which makes local, historical relevant material and knowledge, that is kept in private hands, accessible online, in cooperation with the local population. The Topotheque is an online archive, operated in local entities. Images, audio, video as well as documents and the information about these objects can be found in topotheques. These Treasures mainly hidden in private hands can be unveiled and be made accessible digitally for anybody independent of space and time. The Graz Museum opened up a topotheque for Graz in 2019: <https://graz.topothek.at/>

Organisation in charge of best practice

ICARUS – International Centre for Archival Research

Location

Graz, Austria (and other European Countries)

Dates

topotheque Graz: 2019 - ongoing

Description

The topotheque is an regional historical source of reference, focusing on not only preserving historical material kept in private hands but making it visible to the public. Topotheques already exist in a number of different European countries. This allows for a comparison of regional historical conditions on a European level, making the diversity and common grounds of every-day life tangible. As a virtual collection, the Topotheque is easily expandable and doesn't have to comply with editorial deadlines or page limits.





The main aim of the Topotheque is to make the historical heritage of Europe digitally available via the Internet – in accordance with up-to-date indexing one can find image or file content sorted by key words, date and perspective on the map.

It is all about local history and collaborative remembering and knowledge in a modern way of presenting and preserving it for future generations.

The diverse history of a community calls for a modern presentation: The unifying functionality of a database can accomplish the aggregation of dispersed material, documents and knowledge and step in where the sheer amount of images may overstrain the capacities of museums and local chronicles. The Topotheque may be expanded constantly, with search, link and location functionalities, .

Only regional forces can preserve local history comprehensively and in detail. For this reason, the topotheque managers ought to be anchored in their municipality. With their knowledge of and familiarity with local circumstances, topotheque managers can locate and identify relevant historical sources and in turn ensure high-quality indexing and localization of topotheque entries.

With the functionality of indexation and localization, historical material dispersed in private property can be virtually unified by a topotheque especially. For instance, searching the term “Main street 18” invokes all entries, in which this specific building is documented. Searching for terms such as “stroller” oder “fieldwork” shows all images or texts that include said search terms likewise. Search results of great value can resolve from genealogical research, since many ancestors are traceable by name. The original source material and all rights of use, which go beyond the presentation through a topotheque, remain with the respective right holders!

Links

<https://www.topothek.at/en/>

Resources needed

A topotheque contract, topotheque managers and technical infrastructure (e.g. scanner), a local community (volunteer workers, citizen scientists...)

Challenges encountered

In the first years it is important to build up a network and community of helpers for the topotheque. If not it can be challenging because the topotheque managers can be overwhelmed by the number of material that is offered by the people.

Evidence of success

The topotheque community is growing rapidly: As of November 2020, more than 220 individual topotheques are online in Austria alone. In September 2021, the value of 1,000,000 uploaded documents was reached. As of December 2022, over 400 Topotheques in almost 20 countries (such as Germany, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Croatia, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Serbia, Spain, the Czech Republic, Hungary, etc., as well as by institutions and private individuals) can be found on the homepage.





Potential for transfer

There is a high potential for transfer because a topotheque is an easy to handle tool.

Further Information

For museums and other cultural heritage institutions the topotheque can be really helpful for trying out participatory approaches, creating or expanding a community and working with people outside the museum. People's knowledge, experiences and memories are at the center of this format of collecting.