



Austria

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Digitisation policies and emerging activities

Building the operative infrastructure as a first step towards a co-ordinated digitisation approach

In 2003, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture took a first major step towards a systematic approach for digitisation policies and initiatives in Austria by deciding on and implementing the operative structures to co-ordinate future digitisation policies, programmes and initiatives. The Ministry thus responded to a perceived demand already expressed in the 1st National Report, that “without building up an infrastructure for these activities, it will not be possible to establish an efficient network on national level.”

The Austrian three-pronged approach

As responsibility for cultural heritage and science institutions reside with both, federal ministries and regional authorities, but also due to limited resources, it seemed reasonable to mandate an independent research institution with setting up the appropriate mechanisms to co-ordinate and drive all activities related to implementing the Lund Action Plan in Austria. As a result, the Austrian co-ordination mechanism for digitisation now works in a three-pronged constellation consisting of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (strategic and funding level), a domain expert from the Austrian National Library as one of the key institutions carrying out extensive digitisation projects (professional expertise) and Salzburg Research an independent research unit that is well situated within the European research community for cultural and scientific heritage (operational level).

With this steering group at the national level, Austria is now well positioned to implement the Austrian Digital Heritage Initiative as part of the Austrian eEurope initiative, i.e. the Austrian eFIT programme and related actions. Thereby, special attention will be given to build synergies with other actions lines within the eFit programme, in particular with the eLearning initiative which is already well on its way.

For further information see:

eFit Austria:

<http://www.efit.at/english/>

eCulture:

<http://www.efit.at/english/eculture/>

eEducation:

<http://www.efit.at/english/education/>

Planned roll-out of the Lund Action Plan in Austria

The roll-out of the Austrian cultural heritage initiative to co-ordinate national digitisation activities in accordance with the Lund Principles will be realised in three phases.

Phase one: National policy profile, inventory, awareness raising

In this first phase, the primary objective is to identify and collect data on regional and national digitisation projects in Austria and generally, to raise awareness for the Lund Principles, the National Representatives Group and the Minerva activities.

Although the major digitisation projects are well-known and well-documented (see Austrian best practice examples in the 1st NRG National Report), projects initiated and carried out by individual cultural heritage and scientific organisations (especially regional and not



Rudolf von Alt, *Bad Ischl mit dem Kalvarienberg*, ca. 1830
© Kupferstichkabinett, Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien

federally-funded projects) happen unco-ordinated and mostly even unnoticed to a larger public. It will be a major task to identify those projects and get them registered in a national digitisation inventory on the Web. Such an inventory will both help to receive a clear picture on the state-of-affairs of digitisation in Austria (actors, projects and digital resources available) and to employ a communication channel with the basis, i.e. the Austrian cultural and scientific heritage institutions at national, regional and local level. Clearly, translating the essential documents and publishing the best practice guidelines as developed and recommended by Minerva will be critical success factors for effectively touching base with regional and local cultural heritage institutions and building a service that is relevant to the community. With regards to the technical specifications of an inventory on digitisation on the Web, Austria as a "late adopter" now has the opportunity to employ the suggested best practice model and provide feedback on its feasibility and viability to the Minerva working group on inventories and resource discovery. The Austrian national policy profile, Austrian best practice examples in digitisation and a Web-based inventory will be online at the beginning of 2004.

Phase two: Drafting a national digitisation plan, involving the basis, benchmarking

The 1st National Report identified a clear need for an Austrian digitisation plan which should encompass three platforms: a digitisation platform, a research platform, and finally, a business platform. This need for an overarching digitisation programme is still valid and ever more pressing. However, recognising the status quo within the Austrian digital heritage sector which is marked by the far-reaching independence of the

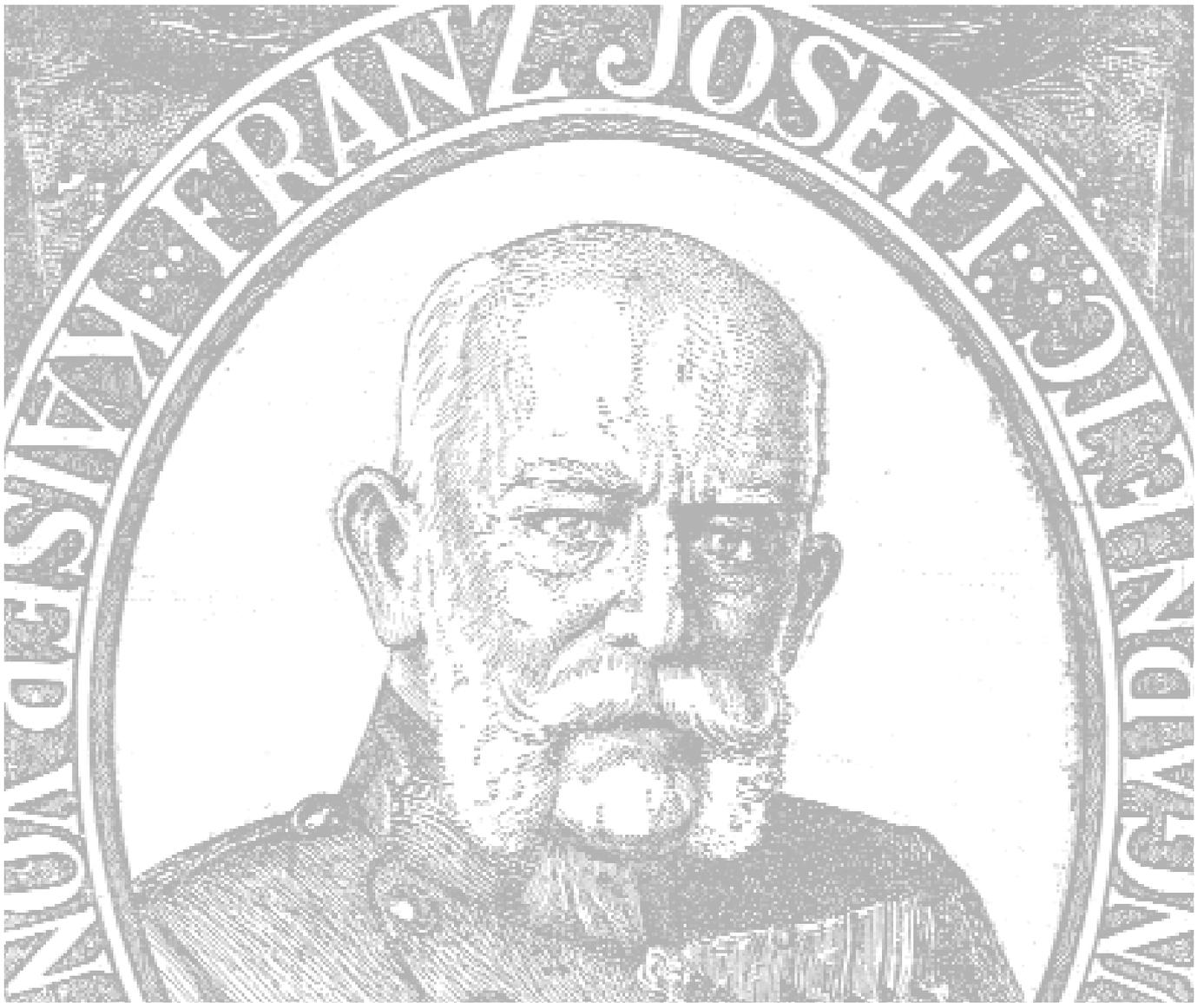
Austrian cultural and scientific institutions, split responsibility between federal and state authorities and between different ministries, regional promotion agencies and private foundations, it becomes clear that a successful Austrian digitisation programme can only be defined and garner acceptance by involving the basis.

Therefore, the primary objective of phase two is to further extend the already existing informal expert network and to establish a national network of cultural heritage institutions and experts on an institutionalised basis. Bringing together experts from all levels and all sectors aims at building consensus with all stakeholders with regards to the objectives, co-ordination, evaluation and implementation of the national digitisation plan, including policies for digitisation, archiving, access and use. Representatives of this network will also be delegated to those MINERVA working groups that are of strategic importance for drafting the Austrian digitisation plan as a referential framework also for state authorities.

Phase three: National competence centres as long-term objective

In the long-term, formally nominating and setting up national competence centres with clearly defined tasks should be the objective. Ideally, such an approach will build on and further strengthen institutions that over the past years have already developed expertise in certain areas of digitisation. However, there are still gaps on the Austrian competence map (such as long-term preservation and archiving of born digital material) that need to be closed. In those areas, international co-operation is highly desirable. While funding, at present, is only secured for Phase 1, the Austrian Digital Heritage Initiative needs further





strategic and financial support as has been recently pointed out by the Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development. In its strategy paper from September 2003 (Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development, Recommendations on future action in the humanities, social and cultural sciences, September 16, 2003.

http://www.ratf.te.at/files/empf_030916_GSK.pdf (last visited: November 11, 2003; in German), the Council called for immediate action with regards to the sifting, registration, organisation, publication and archiving of cultural and scientific resources in the digital domain and pointed out the necessity to find a long-term solution to preserve the Austrian digital cultural and scientific heritage.

Co-operation developments

Setting up a two way communication channel as first step to encourage co-operation

By setting up a Web site for the Austrian Digital Heritage Initiative as the central point for co-ordinated activities in the area of digital cultural and scientific heritage, the Federal Ministry for Education, Culture and Science will also establish a mechanism for systematically (and regularly) channelling information from European to national level and further down to the regional and local level, and vice versa. The site will not only provide access to an inventory of digitisation projects and best practice guidelines, but will also foster the opportunity to directly contact experts and professionals in the field of cultural and scientific heritage for future co-operation. In the future, the site will also be the primary mechanism to disseminate information on NRG and MINERVA activities, and will provide the tools to enable benchmarking of policies, programmes, and projects.

CH experts and professionals: linking pins between the European coordination effort and regional/local digitisation activities

Many Austrian professionals and academics were involved in cultural heritage (CH) research projects within the 5th IST Framework Programme of the European Union. They participated in 21 of the total 92 research projects carried out from 1998-2002, focusing on thematic areas such as preservation, conservation and restoration of audio-visual material and film, 3D modelling and visualisation, distributed, virtual archives, authority files, automatic meta-data generation, and standards and interoperability. Undoubtedly, cultural heritage has been one of the focal points for Austrian participation in FP5, and presumably, will also be in FP6.

The institutional professionals and academics involved in those projects are important and most effective linking pins between the European level and national or regional digitisation activities.

eCulture Symposium as opportunity for face-to-face knowledge exchange between institutions and the research community

In October 2003, Salzburg Research held its first eCulture Symposium on semantic Web for cultural and scientific content in Salzburg. The format of this event is targeted at offering an opportunity for local and regional institutions to get first hand information on recent developments in cultural heritage research and to encourage know-how transfer from academic and commercial actors to these institutions. By bringing together representatives of local and regional cultural heritage institutions with the international CH research community, opportunities for co-operation emerge. The second symposium is planned in October 2004

and is intended to be as an awareness and knowledge transfer event aimed at local and regional cultural heritage organisations. Focusing on the digitisation process for cultural and scientific heritage contents, the event will promote the MINERVA criteria and best practice guidelines to help developing – in line with the Lund Action Plan – a shared vision for a European Cultural Area by offering hands-on workshops, especially for small institutions.

For further information see:

http://eculture.salzburgresearch.at/index_e.html

Emerging issues

Long-term preservation

Although there is sufficient awareness about the urgency of the issue of long-term preservation of our digital scientific and cultural heritage, at present there does not exist an explicit policy or strategy to take on this challenge. To ensure that digital cultural and scientific assets will remain accessible in the future calls for a long-term commitment, first in political and then in financial terms. At present, however, Austria is missing both and due to budgetary reasons, there does not seem to be a short-term solution in sight.

Developments at the regional and local level, state of participation in digitisation

With regards to local and regional developments in digitisation, it is necessary to point to a further categorisation, which distinguishes regional and local institutions supporting and maintaining the so-called "Volkskultur" (folk culture) from the cultural heritage

institutions at the state level. In most states, the responsibility for the two lies within separate departments and archives, libraries and museums in these two categories do not only differ in size but also in financial endowment. For the larger institutions, which are also more technically advanced than their smaller regional and local counterparts, some budget is also devoted to digitisation, mostly in the context of special exhibitions or as part of building up their collection management and inventory systems. Yet, for smaller cultural institutions at the local and regional level the situation looks quite different. An account of the state of affairs in Styria may stand exemplary for the situation in the other Austrian states. Of the about 250 regional and local museums in Styria, 80% do not possess a PC to document and describe the cultural artefacts of their collection. In many cases, those regional and local museums are run and taken care of by culturally enthusiastic individuals who spend all their leisure time (and often their own money) to expand the collection and keep the museum running. For these cultural heritage institutions, future sustainability is not only a question of money, but also of human resources. Therefore, the Styrian government has recently started the project DiglReg (Digitisation and Inventory initiative for regional museums) to strengthen the local and regional cultural institutions by funding training courses for operators and sustainers of regional and local museums. The objective is to teach the basics of how to create a museum inventory with the help of digital media in a six day seminar. Building on their digital inventories, the local and regional museums will then be able to "dock" their contents into the regional cultural network and present their institutions – in a simple form – on the Internet.



From this example, it becomes very clear that for small and regional cultural institutions, the essential question is not technology, but lacking staff, skills and training. What can be generally recognised however, is a growing awareness within the state authorities that small and local institutions need external support to manage the introduction of new media into their organisations. Although not stated explicitly in form of digital heritage policies, state governments increasingly set focal points for action and attribute funding to foster the use of digital technologies in the cultural area. Active know-how transfer through regional competence partners (most of them being actively involved in EU-projects and/or national digitisation projects – see list of Austrian competence partners) seems to be the most promising and currently most frequently employed model.

Competence partners in Austria

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Vienna)

digitisation of photographic objects, digitisation of newspapers
<http://www.onb.ac.at>

Österreichische Mediathek (Vienna)

digitisation of sound
<http://www.mediathek.ac.at/>

Technisches Museum (Vienna)

virtual exhibition, 3D-environment
<http://www.tmw.ac.at/>

University of Innsbruck:

digitisation of books, metadata
<http://www2.uibk.ac.at/ub/dea/>

Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna)

digitisation of art objects
<http://www.khm.at/>

Albertina (Vienna)

digitisation of art objects
<http://www.albertina.at/>

Österreichische Galerie Belvedere (Vienna)

digitisation of art objects
<http://www.belvedere.at/>

Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, Kupferstichkabinett (Vienna)

digitisation of maps and building plans
<http://www.akbild.ac.at/kuka/>

Universitätsbibliothek Graz

digitisation of manuscripts
<http://www.kfuni.graz.ac.at/ub/sosa/index.html>

Institut zur Erschließung und Erforschung kirchlicher Quellen (St. Pölten)

digitisation of medieval charters of monasteries
<http://www.monasterium.net/>

Salzburg Research (Salzburg)

multimedia, semantic Web, knowledge management, enhanced access
<http://www.salzburgresearch.at>

Joanneum Research (Graz)

preservation and restoration of digital audio-visual material
<http://iis.joanneum.ac.at/iis/Default.asp>



The Crown of Rudolf II, later Crown of the Austria Empire, 1602
 © Schatzkammer, Kunsthistorisches Museum



Cultural Service Centre (CSC) Austria (Graz)

collection management, metadata ontology
<http://www.cscaustria.at/index.php>

Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF)

Dokumentation und Archive digital audio and video material, preservation of film material

Benchmarking

The MINERVA questionnaire was circulated among those cultural heritage institutions that carried out major digitisation projects with the request, to voluntarily join the benchmarking exercise. So far, five Austrian best practice initiatives and projects followed the invitation and entered their data to enable pan-European benchmarking. For the first half of 2004, it is also planned to make (a German version) the MINERVA benchmarking tool available on the Web site of the Austrian Digital Heritage Initiative. Austrian scientific and cultural heritage institutions will then be able to carry out benchmarking and measure themselves in comparison to similar institutions.

Use of NRG/MINERVA results and impact

As already mentioned, Austria plans to implement the proposed MINERVA model to structure its national inventory on digitisation on the Austrian Digital Heritage Initiative Web site. The most relevant documents from the NRG and MINERVA activities will be translated and made available online. In addition, within the Austrian Digital Heritage Initiative special knowledge transfer activities will be launched, including an annual symposium with hands-on

workshops specifically targeted at small local and regional institutions, as well as a special awareness raising campaign planned for 2004 to promote NRG and MINERVA results.

