



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE  
FOR ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

## **„Agenda 2015“**

### **1. Introduction:**

The numerous European archival institutions may well be seen as the essential guardians of Europe's historical memory, being as they are the keepers of invaluable documents about the history of the continent and its regions. The source material stored in their depots documents a common historical background that started out in medieval and early modern times and constitutes the historical basis of today's life in Europe- the identity of the continent, its various countries, inhabitants and cultures.

Archives contain unique documents that are only to be found and viewed within the spatial restriction of the archive itself. The barriers met in using such material, ranging from their decentralised storage in different countries and institutions – just think about travelling costs, accommodation expenses or user fees – to the problems arising from foreign languages and mentalities, have so far hampered the intensive studying of many documents, especially in terms of cross-border and transnational aspects. Moreover, the archival records of individual institutions were hardly known abroad in the past, which is why historical research more often than not ended at one's national border and the mutual relations and common features of countries independent and autonomous today were not even considered in the picture. Yet, European history cannot be written without regard to those aspects and interrelations, just as cultural heritage and general developments of the past can hardly be interpreted without falling back on written source material.

The association "ICARUS – International Centre for Archival Research" intends to break down these barriers and to provide simple and broad access to the historical and cultural memory of Europe for all European citizens, regardless of national, social or educational background, and to offer the possibility for scientific research of European history.

Archival documents and the information stored within these sources are to be seen as common property of all European citizens, that can now for the first time be accessed easily via new information technologies. Documents that up to now were restricted to a certain locality can finally be freed from their isolation and be presented to a wide range

of users, in order to widen their horizon in general, as well as to offer opportunities for scientific and cultural research on a new level.

ICARUS is now aimed at firmly establishing and gradually expanding a European network for archival cultural heritage. People's awareness for Europe's common historical past and the historical memory of its countries and cultures is supposed to be strengthened through the development of innovative new strategies by means of modern technologies.

ICARUS is to be considered a complementary initiative to today's leading European initiatives in this sector:

- Establishing a network and setting a framework for **archival cooperation in Europe** builds the basis for creating high-quality digital content that will be integrated into portals such as APEnet or Europeana;
- By putting the **main geographical, but non exclusive focus on countries in Central and South Eastern Europe**, ICARUS will pave the way for raising awareness among Europeans for the cultural heritage of those regions, which so far has been rather underrepresented in the relevant portals.

## 2. Initial Situation

Within the scope of various promotional programmes (Culture2000, Culture2007, Interreg, eContent+, etc.) the European Commission has been supporting the digitisation of Europe's cultural heritage and, in doing so, its open and easy accessibility. Many traditional institutions dedicated to keeping our cultural heritage, first of all the national libraries and the major museums in the individual countries, did not waste time in responding to the new challenges and soon presented digital information and digitised objects on various Internet platforms. Virtual central catalogues and digitally available books and magazines have long become a standard feature of modern-day libraries. Many of the results of those multifaceted digitisation projects are being integrated into the European digital library „Europeana“.

### **2.1. Archives as Keepers of Unique Copies**

So far the role of archives as digital information services providers has been a minor one when compared to libraries. In general, public knowledge about the tasks and areas of activity of archives is vague at best, and mostly people are oblivious to the differences between archives and their neighbouring institutions such as libraries and museums. A major or perhaps even the most important distinctive feature is the uniqueness of the records stored in archival institutions.

Archival records are evidence of tangible transactions such as administrative dealings, business activities or other kinds of interactions between people. The core stock of each archive consists of the documents from those institutions allocated to it. Consequently, each document and each archival record is exclusively stored in one single archive

only. Since archival records bear authentic witness to dealings in the past, they are used as sources for historical research and as such turn into important cultural assets.

Given the fact that archival records must – for proper understanding – always be seen in the context of their storage facility and the respective administrative procedures within which they were created, and thus have to be put into a wider perspective, their (electronic) processing and indexing becomes a highly complex business.

All existing archives and the records they keep are unique, as they contain unique and singular source material, no matter whether we talk about at a small community archive or a major national institution. Yet, material needed for a given research topic is rarely found in just one archive alone, but is spread over many different institutions, countries, regions and even states, leading to:

- A need for time-consuming and expensive travelling for international research,
- Which cannot be undertaken for those exact same reasons and
- Consequently restricts research activities to a national angle.
- Other than that, also interested laypersons have no possibility to discover the transnational historical contexts depicted in those numerous archival records.

Against this backdrop, the possibility to make our unique cultural heritage digitally accessible via the Internet to any number of people at any place in the world 24 hours a day is the basis for an outright revolution, not only in terms of using historical archives but also in a mid- and long-term perspective with regard to the output of research thus made possible:

- International historical contexts become more transparent;
- Latest indexing methods (e.g. „semantic web“) lead to completely new research angles;
- Archival records become common property: accessible to anyone, independent of social status, education or location;
- Which in turn will lead to creating cross-border awareness among the European population.

## 2.2. Conclusion

The cultural institutions within the association ICARUS wish to meet above challenges in a special way. Many of them have already contributed valuable preparatory work by processing their archival information within electronic data collections or digitising individual inventory groups.

Also, there is an increase in the number of national and content-related archival portals that meet the demands of the general public by opening their stock. Those different activities are, however, usually focused on themselves, leading to a very heterogeneous and mostly uncoordinated situation at European level with numerous strategies, methods and ways of work.

Similar circumstances apply when talking about the indexing of archival records, both at national and European level. As the essential part of archival work, indexing is the basis for the public use of historical sources by interested parties.

Depending on the value of information and the degree of use to be expected, the classification and itemisation of information contained in archived documents is done to a varying extent and with regard to personal and financial resources as well as technical capacities available. Add to this the inhomogeneous or even nonexistent rules for indexing, a standardised presentation of archival records across several institutions, let alone countries, becomes impossible, severely impeding especially their online researchability.

Due to the ever progressing development in the area of digitisation and the electronic presentation of cultural assets combined with the consequent demands on modern service providers - which definitely include archives - the latter will have to increasingly connect and coordinate not only within their national markets for Internet services, but at European level as well.

As such kind of re-positioning cannot be accomplished alone in the long run – which in any way cannot be the intention of common European activities – there is a considerable need for transnational networks that make the approach and solution regarding such issues their business.

### **3. Aims and work programme of ICARUS**

As a result of the situation as laid out above and by the experience gained within the 2 years since the establishment of the association „ICARUS – International Centre for Archival Research“ several tangible working fields have become clear, which are hereby defined within a work programme for ICARUS the upcoming 5 years.

#### **1. Expanding the international network of ICARUS**

Main goal is to expand the already existing network of European institutions. This aim is to be achieved by the following activities:

##### **a) Semi-annual ICARUS-Meetings:**

Already since the establishment of ICARUS regular meetings for all the members of the association were held every 6 months in a different member country. Those meetings will last 2 days and serve to

- Continuously align common activities,
- Exchange latest developments and experiences made in the member states,
- Report on each member's latest activities,

- Make further plans,
- Develop common visions and strategies.

A general assembly is scheduled each June, while in November a meeting of the board is held.

#### **b) Regular national workshops:**

In order to make ICARUS and its work known among experts within the individual countries and attract new partners for the network, each member country of ICARUS hosts a national workshop. The organisation of those workshops basically lies with the hosting partner, however it has been agreed upon as a guideline that they should last one day and consist of two blocks:

1. An appraisal of national activities in the area of digital processing of archival records,
2. A discussion in context to ICARUS and international developments in general.

The introductory presentations regarding block 2 will be held by lecturers from other countries, organised by ICARUS, safeguarding an exchange on an international basis

#### **c) „ICARUS-academy“:**

Expert knowledge on different fields of archivistics such as digitisation, online-archives and the like are not only to be presented to a circle of experts but also to the wider range of historically interested people. Therefore ICARUS will organise lectures dealing with different topics of archival sciences. The lectures are to be held in the member countries by experts from another country.

In cooperation with other ICARUS members learning courses can be developed focussing on archival sciences (restoration, preservation, etc.), digital processing and digital archives (creation and active use) etc. open to experts and laymen all over Europe.

#### **d) Presentations at national and international conferences, workshops, etc.:**

Another possibility for an extensive exchange of knowledge and experience is offered by various workshops, subject-specific national and international conferences regularly held in the different member countries (e.g.: national archival conferences etc.). An active participation of ICARUS-members in such events is most welcome and can also be coordinated by the administration of ICARUS if required. If so, it would be necessary to communicate all important information about the event in due time.

ICARUS-members actively participating in events, which have not been organised by ICARUS, are asked to let the administration of ICARUS know about this, in order to be able to include the activity into the annual report.

### **e) Experts Exchange Programme**

Within the frame of the EU-project „Charters Network“ a first design of an expert exchange programme was crafted. But also after the end of the project in autumn 2010 the possibility for an international staff exchange should be able to persist.

The programme offers staff members of archival institutions the opportunity to work in another archive for a certain period of time (up to 3-4 weeks). In doing so, people will be able to share their expertise across borders with other institutions and at the same time gain knowledge and new experience in turn.

The main goals of the programme are:

- To establish personal networks and contacts at expert level
- To familiarise with different working methods and technologies
- To intensively exchange knowledge and experience
- To strengthen the intercultural dialogue

To apply for the programme it is necessary to fill in an application form (download from [www.icar-us.eu](http://www.icar-us.eu)), and send it to ICARUS in addition to a letter of recommendation. The selection of the applicants will be handled by a committee.

After the end of the stay, the exchange staff is asked to fill in an evaluation form, which should be downloadable from the homepage as well.

Further information on the project can be found on the website [www.icar.us.eu](http://www.icar.us.eu).

### **f) „Linking the Neighbourhood“ – Programme**

In order to systematically expand the network of ICARUS it is planned to enhance the cross-border communication within the so called “Linking the Neighbourhood“-programme. Members of ICARUS are asked to establish closer contacts to their neighbouring countries and encourage further cooperation by organising workshops in those very countries.

Main goals of the programme are:

- Establishing new contacts
- Dissemination
- Organisation of a national workshop in the neighbouring country together with a local host

## 2. Support of digitising projects:

The second large part of the work programme of ICARUS deals with digitisation and indexing activities within the individual archives of the partners. It is not intended to create a new digital library, but rather to integrate and publish all contents within the framework of already existing relevant platforms (please see below). This will bundle capacities and competences and warrant an effective and continuous availability of all contents:

- All contents (both descriptive metadata and digital objects) will be made available through national portals (e.g. ARHInet in Croatia, [www.arhinet.hr](http://www.arhinet.hr)) or content-related portals (e.g. for charters, [www.monasterium.net](http://www.monasterium.net)).
- That way, content will be integrated into the nascent European archive portal APENet ([www.apenet.eu](http://www.apenet.eu)), where ICARUS is going to be an associated member.
- Furthermore, there will be direct access to all digital objects via Europeana.

But nevertheless ICARUS is in more than one way a complementary initiative to the above-named portals:

- While the latter basically deal with developing the technical pre-requisites for merging existing electronic and digital information on archival material in European commemorative institutions, ICARUS aims at institutionalising and coordinating the workload before and after with the objective of making high-quality content available on those portals.
- Other than that, ICARUS guarantees an extension of today's content in APENet and Europeana with material from large parts of Southern, Central and Eastern Europe where most Consortium members come from.

ICARUS will constantly offer to coordinate and support digitising activities of the partners, be it by organising technical equipment, professional staff or the like.

## 3. Ongoing further development of the online archives as well as input of new digital content

The continuous administration of the online charters-portal [www.monasterium.net](http://www.monasterium.net) as well as the newly established church register portal technical [www.maticula-findbuch.net](http://www.maticula-findbuch.net) is another important working field of ICARUS. Input of new digital contents into these portals, as well as into the APENet-portal is an ongoing process.

In cooperation with the institute Historisch- Kulturwissenschaftliche Informationsverarbeitung (HKI, roughly: Humanities Computer Science) of the university of Cologne new features and qualities for the digital archives are developed and administered.

#### **4. Usage of the online portals on an educational level within schools and universities**

The development of the collaborative archive MOM-CA allows an active use of the digital contents of the portal. This can now be effectively used as teaching methods within schools and university courses, as currently undertaken at the University of Vienna and the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II. Experiences and achievements gained from these courses will be further analysed in order to develop similar projects for other learning institutions.

#### **5. Dissemination**

The publishing of news concerning ICARUS and its members, both inside and outside the network and towards to the general public, is another important factor. Regular news-updates on the homepage [www.icar-us.eu](http://www.icar-us.eu) will keep the users informed about upcoming and past events, conferences, workshops etc.

ICARUS will furthermore release electronic newsletters in more or less regular intervals (according to necessity) to all the members of the network, as well as other interested people and institutions. These newsletters therefore offer the opportunity for all members of ICARUS to inform the public about latest news and other important events. We encourage all ICARUS members to take advantage of this possibility and ask you to pass all relevant information on to Caroline Maximoff ([caroline.maximoff@icar-us.eu](mailto:caroline.maximoff@icar-us.eu)) who is in charge of the composition of the newsletters.

#### **6. Creation of an international communication platform for the members of ICARUS (based on WIKI)**

To enhance and simplify the communication between the members of the ICARUS network, an online communication platform may be established, based on WIKI.