

# insights

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Archives and people in the digital age

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Four years co:op 4all

# editorial



Dear friends of co:op,  
dear colleagues!

It is only ten years since ICARUS was founded – ten years full of passion and energy. Side by side with our professional endeavours, ICARUS has always strongly focused on bringing people together. Our latest project is fully committed to this European spirit and bears its objectives in the project's title: "co:op – community as opportunity. the creative archives' and users' network". 17 partner institutions from 11 countries have joined forces to make documents accessible, to bring people together and to develop and try new online technologies. During the project's entire duration, insights has provided its readers with an insider's look into a multitude of activities. The current issue is the last one to be published for this project. Thomas Aigner, President of ICARUS, takes stock in a review of the project that will soon come to an end. Katalin Toma provides us with insights into the Topotheque subproject, while the museum of the historical archives of Banco di Napoli gives an account of its cooperation with the Federico II University of Naples. This cooperation would not have been possible without Antonella Ambrosio, historian and Vice President of ICARUS, a colleague and co-creator since the early days. She is writing about the important stimuli which the co:op project has given to Italy. In the ICARUS4all community section, you will read about some of the activities that have been taking place within the framework of co:op.

I would like to sincerely thank all of our colleagues for the discipline, effort and passion they have been bringing into our common project.

Francesco Roberg  
Hessian State Archives in Marburg  
Lead Partner co:op

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insights provides information about the international archival community today, including archival institutions as well as the related user groups.

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Interview: Antonella Ambrosio | University of Naples Federico II

## Digitisation in Italian

Antonella Ambrosio is not only a palaeographer and diplomatist, she is also enthusiastic about the possibilities of information technology for the humanities. Thanks to the EU-funded programme “community as opportunity” (co:op) she has been able to pave the way towards a digital future at her home institution, the University of Naples Federico II. As head of the didactics group within the co:op project, she talked to insights about the past four years of work with ICARUS and her visions for the future.

by Dagmar Weidinger | photos: Michele Innangi

**Antonella Ambrosio, tell us a little bit about your activities that connect you with ICARUS.**

I am a researcher in the areas of palaeography and diplomatics, specialising in medieval documents. My activities are focusing on three areas: didactics, research and other projects such as the organisation of conferences, workshops and the promotion of digital representations of archives online. It is this last point that specifically connects me with ICARUS.

**What motivated you to introduce digital technologies into your work?**

It is all Georg Vogeler's “fault” (laughing). When I first met him in 2007, I was simply amazed by the new possibilities I could gain for my research through the new technologies. We soon started to cooperate on Monasterium, working on a translation from German into Italian. Ever since then we have been collaborating on various projects and together organised two conferences on digital diplomatics in 2011 and 2013.

**When did you start using Monasterium and MOM-CA for your students?**

I was so eager to test the new technologies that I started teaching in this new way already in 2008. That was not widespread in Italy at that time. The two disciplines of palaeography and diplomatics are generally taught in a very traditional way here. I know what I am talking about as I myself studied archival sciences, palaeography and diplomatics at a very traditional institution, the Scuola Vaticana at Archivio Segreto Vaticano. It has only been a few years that some of my colleagues have started to change their perspectives and try out this new approach.

**I find it quite surprising that you managed to be so open-minded in such a working environment in Italy – how come?**

I guess it was not so difficult for me to be open-minded as I was familiar with the archival point of view right

from the beginning. During the early years of my career I worked at archives quite a lot. Thus it was obvious to me that digitisation would make our work a lot easier. These experiences in the field convinced me that digitisation is necessary for the study and enhancement of the documentation stored in the archives.

*“It has only been a few years that some of my colleagues have started to change their perspectives and try out this new approach.”*

**I understand that you have not studied IT yourself. Where did you get your knowledge from?**

Myself and my little group of researchers and tutors in Naples, in particular Maria Rosaria Falcone and Vera Schwarz-Ricci, have learned a lot in the direct co-operation with ICARUS' MOM-CA work group. ICARUS has always provided us with an environment to learn. I guess it is with them that we started to grow, too. And we also attended international conferences and courses on the topic.



**Antonella Ambrosio** enjoys to take her students into the archives to make studying the originals possible.

**In 2008 you founded Monasterium South Italy and in 2014 Monasterium Italy. Why do you think Monasterium is particularly relevant for your country?**

Monasterium constitutes a primary point of access to the Italian archival patrimony. Its intention is to make our heritage known to an audience not only of specialists. Digital technologies can give visibility and usability to the Italian documentation. Being able to reconstruct monastic archives with dispersed documentation and kept at various places of conservation is a very important factor. What is more, it allows to interconnect with other portals, archives and resources from the web. In this context I would like to highlight that the development of Monasterium Italy would not have been possible without the support of the two EU projects Enarc and co.op.

**How was your new approach received by your students?**

Very well. They liked it very much. Before Monasterium some of my students found the work we do rather annoying. Now it is something fun for them. The training has become much more effective. And I am proud to say that some of our students now even manage to do critical digital editions themselves. This is not only important for the world of science but also gives the students the feeling of doing something useful, of contributing in a larger, European context. They realise that the work they do here in Naples is collocated in a big community of researchers, teachers and archivists under the roof of ICARUS. Some students have already written or are currently writing graduation theses that provide for the use of MOM-CA and digital technologies in general.

**Can you give me a concrete example of the way you work?**

My courses consist of two phases. First of all we take a look at the docu-

ments on Monasterium in the classroom, trying to examine them in as much detail as possible. This way we can save a lot of time in the archives where we are actually dealing with the originals. This is important as there is always too little time there. Therefore good preparation – as we can do thanks to Monasterium – is everything! As already mentioned the second step is to examine the originals in the archives and after the students do complete descriptions of the documents on monasterium, also providing digital critical editions.

"Good preparation – as we can do thanks to Monasterium – is everything!"

**What is your wish for your future work in Naples/Italy?**

There is one thing that still has to change and that has to do with the kind of courses we offer. You see, I am a trained diplomatist and palaeographer who has studied the possibilities of digital technologies later on. But what we really need are scholars who learn to combine the two approaches, the one from history and the one from information technology, right from the beginning as digital humanists. I do think that many young people are going in that direction anyway. Of course I would also like to continue cooperating with the ICARUS partner universities. I have

**First name, last name:**  
Antonella Ambrosio

**My favourite memories from my professional life:**

Realising while im writing this answer that I have so many beautiful memories to choose from.

**When I am alone at the archives, ...**

I think life has been generous to me because it allows me to do the job I love.

**Coffee or tea?**

Is this a serious question to ask a Napolitan? Coffee, of course!

**I am impressed with...**

people who, with intelligence, commitment, courage and perseverance, have managed to achieve goals in their field that others consider particularly difficult.

**I am good at ...**

linking ideas and concepts seemingly without connection and daring to implement them in concrete projects.

**Three things I love about archives:**

Sharing the silence of the reading room with other scholars, waiting for a document to consult for the first time and the life perceived in the documents that have not yet been sorted.

**My connection with ICARUS:**

I value the professional partnership and especially the human interaction.

portrait

The Didactics work group

The Didactics work group was established during an ICARUS meeting in Poznań (Poland) in June 2011. It currently consists of 36 members (researchers and professors of archival sciences, palaeography, diplomatics and medieval history) from 15 European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Hungary).

info



Since Ambrosio discovered the digital world with her students, working at the archives is even more fun.

managed to organise three Erasmus projects within Europe for my students, in Serbia, Austria and the Czech Republic. These stays are very special for my students because they can perfect their skills in an international environment. At the same time, I hope that international students can take advantage of the knowledge offered by our university.

**Finally I would like to ask you what your personal research focus is.**

I am most interested in medieval charters and private deeds from southern Italy from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century especially. One monastery that I have particularly done a lot of research on is Santa Maria

della Grotta of Vitulano near Benevento as all the documents of this monastery are in archives here in Naples. The abbey does not actually exist anymore. Nevertheless the place and its history are very important for the local identity. It was thus very special for me to get in touch with the community there during my research. At the end I even received an honorary citizenship of Vitulano not only for traditional research, but also for the creation of the digital collection of Santa Maria della Grotta on Monasterium. Vitulano is a lively, yet a bit isolated village in a valley. Feeling that through their documents and photographs in Monasterium and in the Topotheque

they were part of a larger and international community was something very special and unique for the people living there.

**Name of the institution:**

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II – Dipartimento di Studi umanistici/Monasterium Italy Working Group

**Web address:**

[www.studiumanistici.dip.unina.it/dipartimento](http://www.studiumanistici.dip.unina.it/dipartimento)

Facebook: [www.bit.ly/2Nka2Cy](http://www.bit.ly/2Nka2Cy)

**Oldest collection:**

The collection "Biblioteca della Società Napoletana di Storia Patria", series Compre e vendite, charter 2 AAIII 1, 15 July 987.

**Oddest object / best-known archival item:**

A forgery of the notary Ruggiero Pappansogna who has a very strange surname that suggests that he maybe did not exist ...

**Overall volume of digital copies:**

More than 7000.

**Most loyal visitors of the online portal Monasterium and the Topotheque:**

Students, trainees, historians, local history researchers, archivists and passionate scholars studying charters and implementing data.

fact sheet

## From the team's point of view

Maria Rosaria Falcone (Project coordination Monasterium/Topotheque and didactic tutor): "I have been collaborating for about ten years in the teaching and research activities promoted by Antonella Ambrosio in Italy, especially for Monasterium. Our team has formed around the digital archives, the digitisation of medieval charters of Southern Italy. Under Antonella's leadership and enthusiasm, we achieved excellent objectives on the Scholarly Digital Editions of medieval charters and also in the teaching field, thanks to academic courses in Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archival Science with the support of the Monasterium and Topotheque platforms. An very stimulating environment!"

Martina Canonico (Student): "During my studies I attended the Palaeography, Diplomatics and Archival Science courses and seminars by professor Ambrosio and also wrote my bachelor thesis in Palaeography. On this occasion I worked directly with Monasterium where I published the collection 'The Virtual Archive of the Monastery S. Gregorio Armeno'. Currently, I am working on a digital exhibition on this special monastery."

Vera Schwarz-Ricci (Monasterium Scholarly Digital Edition; Communication): "I started working with professor Ambrosio some time ago and I like the diversified project work and the nice working atmosphere. I especially appreciate Antonella's curiosity about everything that brings innovation to the research sector."

Dagmar Weidinger is an art historian and works as a freelance journalists as well as a University lecturer at the University of Vienna (AT).

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# The Topotheque goes viral

Viewing and sorting private archival material is the first step to every Topotheque.

Since its foundation in 2010 in Austria, the Topotheque has long gone international. An overview of a cross-border success story supported by the EU-funded project "community as opportunity (co:op)".

It is now exactly four years that the co:op project partners have decided to establish local Topotheques in their countries. Together they took up the challenge of finding local communities that would present their historical treasures in the form of photographs and other documents on the online platform. With the co:op project drawing to its close, 35 international Topotheques have been set up, bringing the overall number up to 200.

## New challenges ahead

When the Topotheque went international, it also had to tackle new challenges. The idea for this online platform was conceived in Austria where communities have a strong local identity as well as a long tradition in local historical research. Finding volunteers to support such an activity is easy under these circumstances. But would something that worked well in one country also work in another country, with a different social and historical background?

Usually, the initiative to create a Topotheque comes from within the community. In the case of the co:op project, it is the archives that have to assume this role: They must find communities and content providers that are willing to participate.

In addition, the content providers have to cope with different languages and different countries that need to be implemented on the Topotheque's

website. These days, the Topotheque is available in English, German as well as eleven other languages.

## Door openers: local libraries and museums

Let's take a closer look at how some of the project partners managed to get started.

In Hungary, the first Topotheque was established in Berettyóújfalú thanks to a personal contact with the region's museum. This was soon followed by two more Topotheques that were set up by the librarians of the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library in Budapest. At district libraries, the librarians know exactly who among their regular visitors is interested in local history. This knowledge turned out to be a huge advantage.

In Estonia, the National Archives similarly found their target audience for the Topotheque at rural libraries. Already functioning as local hubs of culture, the libraries have often been collecting regional history for decades. The Topotheque provided the librarians with an easy-to-use tool to bring these collections out of the cupboards and into the digital world. Their endeavours were well received within the communities, with people

sharing stories about the images and wishing to add content to the Topotheque from their family archives.

In Finland, the Topotheques answered a desire that many Finnish citizens and private organisations had brought forward with the National Archives – to get better access to local history. Ever since word has been spread, the Finnish project team has been receiving new contacts almost weekly. By now there are also private organisations that want to work together on the Topotheques.

Connecting with regional cultural heritage institutions to initiate or further the communities' participation in making their past visible: This has also been a key element in the other partner countries of the project. The Topotheque has been highly welcomed as a perfect tool, and in some countries the Topotheque network will continue to grow well beyond the co:op project's lifetime. ■

Link

Discover the international Topotheque landscape:  
[topothequ.eu](http://topothequ.eu)

info

Katalin Toma works as an institute secretary and deputy head of department at the Budapest City Archives and coordinates the Topotheque's progress within co:op.



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The nine countries setting up Topotheques within the co:op project:

Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Sweden

# The end is just a new beginning

Connecting archivists, historians and historically interested people in order to create a benefit for everyone has been the most important goal of the co:op-project, which is about to end. A review of four exciting years of teamwork and an outlook into the future.

**W**hen we started to think about a follow-up project for “ENArC – European Network on Archival Cooperation” in 2014, it seemed like a logical step to expand our view from the archival institutions to the people actually using them for research purposes. Many of them truly love our institutions.

## Joining forces

The digital era not only creates a new understanding of what it means to preserve historical information in the form of old documents and data that has already been “born” digitally, it also radically changes the relationship between institutions and private users or communities. Digital tools and platforms enable both sides to find new and uncomplicated ways of cooperation to the benefit of each other: Archives provide their documents 24/7 to every living room or study, while users in return support the archives by enriching and correcting the data they use for their research. The collective knowledge is channelled back into the systems and thereby makes them richer every day.

## Wealth of ideas through teamwork

Cooperation between all interested people and institutions is an indispensable prerequisite for such a process. Our project is the perfect proof of this fact. Regular reunions in the form of the semi-annual ICARUS meetings usually brought together between 60 and more than 100 professionals from all over Europe. These meetings came up with exciting ideas such as the project “Adventures in archives” which aims at enticing children and young people to visit archives. Furthermore, there were numerous round tables bringing together professionals and the general public in vivid and fruitful discussions. And last but not least, the idea of the Topotheque was passed on to many partner institutions. This platform represents an innovative way of enabling regionally interested people to save and publish private historical documents in a simple manner. Two conventions – one in Marburg, the other in Naples – united professionals, communities and private people for discussions and decisions on common ways of cooperation.

## The best is yet to come

Even though the co:op project will end on November 30, 2018, an exciting future lies ahead of us. New tools for the processing, indexing and sharing of historical data are continuously being developed. And new communities evolve: In the future, many more people will be using historical data for all kinds of purposes, more and more documents will be available online and technologies like Handwritten Text Recognition will be so advanced that the huge treasure of information of more than a thousand years of history will be unlocked to make history an important part of everybody’s life! ■

Always stay on top of the activities carried out by ICARUS:

[icar-us.eu](http://icar-us.eu)

info

**Thomas Aigner** has been President of ICARUS since 2008 and Director of the Diocesan Archives of St. Pölten since 1995. All along he has been doing pioneering work in the field of digitising archival material.



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Soccer unites people – apart from professional discussions, fun can’t miss out at the ICARUS meetings. Appreciation and respect take first place within the ICARUS community.



© Luiza Puiu

# Bringing history to life

There is a saying that “A picture is worth a thousand words”. But who would have thought that a simple payment receipt can reveal an entire narrative? The Banco di Napoli Historical Archives hold the largest archival collection of bank documents in the world – and they have a virtually inexhaustible number of historical stories to tell. Within the framework of the EU-funded project co:op, some of these stories have come to life.

The documents kept at the Banco di Napoli Historical Archives not only chronicle the evolution of banking. In truth, these documents bear witness to the economic, social and artistic history of the entire Southern Italian peninsula. Seventeen million names and hundreds of thousands of payment receipts with detailed payment reasons create a fascinating picture of not only Naples, but of all of Southern Italy over the past 450 years.

## ilCartastorie: Multimedia storytelling at the archives

ilCartastorie, the museum at the Banco di Napoli Historical Archives, was created as a public gateway to the enormous patrimony of documents from the ancient Neapolitan public banks. There are many ways in which the museum unveils the stories that have been immortalised at the archives, ranging from mul-

timedia exhibits to creative writing workshops. Visitors learn interesting details about Caravaggio’s masterpieces in Naples, the intuitions and torments of the Prince of Sansevero, as well as the innumerable stories of Neapolitans and foreigners.

## Bank transactions telling “tales of the city”

Thanks to the project co:op, the Department of Humanistic Studies at the University of Naples, Federico II and the Banco di Napoli Foundation together with the museum ilCartastorie joined forces and tried a new way of bringing life into the narratives behind the banking documents. The co:op-funded film project “Adventures at archives” constituted the perfect background for uniting the academic experience of teaching with the creative and didactical activities that ilCartastorie offers for schools. Specific archival collections served as the basis for workshops in which archivists instilled the students with their expertise. Documents containing the transactions of the ancient public banks turned into “tales of the city”, inspired by the sheer architecture of the archives themselves. Blending the information extracted from the documents with the immediate surroundings spurred artistic expressions of their own.

## Learning “outside the box”

Also, the various rooms of the archives turned into evocative spaces for the students to prepare theatre pieces based on the stories that were revealed by the archival documents. Even more, the study of and immersion into the past turned the students themselves into guides that would lead visitors through the multimedia tour of the museum and unveil the rich cultural heritage of the archival documents.

All in all, five short films were produced based on the students’ experiences, ranging from elementary to university level. The encouragement to proactively encounter the stories behind the archival documents and express themselves artistically led to a sustainable learning experience outside the usual “educational box”. ■

### Links

[fondazionebanconapoli.it](http://fondazionebanconapoli.it)

[ilcartastorie.it](http://ilcartastorie.it)

Watch the short films here:

<https://bit.ly/2LeRf4N>

**Sergio Riolo** is the director of the Historical Archives Museum of the Banco di Napoli “ilCartastorie” and coordinates the planning and realisation of educational activities at the museum.

There are many ways to let children and teens delve into the past: surrounded by historical documents and with the help of modern, digital technologies, the stories behind the archival material turn into impressive experiences.

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# We support you to simplify the access to digitisation



## Why is it important to capture documents in good quality?

This topic is important at the moment when the paper based documents are very old and the quality of the print, the printing ink and the paper are getting worse and worse every decade. It is necessary to scan these documents in the best possible way to archive it for the future. Image Quality is also important if there is no need of a physical archive and the documents can be destroyed after digitisation. The captured and digitised document is the only existing one and if the quality is not good enough it is not possible to check the document on paper again.

Therefore we have developed guidelines to capture, control and ensure image quality. By using these guidelines, documents are captured with the best possible quality for every situation.

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# Four years co:op 4all

A look back from the perspective of the ICARUS4all community.

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"Looking back at the first **"Bring your history" day** which took place at the monastery of Geras in Lower Austria in September 2015 gives me a lot of pleasant and happy memories. In the impressive ambience of the monastery – and particularly in the ceremonial hall – a great number of participants had carefully presented their show pieces and were happy to answer questions. A variety of objects from different periods were on display, some of them were available to the public for the very first time. I

saw several pieces that would have perfectly complemented my own collection! In addition, specialist books were exhibited. Leafing through them was tempting me to eventually buy some. I particularly enjoyed the discussions with and between the exhibitors: Talks among like-minded people. The event strongly confirmed my view that it was important to continue taking care of and growing my own collection on the history of my home town as well as the topotheque of Traismauer."



Elisabeth Eder, born 1945 in Traismauer. Many years of intensive research on the history of her home town have developed into a passion. Two years ago, she started to study history at the University of Vienna. Elisabeth Eder is bringing the same enthusiasm into her management of the topotheque of Traismauer.

"Last year's **ICARUS4all Late Summer Meeting** took place in the afternoon of September 23 in connection with the General Meeting at the monastery of Klein-Mariazell in Lower Austria's Triestingtal. The event started with a tour of the monastery given by Thomas Aigner. Public tours of churches at monasteries or places of pilgrimage may be somewhat ambiguous in the eyes of laypersons with an interest in history: Of course, they provide valuable information on dates, events and ownership structures and are also important in terms of art and architecture, but the "half-life period of forgetting" is of a dramatically short duration. This is quite understandable, since the knowledge of regional heritage is usually not sufficient to link the information in a sustainable way. In a lively presentation, Thomas Aigner did a great job

explaining the background and the motives of the political and clerical parties involved, starting with the foundation of the Benedictine monastery and the monastery church in 1134 up until its dissolution in 1782 and the subsequent decline. Hence the circle was closed, leading up to Matricula, the "main purpose" of ICARUS. The core of monasteries or family histories is not made up of individual names and dates but of a seemingly endless succession of human destinies with all of their ups and downs. The event also included a hike to the pilgrimage church Hafnerberg at a distance of 5.6 kilometres. The weather was pleasant, the mood was cheerful, and the "Jause" tasted delicious. Of course, this was quite what I had been expecting of an ICARUS4all Late Summer Meeting!"



**Otto Amon**, born 1958, is an independent business and IT consultant and a passionate amateur researcher focussing on the regional, family, migratory and social history of the northern Weinviertel region in Lower Austria.

© Sabine Edith Braun



© Dagmar Weidinger

"Together with a small group of people from the ICARUS4all community I visited the State District Archives of Třeboň in Southern Bohemia in October 2015. I certainly didn't want to miss the opportunity of visiting the oldest and largest archives of the Czech Republic with its archival material ranging from the early 13th century up until today. Being new to family research I also hoped to meet with people who were already more experienced than I was. My expectations of talks and the sharing of knowledge were already met during our bus trip heading up north.

The Renaissance castle of Třeboň – the location of the archives – is worth a visit on its own. But it was overwhelming to see the incredibly

valuable collection of archival material as well. The archivist's presentation and explications of selected pieces was very impressive, my legs almost got a bit shaky. I was really touched by thinking about all the destinies that were documented in these rooms. During our lunch together and on the way back home there was enough time to talk about all of our new impressions. I really enjoyed the day! Still, I have to admit that before I left for this trip I was not overly optimistic of finding anything on my Czech ancestors there. But when I learned that most of the church records were written in German and that digitisation was making progress, with many sites already being online, I was very motivated."



**Marion Hun**, born 1966, is living in Vienna. She is working as a commercial employee at Mediaprint. Her interest in family research happened "by chance" when she started to find out more about her father's stories on his great-grandfather's emigration from Bavaria to Hungary for the purpose of a birthday present.

© Dagmar Weidinger

"What a beautiful and interesting excursion that took us to the "Moravský zemský archiv", the Moravian Provincial Archives in the city of Brno on May 18, 2015! For Austrian family researchers with their typical "Bohemian grandmothers" – or great-grandmothers these days – the archives at a two hours' drive from Vienna are a worthwhile destination. We were welcomed by the archivist Dr. Tomáš Černušák who told us about the archives' organisational structure and fonds at the auditorium on the first floor. The archival material is covering the period from the 9th to the 20th century. Acta publica, the online project now completed, makes it possible to work with Moravian church records from the comfort of your home at any time of the day. Unfortunately, many seigniorial archives have not

been digitised yet. These fonds are of particular interest to family researchers: They comprise contracts of sale, probate proceedings, tax matters, lists of local craftspeople, passport issuances, etc. In short – true treasures. The searching guides are written in Czech. But this is not really a problem since the people who work at the archives are always happy to help, as I was able to experience at a later visit. And sometimes it simply takes luck: At my very first research trip I came across the name Xaver in the Lomnice title register "Ob- rigkeitlichen Realitäten Grundbuch der Herrschaft Lomnitz, Litt. A.". My great-great-grandfather Josef Xaver, Carer of the Poor in Lomnice near Brno, and his wife Anna are buying a house for 462 Austro-Hungarian gulden on July 1, 1860."



**Gerhard Xaver**, born 1947, studied history and German philology in Vienna and worked as a publishing editor in Kiel and Vienna. Before his retirement in 2010 he was head of the editorial department for natural sciences and the humanities at the Österreichische Bundesverlag.



THE CREATIVE  
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