

## ICARUS - International Centre for Archival Research - Cultural Projects and Activities on a European Level

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### *ABSTRACT*

“ICARUS - International Centre for Archival Research” is a network consisting of more than 100 institutions from 20 European countries (by July 2011) constituted as a non-profit association by Austrian law in 2007 with its central office in Vienna. It acts in the field of international cooperation, promoting and fostering the implementation of international archive-related projects. The main topics of these activities are indexing, digitisation and online publication of archival material. For this reason ICARUS offers various services in the fields of project initiation and implementation, digitisation and a continuous exchange of expertise and best practice on an international level. ICARUS has rich experience in coordination and communication of international project-related cooperation and intensive relationships to many institutions in Central, Southern and Eastern Europe. The association gained a lot of expertise specifically in developing, administrating and implementing projects within different EU-funded programmes (Culture Programme 2007-2013, European Regional Development Fund, eContentplus/ICT-PSP).

ICARUS - Centro internazionale per la ricerca archivistica - Progetti ed attività culturali a livello europeo

### *SINTESI*

ICARUS - Centro internazionale per la ricerca archivistica è un network di più di 100 istituzioni di 20 paesi europei (a luglio 2011) costituitosi legalmente in Austria nel 2007 come associazione no-profit e con sede centrale a Vienna. Opera nel settore della cooperazione internazionale, promuovendo e sostenendo lo sviluppo di progetti internazionali legati agli archivi. Principali temi di queste attività sono l'indicizzazione, la digitalizzazione e la pubblicazione online di materiale archivistico. Per questa ragione ICARUS offre vari servizi nel ramo dell'inizio e sviluppo dei progetti, nella digitalizzazione ed un continuo scambio di competenze e di pratiche virtuose a livello internazionale. ICARUS ha una ricca esperienza di coordinamento e comunicazione di cooperazione su progetti internazionali ed una fitta serie di relazioni con molte istituzioni dell'Europa centrale, meridionale ed orientale. L'associazione ha acquisito una gran quantità di competenze specificatamente nella creazione, amministrazione e promozione di progetti all'interno di differenti programmi finanziati dall'Unione Europea (Culture Programme 2007-2013, European Regional Development Fund, eContentplus/ICT-PSP).

Mednarodni center za arhivske raziskave „ICARUS“ - Kulturni projekti in aktivnosti na evropskem nivoju

### *IZVLEČEK*

Mednarodni center za arhivske raziskave “ICARUS” je mreža, ki je sestavljena iz več kot 100 institucij iz 20 evropskih držav (do julija 2011). Kot neprofitna organizacija s sedežem na Dunaju, je bila ustanovljena leta 2007, na osnovi avstrijskega zakona. Deluje na področju mednarodnega sodelovanja, promocije in pospeševanja izvajanja mednarodnih arhivskih projektov. Glavni predmet teh aktivnosti so indeksiranje, digitalizacija in objavljanje arhivskega gradiva preko spleta. Zato ICARUS ponuja različne usluge na področju uvajanja in izvedbe projektov, digitalizacije in nenehne izmenjave znanja in dobre prakse na mednarodnem nivoju. ICARUS ima bogate izkušnje na področju komunikacije in koordinacije mednarodnih arhivskih projektov in neguje tesne stike z mnogimi institucijami v srednji, južni in vzhodni Evropi. Center si je pridobil veliko izkušenj, še posebej na področju razvoja, upravljanja in izvajanja projektov v različnih programih, financiranih s strani EU (Program kulture 2007–2013, Evropski sklad za regionalni razvoj, eContentplus/ICT-PSP).

## ICARUS - International Centre for Archival Research - Kulturprojekte und Aktivitäten auf Europäischer Ebene

## ABRISS

“ICARUS - International Centre for Archival Research” ist ein Netzwerk bestehend aus mehr als 100 Institutionen in 20 verschiedenen europäischen Ländern (Stand Juli 2011). Die Vereinigung wurde im Jahr 2007 als gemeinnütziger Verein nach österreichischem Gesetz in Wien konstituiert. Die Betätigungsfelder von ICARUS sind internationale Zusammenarbeit auf europäischer Ebene sowie die Vermittlung und Administration von Archivbezogenen Projekten. Inhalte solcher internationaler Kooperationsprojekte sind meist die Aufarbeitung, Digitalisierung und virtuelle Publikation von Archivmaterial. Zu diesem Zweck bietet ICARUS unterschiedliche Kompetenzen an, im Bereich Projektanbahnung und Durchführung (administratives und finanzielles Management) und Digitalisierung, sowie die Möglichkeit zu laufendem Erfahrungsaustausch auf internationaler Basis durch regelmäßige Treffen der Vereinsmitglieder und Informationsübermittlung online. ICARUS verfügt über reiche Erfahrung auf dem Gebiet der Koordination und Vermittlung internationaler Zusammenarbeit im Bereich der Archivwissenschaft - konkret in der Entwicklung und Betreuung von EU-Geförderten Kooperationsprojekten (Kultur Programm 2007-2013, Europäische territoriale Zusammenarbeit, eContentplus/ICT-PSP)- und pflegt enge Kontakte zu unterschiedlichen Institutionen in Mittel-, Süd- und Osteuropa.

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## 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.

In contrast to libraries, mainly storing printed and therefore reproducible items, 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 aimed at firmly establishing and gradually expanding a European network for written 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 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 (Culture 2000, Culture 2007-2013, European Regional Development Fund, eContentplus/ICT-PSP, 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 - as opposed to library material, seeing that a printed book could theoretically be found in other places as well. 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 mentioned 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 on 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 years since the establishment of the association „ICARUS - International Centre for Archival Research“ in 2007, several tangible working fields have become clear, which are carried out by ICARUS in close cooperation with its member institutions.

The necessary financial support for these activities is provided through international cooperation projects, such as the current project “ENArC - European Network on Archival Cooperation” funded by the Culture Programme 2007-2013 of the European Commission. Within this large-scale project, with a duration of 4.5 years, 14 institutions from 10 different European countries work together to fulfil the following aims:

**1. Expanding the international network of ICARUS** by means of intensified communication with other institutions on a personal and professional level. This is to be accomplished by:

- a. Semi-annual ICARUS-meetings
- b. National Workshops
- c. „ICARUS-Lectures“
- d. Presentations at national and international conferences, workshops etc.
- e. Experts Exchange Programme
- f. „Linking the Neighbourhood“ - Programme

**2. Support for digitising projects of all members** (and also other institutions if needed)

**3. Ongoing further development of the online archives [www.monasterium.net](http://www.monasterium.net) and [www.matricula-online.eu](http://www.matricula-online.eu) as well as input of new digital content**

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

#### 5. Dissemination

#### 6. Creation of an international communication platform for the members of ICARUS

##### 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 usually last 2 or 3 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.

New members and interested institutions are always welcome to participate in these biannual meetings and thereby take the chance to present themselves in front of a professional audience and to find partners for cooperation projects on an international level. A financial support for travel- and accommodation costs in the form of a Travel-Grant can be requested for each of the meetings by filling in a prepared online form on the website [www.icar-us.eu](http://www.icar-us.eu).

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 institution of ICARUS is invited to organise a national workshop. The organisation of these 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-Lectures“:

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 organises lectures dealing with different topics of archival sciences. The lectures are to be held in the member countries by experts from another country.

The Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa (IT) has abundant experience in holding courses that focus on cultural heritage and information technologies, and offers the opportunity to organise such courses within the frame of the centre of learning of the Fondazione Conservatorio Santa Chiara in San Miniato. In cooperation with other ICARUS members learning courses can be developed focusing 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 intensive exchange of knowledge and experience is offered by various workshops, subject-specific national and international conferences regularly held in the different mem-

ber 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.

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

Within the frame of the EU-project „Charters Network” - submitted within the Culture Programme 2007-2013 in 2008 and in a way being a precursor for the project “ENArC” - 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 was meant to persist and therefore included into the work programme of “ENArC”.

The programme offers individual staff of member institutions from the ICARUS-network the opportunity to work in a foreign institution for a certain period of time (up to 2 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. Costs for travel, accommodation and daily allowances will be covered by ICARUS.

The main goals of the programme are to:

- establish personal networks and contacts at expert level
- familiarise with different working methods and technologies
- intensively exchange knowledge and experience
- 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 can be downloaded from the homepage as well.

#### **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 within the frame of “ENArC”. Certain project partners 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. This will bundle capacities and competences and warrant an effective and continuous availability of all contents:

- All content (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 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 constantly offers 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 recently established church register portal [www.matricula-online.eu](http://www.matricula-online.eu) is another important working field of ICARUS. Input of new digital content into these portals, as well as into the APEnet-portal and Europeana 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 maintained.

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

The development of the collaborative archive MOM-CA by the aforementioned institute in Cologne 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 among others. 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 the general public is another important factor. Regular news-updates on the homepage [www.icar-us.eu](http://www.icar-us.eu) keep the users informed about upcoming events, conferences, workshops etc.

The association is also active within social networks, maintaining a site on facebook and a twitter account.

ICARUS furthermore releases 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 offer the opportunity for all members of ICARUS to inform the public about latest news and other important events. We encourage all ICARUS members and other interested institutions to take advantage of this possibility and pass on relevant information to Caroline Maximoff ([caroline.maximoff\(at\)icar-us.eu](mailto:caroline.maximoff(at)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

To enhance and simplify the communication between the members of the ICARUS network, an online communication platform will be established.

**SUMMARY**

The „Culture Programme 2007-2013“ of the European Commission among others offers a great opportunity for the funding of different multiannual cooperation projects (strands 1.1 & 1.2.1). Following the programme's 3 main goals - transnational mobility of people and cultural works and intercultural dialogue - ICARUS and its members managed to successfully submit 2 project applications, dealing with the digitisation and online presentation of archival content as well as promoting and sharing the knowledge of the several international project partners not only within a professional sphere but also introducing it to the wide public and interested laymen. The project activities include workshops, conferences, lectures etc. on an international basis, but also for a more closely targeted exchange of professional know-how an „Experts Exchange Programme“ was included in both EU-projects, giving staff members of the project partners the opportunity to work in a foreign institution for a limited time to get to know different work processes or technical equipment, to support the host on scientific matters, etc. Being an international association with member institutions from different cultural sectors (mostly archives, but also universities etc.) and up to now covering 20 European countries (by July 2011), „ICARUS - International Centre for Archival Research“ has the great advantage of a wide network of professionals and has- since its establishment in 2007- gained a lot of knowledge concerning the formulation and promotion of project ideas as well as with the submission and continuous administrative support of transnational cooperation projects.

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