Topotheque

Community-driven online archive anchored in regions

Participatory governance of cultural heritage

(AT)

Weinviertel Ost Region

238,000

Challenge

Historic heritage is often kept in private hands, inaccessible to the broader public. Questions such as 'how did the house on 18 Main Street in my home town look in the 30s?' remain unanswered, making it difficult to compare regional historic conditions at a European level.

Materials, documents and knowledge is dispersed, while it could complement the chronicles of local museums and reinforce the sense of belonging to a common European space.
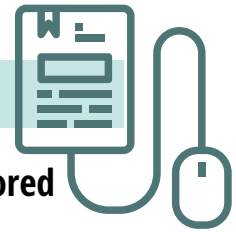
Solutions

Topotheque provides an IT solution by offering both the infrastructure and the knowhow to build a crowd-sourced online archive.

Based on the voluntary work of residents, historical material held by private citizens becomes accessible online. Topotheque managers, anchored in local or regional authorities, enable a citizen-driven process which aggregates dispersed material in a virtually unified Topotheque. Indexation and localisation can take place at neighbourhood, district or city level!

How ?

1 A local or regional authority wishes to make European heritage held by private citizens publicly available using digital tools.

2 After the technical implementation of a digital archive of tangible and intangible heritage held by citizens, called a Topotheque, and a quick introduction, a Topotheque manager starts with entries that can be taken from existing archives.

3 A newsletter keeps managers up to speed.

4 A pool of voluntary residents is set up by the local or regional authority: the Topothequers.

5 ICARUS teaches the Topothequers how to gather relevant data, and provides them with information on copyrights and private rights. Blogs and meetings offer a forum for everyone wanting to exchange experiences and requests.

6 The Topothequers get in contact with the local residents to gather private historic findings and information. This growing collection is backed by the local or regional government, which incentivises the collection of memories and stories.

7 Public events and the support of local media can raise awareness of the Topotheque and contribute to the development and sustainability of the Topotheque community.

Budget/Financing

Overall budget of €152,148 (three years), with additional funds from the region (9%), the national level (14%) and the EU level (56% from the Rural Development Fund).

Broken down into an average of €800 per municipality, as well as:

- €91,386: use of the platform www.topothek.at
- €29,260: historical preparation of community history including an overview board
- € 26,554.36: public relations (reporting in newspapers, flyers, posters, etc.)
- € 4,948.54: closing event of the project

Management

- Topotheque is about building a community for whom the protection and accessibility of local history is important. Cooperation lies at the heart of the process and provides the Topotheque with the power to grow.
- Only regional forces can preserve local history in a crowd-sourced virtual collection. For this reason, the Topotheque managers ought to be anchored in their municipality. With their knowledge of the local circumstances, the Topotheque managers identify relevant historical sources and ensure high-quality indexing and localisation of the entries.
- ICARUS, the International Centre of Archival Research, provides the IT-infrastructure (no development costs) as well as the know-how to foster community-driven development. Technical support as well as assistance concerning content is provided at all times.
- Topothequers are volunteers that contribute to the online archive by providing their documentation.

Impact

- Strengthened sense of identity and belonging.
- Preservation and valorisation of personal cultural heritage.
- Improved open access to privately owned data/ information about local cultural heritage.
- Improved collection of historical and recent data on local cultural heritage.
- Improved knowledge sharing about local cultural heritage via more than 200 Topotheques across Europe.

Transferability

- All that is necessary is the willingness of a local or regional authority to facilitate community-driven development of an online archive. The authority provides the initial data and recruits the volunteers who will share their personal archives. ICARUS provides the infrastructure and the training for a unified visualisation of the online archive.
- Stemming from an EU-funded project, the Topotheque expands beyond the borders of Austria. Today, over 200 Topotheques are already present in 13 countries.

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Links

Website: https://www.topothek.at/en/
Our Topoteques: https://www.topothek.at/en/our-topotheques/
Video (DE): https://www.topothek.at/de/das-video/

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