

Online guide to art libraries and archives in Vienna

Presentation held at the ARLIS /NA 43RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE

New frontiers on the old frontier,

Omni Hotel Forth Worth, TX, March 22nd, 2015

SEASON 1 OPENING

Sybille Hentze



Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues! Andrea and I are delighted to speak to you today about our project of creating a guide for art libraries and archives in Vienna! This is the first time in Texas for both of us and we are very excited!

The reason why Andrea and I are talking to you today goes back to our encounter with members of the ARLIS North America group in Budapest and Vienna while on their annual study tour in spring of last year. I had the pleasure to assist in organizing the Viennese part of the tour. The meeting was unique and unforgettable for all Viennese colleagues. ARLIS North America group members came as colleagues and left as friends, but not before encouraging us to participate in this ARLIS conference in Fort Worth today.

Right away, Andrea and I started to think about a topic worthy to present at this conference. In other words, the project we are going to present to you now is about eight months old!

We decided to use the structure of a TV series for this presentation, to guide you through the storyline and of course to entertain!

We proudly present to you season one of our story, featuring five episodes.

What is this first season about?

An archive and a library, both focusing on art, both located in Vienna, are trying to establish an online guide of similar institutions.

In this guide, we try to assemble all the information which, to us, is essential to describe a certain archive or library. For us, libraries, archives and possibly even art bookshops belong together, and we want to make them visible on the internet.

In the summary of our presentation, you can read „class not mass“. Even early on, it became apparent that covering all Austrian institutions would result in mass (or a mess) instead of class due to lack of time, so we decided to start considering only Viennese institutions.

EPISODE #1 *Extracting information*

Andrea Neidhöfer



The story we are telling you today began with asking many questions and continued with finding out if we were asking the right questions.

Before we could start to gather information for our online guide, we had to consider which information we wanted to show and whom we wanted to provide it. To find answers to these questions we first looked at our own institutions.

I am Head of Archive at Basis Wien, a documentation centre for contemporary art in and from Austria. Many people know and use our wonderful online database but not many people are aware that we have a physical archive and library as well which they can visit on site.

The same applies in Sybille's case too: Sybille is Head Librarian at the Albertina, the renowned museum of graphic arts in Vienna. Although everybody knows about the Albertina, many art historians who live and work in Vienna are not aware that the Albertina also has a wonderful library which is open to the public.

Assuming that we were not the only ones, we identified the first problem we wanted to address: making institutions like ours more visible.

Our second idea was to bring together art archives and libraries. We are convinced that both sides and the users will profit from collaborating more closely and finding them in one place.

Let me give you an example from my personal experience: Over the last few years, I have visited several conferences and presented the basis wien archive. We collect ephemeral objects such as invitation cards, flyers and press releases amongst other things. Each time, librarians approached me afterwards and told me that they also had small collections of similar materials, but never realized their potential value.

Usually they do not actively collect them but do not want to throw them away and so they just remain in a box.

This brings us to our third topic: We want to provide extensive information on the collections of the institutions indexed in our guide. What do we mean by this?

We do not intend to create a virtual catalog or a tool to do an object-oriented search, but we want to give the user an idea about the whole variety

of materials collected by the institutions we feature. We really want to go into the details of the kinds of materials users will expect to find and the form in which they are recorded.

Are there digitized media? Can they be discovered online? Are there analogue materials that can only be found and used on location? How could they be accessed? Are there any special collections like postcards, artist letters, and artists' estates? Where can people find materials on a specific subject?

All information should be listed using key words and thesauri thus making it searchable by category and subject. Let me give you an example: If you are looking for 'painting from Austria from 1970-2000' – your search result will be a list of all institutions that hold collections – either analogue or digital, recorded or unrecorded - on this topic.

Now that we defined the topics, we wanted to address and identify our content-providers. To find out if there was any interest in our project at all, we sent out a mail requesting a short response. While the actual number of responding institutions was not large, we heard back from exactly the kinds of institutions we envisioned and they did confirm our assumption: There is a strong desire for better visibility and networking amongst art archives and art libraries in Vienna.

To collect the content for our database we have already devised a survey with a structured questionnaire, which covers all the topics mentioned above. However, before we can begin to fill our online guide with content we have to make many decisions regarding its technical foundation and design.

EPISODE #2 *Creating a prototype*

Andrea Neidhöfer



Our aim is not to create a large project that requires huge amounts of money and staff to realize and maintain it. We would like to be able to implement it easily and allow it for future growth.

Therefore, the first step was to examine if a directory that fulfills the functions we envisage already exists.

We started our research with a basic Google search on „Archives / Libraries / Vienna“. However, all we found were some incomplete lists of links usually focusing either on libraries or on archives.

Then, a colleague pointed us in the direction of a database called *Infonet Austria*, which The Ministry of Culture hosts. It is a directory of all museums, archives, libraries and institutes researching culture in Austria. It is an excellent resource but has one big disadvantage: You cannot find it! It did not come up in any of our searches on Google. Unless you are actually search for *Infonet Austria* it does not show up.

Apart from that, the database is well maintained and up to date. Its scope is much wider than what we were thinking of – it covers the whole of Austria and the very broad field of ‘culture’, whereas we want to limit our project to Vienna and the visual arts. In addition, when you look for Albertina you will find only one entry for the Albertina Museum but not the Albertina Library.

Nevertheless, we were curious and wanted to learn more. Perhaps there was a chance to collaborate in any way? We made an appointment to meet the woman who started the project in the late 1990s and still runs it. Yet although she was willing enough to share information about her database with us, we soon realized there was absolutely no interest in any kind of exchange or collaboration.

Another lead we followed up was the *Artguide*, a directory of digital resources on art in German speaking countries, whose host is the University Library of Heidelberg. Head of the department Maria Effinger was supportive of our endeavour and informed us, that the *Artguide* is going to close down in 2015 because it was technically outdated.

If we wanted to we could use the database structure but it would not be very feasible to do so. Nevertheless, she also provided us with an idea for where to look next...

EPISODE #3 *Thinking out of the box*

Sybille Hentze



In this episode, we want to show you how important it was for us not to lose sight of the ‘bigger picture’. Once again, our supportive colleague from the University Library in Heidelberg encouraged us to get in touch with a certain person in Cologne. His name is Holger Simon; he works as a professor of history of art and is an entrepreneur.

Holger has created the well-known digital image archive *Prometheus* in Europe. He also develops applications and audio-guides for museums, and he founded Pausanio Akademie that assists cultural institutions to develop new business models.

I may say that the conversation with Holger was a wake-up call for us in the way we were looking at our project.

As Holger is a businessperson, he was very open-minded and encouraging when we talked to him on the phone. Someone wanting to be a successful entrepreneur and businessperson not only has to take care of developing smart products but also of the way, they can be used!

As librarians and archivists, we only tend to focus on our holdings and services as these are our products! Nevertheless, if you look at Amazon, for example, you realize their focus is marketing and selling!

This is what we should aim for as well!
We want to bring our services to market!

One of the greatest things we learnt from Holger was that the job does not stop once we had filled the database with data. The tricky thing is to let people know that the database exists in the first place!

Yet, in our experience, this is exactly what librarians and archivists are not doing at present.

We were also naive when we thought of creating an application instead of a database. What we didn't know was, that the internet is full of tangled links and zombie apps. According to a BBC report, a study discovered that about one third of all apps nobody had ever downloaded!

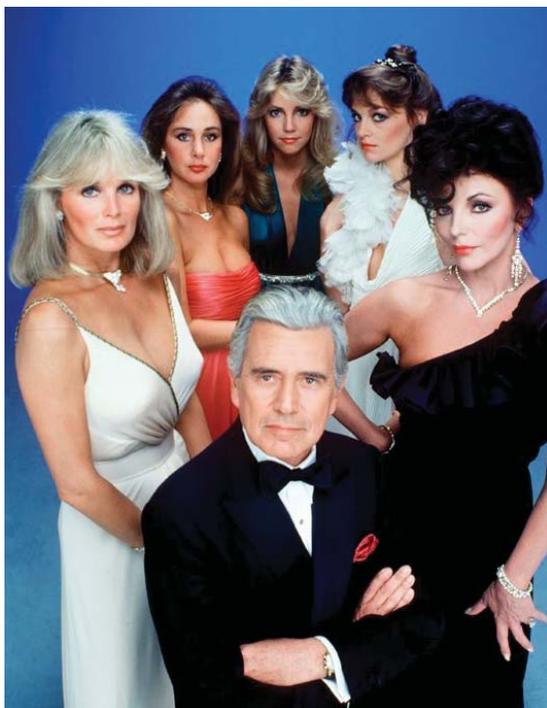
The conclusion of the third episode is this: important as it is to fill a database with data, it is even more important to find the right place on the web to which to link your database so that users can discover it easily!

EPISODE #4 *Learning from others and chance acquaintances*

Andrea Neidhöfer

Having freed ourselves from the idea, that the basis for our online guide must be a database designed using scientific criteria, opened up new paths on our investigations.

We met with Josef Pauser, Chief Librarian of The Constitutional Court of Austria, who runs the blog of the Austrian Association of Librarians (VOEBB). We wanted to ask him about his experiences with WordPress and with running a blog. Begun in 2008, a server of the University of Vienna hosts the blog and Josef feeds it with content. It uses WordPress and records about 800-900 visits daily. WordPress is one of the most popular



blogging systems, which is also widely used as content management system for websites. It is an Open Source CMS (Content Management System) project with thousands of ready-made plugins, widgets and themes, and can be customized for a wide range of applications.

It is also easy to integrate a MySQL database. Holger in Cologne had already recommended WordPress as a possible technical solution to us too, and Josef supported his recommendation.

Using WordPress for our project, we learned that it would still be necessary to enlist the help of an IT specialist to program or adapt it for our special needs; we would also need to calculate a budget for future updates and adaptations.

Compared to the programming of other kinds of database these costs would be comparatively small. In addition, the widespread use of WordPress and the active community of programmers make it easier to find someone who is familiar with it.

Just as we discussed these questions, Josef's very committed IT co-worker Johannes entered the office. He offered to have a look at the specifications of our database once we finish them and to give us an evaluation on how to realise them. He also advised us not to stick to our specifications too tightly but instead just to draw an outline of how we envisioned our prototype to look.

We left the meeting re-motivated and full of new ideas. There were concrete tasks that we needed to accomplish next: design our prototype and think about the look and feel that we want it to have.

It still left open some very important questions: Who will use the guide and where are they going to find it?

EPISODE #5 *Dressed for success - Preview of the 2nd season*

Sybille Hentze



In the final episode, we would like to give you a short conclusion of the first season and tell you about our plans.

No matter how sophisticated the structure of our databases is, we must make sure they attract the attention of interested internet users.

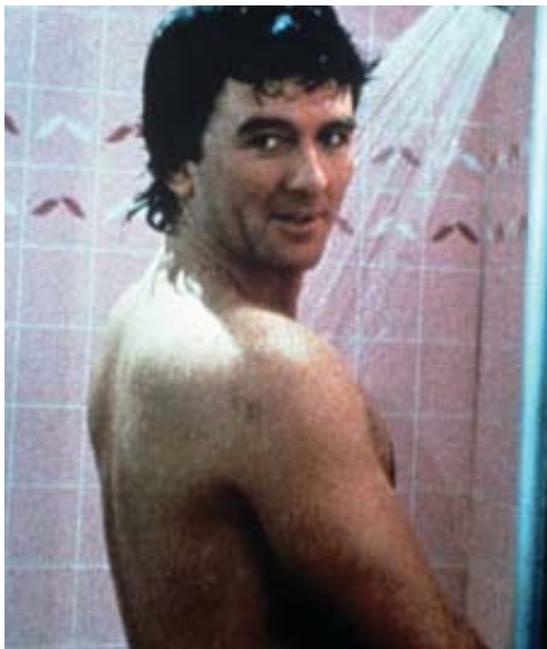
It may also be useful to place links on websites frequented by other users for whom our information may be relevant.

Online services like Google Scholar, Google Books and Wikipedia go further than what libraries or archives usually offer and we need to become as clever as them.

Our initial plan to create a guide turns out to be an ambitious project now. Three questions came up only towards the end of our investigations, but they will be crucial for the following seasons.

The first question is what type of person is looking for our institutions? (It is the question about THE USER)

Second question: Where do we want people to find us on the web? (It is the question of LOCALISATION)



The third important question is: Does anyone look for our institutions at all? (It is a question about THE NEED)

Are we on the right track?

As soon as we return to our workplaces, we are going to start on the next step. We are eagerly looking forward to learn more about Google website ranking, responsive design, geo-referencing and other things that are not yet integrated in a librarian's or archivist's everyday job.

Together with the help of our IT colleague, we will try to develop a prototype for our guide and hope to present the result of the second season to you soon.

Thank you very much for your attention!

Sybille Hentze *Albertina Museum Wien* Andrea Neidhöfer *Basis Wien*

