Ars Electronica Archive Relaunch

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Abstract

Ars Electronica is based in Linz, Upper Austria. A funded project currently makes it possible to commit more resources to its archive to make substantial changes in the database structure and to rethink workflows new. The presentation provides a glimpse into the current developments and challenges of this project, that started in May 2023 and will end in August 2024.

Keywords

Database, metadata, structure, user interface design, online archive, cultural heritage, funding

Ars Electronica Archive

As a young branch of art at the cutting edge of technological developments, digital media art poses major archiving challenges for the cultural sector. The professional documentation and long-term preservation of digital-born content is only just beginning, and many media art archives contain a wide variety of holdings at the same time. This translates into a greater conservation effort. And it also leads to an increase in the complexity of the databases, which already must meet many requirements.

The European Union has recognized the urgency of the issue and is making substantial investments in digital infrastructure to professionalize the archiving of digital cultural heritage (European Open Science Cloud, European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage, Europeana, etc.). This is currently also leading to more money for this area in the funding pots in Austria. Amongst many other museums also Ars Electronica has received funding in the context of digitizing cultural heritage and is therefore able to make substantial changes within its archive structure and to rethink workflows new.

The Details: The "Archive Relaunch Project" of Ars Electronica, funded by the BMKÖS (Austrian Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sports), started in May 2023 and will last until August 2024.

The two main goals in mind are:
1. as groundwork for further continuity and long-term preservation, and better export and import possibilities: to adapt to current standards and update the data structure.
2. as groundwork for a more active use: to adapt and improve the user interface of the intern database regarding new requirements. This basically means to simplify it, to make it easier manageable and therefore more interesting for Ars Electronica employees outside of the Archive Context.

At the beginning stood the building of a team and the start of a research phase regarding software guidelines, data structure, Metadata-Standards, and ways to simplify the currently complex database structure in a way, that still allows the migration of the already existing archive data. Additionally, employees of the different departments of Ars Electronica have been invited to express their needs and wishes to the archive. In these meetings also new approaches regarding workflows and responsibilities have been addressed. Beginning of autumn the requirements catalogue was finished, and a user interface designer was involved in the meetings and considerations.

After this consideration phase the plans by now is: Updating the software and adapting the data model will ensure the continued existence of the already large treasure trove of data. The change in the structure will mainly be from the current file type focus to a more content focused structure. Additionally linking the data more should make it easier and more comprehensive to store new data. Data cleansing regarding the creation of persons will support this, and it will create the basis for linking opportunities with other archives and data pools as for example Wikipedia. Finally, the new user interface design will enable employees to use the archive more actively. In the end this all will affect the Online Archive and also here a user interface designer will help to translate the new structure also to this.

In the context of European developments the focus will be on harmonization with international data standards to ensure compatibility with other data sources. This is a given, as the funding is bound to deliverables of data to Kulturerbe-

digital (Austrian aggregator for Europeana). By sharing the data with this national and European infrastructures, they are made more accessible not only to the interested public but also to researchers.

A second project strand will expand the archive in the coming year to include a large dataset. The digitization of part of the estate of Hannes Leopoldseder, one of the main protagonists in the history of Ars Electronica - especially in the early phase until the mid-1990s, will significantly increase the number of digitized historical documents in the archive, and will make an important contribution to the accessibility of digital cultural heritage in the field of media art.

The results and findings of the "Archive Relaunch Project" will be published on the Ars Electronica website at the end of the project. The selection of the newly created digital entries will be available in the AE Online Archive, the digital cultural heritage platform of Austria and via these also on Europeana.

Ars Electronica is based in Linz, Upper Austria. Part of the Archiv of Ars Electronica is accessible online (Online Archive, https://ars.electronica.art/archive/en/, https://archive.aec.at/), part of it only internally (physical Archive & internal Database).

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Figure 1. Project Picture, Ars Electronica Archive Relaunch. ©Ars Electronica

Author(s) Biography(ies)

Christina Radner (AT) currently is the responsible project manager for the Ars Electronica Archive in Linz, Austria. In 2009 she got her master´s degree in art history at the University of Vienna. At an internship at the Art Brut Museum Gugging in Klosterneuburg near Vienna, she got a first insight into the archive work of a museum. She was hired project-based, to help work on an artist´s estate and to prepare a retrospective and a comprehensive catalogue of works. In 2013 she moved back to Upper Austria and started her work in the Ars Electronica Archive Team. Since 2015 she is the responsible project manager for the Archive and part of the Festival/Prix/Archive Core Team of Ars Electronica.