

Euromuse - EIN INTERNET PORTAL ZU SONDERAUSSTELLUNGEN EUROPÄISCHER MUSEEN

Euromuse - AN INTERNET PORTAL TO THE EXHIBITIONS OF EUROPEAN MUSEUMS

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Zusammenfassung:

Euromuse ist ein Internet-Portal zu den Sonderausstellungen europäischer Museen. Es wurde in den letzten 1 1/2 Jahren von einem Projektteam entwickelt, dem Vertreter von 7 großen europäischen Museen angehören und von den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz realisiert. Sein Schwerpunkt ist ein Kalender von bevorstehenden und laufenden Ausstellungen. Diese wie auch die gesamte präsentierte Information werden ausschließlich von den betroffenen Museen selbst ausgewählt, in der Regel Ausstellungen von europäischem Rang. Derzeit handelt es sich um Kunst- und archäologische Ausstellungen, da EuroMuse ein Organ der "Réunion des organisateurs des grandes expositions - European Chapter" mit etwa 50 Mitgliedern ist, von denen etwa 2/3 bisher Beiträge einspeisen. Ihr obliegt es auch, über eine künftige Erweiterung des Teilnehmerkreises über diese Gruppe hinaus zu befinden.

Es wird ein kurzer Überblick über den Seitenaufbau, die Navigation und die Benutzung der Website gegeben und es werden die Pläne zur Weiterentwicklung der Seite dargestellt.

Abstract:

Euromuse is an internet portal to the temporary exhibitions of European museums. It has been developed over the last 1 1/2 year by a project team composed of members of 7 large European museums and it has been realised by the State Museums Berlin - Prussian Cultural Heritage. Its focus is a calendar of coming as well as already ongoing exhibitions. These as well as all information presented are exclusively selected by the participating museums, usually they are exhibitions of Europe-wide importance. Presently, it is mainly art and archaeological exhibitions since Euromuse is an organ of the "Réunion des organisateurs des grandes expositions - European chapter" of about 50 members of whom 2/3 are presently contributing. It is up to this group to decide upon a possible future enlargement of the participants beyond this group.

A short overview on the components of the Euromuse website, the design and the handling is being given as well as the plans for the future development of the site.

Somewhat inspired by the GABRIEL internet network of European National Libraries, the idea was born some time ago why not to try some similar internet presence for museums.

After a process of studying different approaches (e.g. such including thematic sections), technical feasibility, and organisational matters (participation, workload, responsibilities), the shape began to become visible of what can now be seen on the internet as www.euromuse.net. It has been soft-launched in September 2001.

The actual project work on the system as it stands now started about 1 1/2 years ago. A **project team** had formed of representatives of

- the National Gallery, London,
- Le Musée du Louvre, Paris,
- La Réunion des Musées nationaux, Paris,
- Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen,
- Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien,
- Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam,
- Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

These are some main features of Euromuse:

The focus of Euromuse is on being a **calendar of exhibitions**. Its main aim is to feature and publicise the ongoing and planned exhibitions of the participating museums. It is entirely the museums' choice which exhibitions they wish to publicise through Euromuse. In general, those exhibitions are being chosen which can rightfully be felt to be not just of local, but of Europe-wide importance.

As of now, Euromuse is featuring mainly special exhibitions though also providing a little bit of reference to the permanent exhibitions, the "continuous face" of the museums.

Related to that calendar, **information on the museums** that host the exhibitions, **news** related to them, electronic **shops**, and recommended further **electronic resources** are featured in Euromuse.

At present, Euromuse is the platform of a specific museum organisation, the "Réunion des organisateurs des grandes expositions". This is a network of art museums, and more specifically of large museums whose daily work includes the organisation of numerous voluminous exhibitions as well as, often, the travelling of such exhibitions to many places. This organisation presently comprises 60 to 70 museums around the world.

But as the name says, Euromuse is a European internet portal to museum exhibitions. It has been the definite intention to create a **European** portal, a focus that strengthens common European identity and cultural communication.

Out of the need felt to discuss practical matters that specifically concern European museums there grew the "European Chapter" of the "Réunion des organisateurs des grandes expositions". Euromuse was attached to that chapter and presently represents the exhibitions of 67 institutions which are part of the museums in the "European chapter". This is because what forms one entity "The x museum" often consists of many branches, different buildings, attached special collections housed in remote locations, etc. For example, the State Museums Berlin count as one museum but are actually composed of 16 individual museums.

Being linked to the European chapter of that organisation does, however, not at all preclude that in future, further European museums not members of that group could well be included into Euromuse. The rich diversity and the sheer number of museums in Europe might slightly suggest such future development.

Euromuse is a real network in the sense that it does provide some central editing functions but all information on exhibitions and on the museums is being provided exclusively by the partners themselves. The National Gallery in London ensures the editing of the English language part at this moment, at the time of start of the system.

In Euromuse, currently all the navigation is in English. The information on the museums and the exhibitions is provided in two languages (the local language and English). At present, we have partners from ten European countries in which seven different languages are spoken. Therefore, there are seven different languages in the system. Speaking of the cultural variety in Europe as a central aspect it is clear that high priority should be given in the further Euromuse development to implementing full multilinguality of the system in more languages than English.

The State Museums of Berlin and especially the Institute for Museum Studies presently take care of the development and maintenance of the Euromuse Website. At the next meeting of the European group in February 2002, the results then achieved will be evaluated and it will be decided how to proceed.

The components of the Euromuse website, the design and the handling

A central component of the Euromuse, and one of the first to encounter, is the navigation line on top of the page which is permanently visible on all subsequent screens. It contains six buttons to reach each section of the site from each screen. From left to right the buttons are: 'home', 'exhibitions', 'museums', 'news', 'resources' and 'shops'.

In general, each screen is divided into two or three blocks. The upper one is always related to the section where you are, i.e. 'exhibitions', 'news', 'resources', 'shops', or 'museums'.

The lower part of the screen shows on the left the entry page to the participating museums, offers in the middle a "myCalendar" function, and on the right further information on Euromuse, i.e. an "about" text, the disclaimer, information on copyright etc..

When you enter the section 'Exhibitions', intended as the central function of Euromuse, the small navigation line indicates that this is the exhibition section and offers four different possibilities to choose from the calendar: 'today', 'now running', 'coming soon' and 'all exhibitions'. The entry page offers those exhibitions within the calendar which open very soon.

The following options are offered to **choose exhibitions**: by date (using the interactive calendar), by topic or by country (using the pull-down menus offered). Besides these tools, three or four exhibitions opening very soon are short-listed on the actual screen from which you start using these options. In all cases, the title of the exhibition is offered in English and in the original language of the exhibition.

Now, the user has the possibility to click on the title to get more information: either in the exhibition's language or in English. The short list of current exhibition openings is still visible; underneath, a new section opens to display a short abstract of the exhibition (together with an image), information on its running time, the location, the museum, co-organisers, etc.

A 'read more' button offers the possibility to view more text, the opening hours as web-links, as well as the logo of the institution which presents this temporary exhibition.

The entry page to the 'museum' section contains an interactive map which makes it possible to choose a city and to find out which museums are Euromuse partners there. Pull-down menus allow the search by country or by name.

The information provided consists of the museum logo which is linked to the museum's own homepage, a summary description of the museum, its location and accessibility, and a link to its exhibitions.

Possible next steps of the Euromuse developments

Having said this, what are the coming steps which we envisage to extend euromuse ? What are the next cornerstones for us to add to the system ?

Obviously, building on the experience so far and putting it to good use, the first goal for the immediate future will be consolidation of the system, with still a period of expansion and update of the site by including more museums, more exhibitions and additional news and resources to make frequent visits worthwhile. Keeping euromuse posted as a new, attractive tool which continues to be up-to-date in respect of contents, presentation and technology will be the continuous goal. By such quality control and by retaining the critical mass of participating museums,. Euromuse can hope to achieve long-term customer loyalty.

As it stands now, there are, then, 4 main directions for further development:

- seek as much user-orientation as possible,
- more personalization of the service
- more languages, more content
- strengthen coomNet, our professional tool.

1) If we are able to get additional funding – and we will try the European Union for that –, it is worth trying to intensify the personalisation of the system (a slight start of this is already the MyCalendar function, allowing to copy important exhibition dates directly into your personal electronic calendar).

Each of these platforms would certainly have their own specific users. E.g., mobile phone users might specifically be interested in information on events geographically close to their present location.

Another aspect of personalization are "e-cards", greeting messages users send to persons they know, which the system allows them to generate and to design themselves.

An obvious next step will be the "Multi-channelling" of the system, i.e. output of the information will be possible - and can be accessed - on multiple platforms: on the PC screen as presently, on mobile phones (WAP), on hand-held (palm-top) devices, etc.

A closely related step will be reminder messages on your mobile that a certain exhibition closes or opens soon. These are initiated upon your request and are automatically generated by the system.

A further step to imagine is the use of technology to connect euromuse to interactive TV. It will be possible to install in existing TV channels an interactive "museum" window and to offer, e.g. 10 to 15 min. short videos prepared by the museums or for specific exhibitions.

Thought should also be given to broaden the accessibility of Euromuse by creating access tools for disabled people.

2) Europe is an area defined by many languages and many cultures, a multitude which undoubtedly must be respected, the more so by a provider of cultural content. Euromuse as a

whole presently operates in the modern lingua franca, English, and in the national language for the contribution of each specific museum. A major next step required is the provision of the full Euromuse content, and of its full navigation, in further languages, such as French, Spanish, German, Italian.

3) A clearly stimulating goal for a system which is so much concerned with disseminating - museum-based - cultural content is the installation of an automated Newsletter addressed to a certain profile of users. This, as an offspring of Euromuse, would be generated from a user's defined interest profile over the total Euromuse News content. Such further development, however, is dependent on the future availability of a full-time human editor: for features so deeply touching on the issue of content and quality, there is no other possibility of bringing them to life.

Also interesting from the point of view both of increased service and expanded contents would be a function which allows more in-depth search of the websites of the museums participating in Euromuse. And it is in the consequence of technical development that the Euromuse portal may in future well function for integrated access simultaneously to several independent databases in the museum field.

Aiming at as much as possible indexing of Euromuse sites by web search engines goes without saying in this context.

coomNet - a professional service backing Euromuse

Euromuse stands on a second "foot", so to speak. It has coomNet, envisaged as a network for professional co-operation, at its side. While Euromuse is an internet portal for the general public, it is equally important not to forget the strengthening and full application in the future development, of the tool created for future direct online communication between museum professionals: "coomNet", which has been created for such need, and which should provide a suitable basis to discuss and plan matters of exhibition planning and museum maintenance - for matters which require a password-protected, closed instrument of internet communication.