

AUSTRIAS CULTURAL INFORMATION SYSTEM AEIOU
3 YEARS OF ONLINE EXPERIENCE

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The earliest recorded mentioning of the name of Austria in its early German form of "Ostarrichi" dates back to a deed of gift of the year 996 covering the rights of possession of a piece of land in the present area of Lower Austria. This 1000th anniversary of Austria's "name day" was celebrated in 1996 in many ways. It was also the inspiring idea for the present Cultural Information System AEIOU.

Under the title of "Cultural Information System AEIOU" (<http://www.aeiou.at>) all projects proposed in the context of the Austrian Millenium 1996 dealing with the electronic representation of data related to culture were brought together in one unified project. The following criteria were used for selection:

- contribution to national identity
- international interest
- presentation of aspects of Austria's present, past and future
- creation of lasting values.

The technical platform for AEIOU is the distributed information system Hyperwave, which was created at the Institute for Information Processing and Computer Supported New Media (IICM) at Graz University of Technology, Styria. HyperWave offers unique possibilities for search and navigation through huge databases like AEIOU. IICM has also helped with the integration of the contents and the creation of the links.

The basis of all the materials is the "Österreich-Lexikon", a concise Austrian encyclopedia newly edited in 1995 and published by an Editors Association (13,000 text contributions and 2000 pictures). One of the main tasks of this encyclopedia is to present the positive as well as the negative aspects of 20th century Austria, and to give credit to Austrians who brought about political, cultural, social and economic progress. It is equally important, however, to maintain the discourse about past and present ills of Austrian society and other critical developments. For this purpose a team of editors is in charge of updating the entries in the online *version several times a year* in order to provide the latest information on all aspects of Austria.

For the music section, an Austrian history of music with examples of music from the beginnings to the present was prepared by the Institute of Musicology at the University of Graz. In addition, the Austrian music teacher Manfred Schilder has prepared works of Austrian composers for multimedia presentation according to the principle "seeing - understanding - hearing - experiencing".

The Institute of Research into the Material Culture and Everyday Life of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period of the Austrian Academy of Sciences has prepared a vast amount of pictorial material with detailed descriptions covering 1000 years of Austrian history.

Many key words of the encyclopedia are illustrated by video clips selected by the Austrian Federal Institute for Scientific Film from historic film material at the Austrian Film Archive in Laxenburg. Likewise, suitable modern material from the Archive of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) was included.

Other contributions to the Cultural Information System were made by the Austrian Tourist Board, which presents its collection of photos of Austria. The Austrian Postal and Telegraph Administration contributed a synopsis of its special-issue stamps from 1986 to 1996. The Sigmund Freud Society prepared a biography of Sigmund Freud and the Museum of Applied Art created a data base of living Austrian designers.

The system as it stands today is not a closed system but is the nucleus of a comprehensive information system on Austria which can be enlarged in depth as well as in size to encompass new subjects at a later time. The material presented is intended to demonstrate the multitude of possibilities and usage of multimedia systems. In view of future enlargements, discussions with various contributors are being held on an ongoing basis.

Since the project started as an Austrian contribution to the celebration of the Austrian Millennium, most of the material was only available in German at the beginning. However, since the worldwide feedback was very positive, ongoing efforts are being developed to provide an English translation.

Two thirds of the translation of the encyclopedia are already finished. It was not an easy task because many of the lexical entries needed additional information to make them understandable for foreign users. The experiences made by the team of translators headed by Michèle Kaiser-Cooke produced a new scientific approach in translating this special kind of cultural information.

One of the newest additions is an interactive timeline of approx. 5000 biographical entries of the encyclopedia. The biodata of famous Austrians were categorized and visualized synchronously, a new possibility of access to the original data. Very soon, a virtual guided tour will also be added that would enable the user to enjoy an informational parade through interesting epochs of Viennese literature.

Worldwide, the user statistics clearly shows great acceptance. Last year the number of user sessions increased to almost 100 000 per month with an average session duration of about 15 minutes and the number of page impressions was about 300 000 per month. Examining the keywords entered by users in search engines gives also an interesting insight. Of course, many are searching for famous Austrian composers or the Venus of Willendorf. However, during the last Alpine Skiing World Championship the name „Flachau“, the birthplace of Hermann Maier, was a keyword used very frequently. AEIOU has visitors from about 100 countries all over the world with United States and Germany as the most active countries. It is interesting to mention that in the United States, genealogical research is very popular and as a matter of fact we are receiving many e-mail inquiries about family names which often can only be found in the Austrian encyclopedia.

Besides the video album, the “Musik-Kolleg” – a collection of musical works is likewise popular. It was utilized as a medium of instruction and learning in a German school in Guatemala. Here in Germany, it can be found on teachers’ networks as well as cited by students of music in their research papers.

The information system is not a one-way line. It enables the user to participate actively by directly contributing entries which are relevant to the theme or topic. These entries are then checked and validated before they are finally integrated. Undoubtedly, through this method, the information system increases dynamically.