

APEnet

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The APEnet project is over – Long live the Archives Portal Europe

The APEnet project presents the Archives Portal Europe – A single gateway to the original documents of European history.

The APEnet project has come to a successful conclusion and the main goal of the project – the Archives Portal Europe – is a fully functional portal now up and running at www.archivesportaleurope.eu.

At the moment the portal contains more than 14 million descriptive units linked to approximately 64 million digitised pages of archival material. Currently featuring the materials of 60 institutions from 14 European countries, the portal is now a major actor on the European cultural heritage scene.



Jef Schram, Jill Cousins and Martin Berendse on the APEnet developments:

Jef Schram at the Secretariat-General of the European Commission has followed the development of the project closely and says that the Archives Portal Europe is one of the keystones of cooperation between the National Archives of the EU member states and is supported by a Council recommendation of November 2005. The European Commission warmly welcomes the creation of the portal by the APEnet project consortium as an important step towards providing online access to our joint European archival heritage. The European archival community intends to build further on the success of APEnet in the ambitious new APEX project.

Jill Cousins, the Executive Director of the Europeana Initiative states that: Archives Portal Europe is a wonderful initiative, opening up the world of archives to the world. It has brought together major archives across Europe to solve interoperability issues to create ease of access for the user. It is also a major contributor to the success of Europeana. By ensuring that the archival material is also available alongside our other cultural heritage material from museums and libraries Archives Portal Europe gives breadth and depth to Europeana in a sustainable way.

Martin Berendse, National Archivist of the Netherlands and President of ICA believes that the goal to provide joint access to European archives through a common portal has been broad and ambitious. It is an achievement to have the basic infrastructure set up, including an already impressive amount of content made available via an appealing interface. This could only be accomplished by a strong consortium of partners by combining their interests and skills. The overwhelming amount of colleague National Archival institutions wanting to join the follow-up project APEX is proof of the success of the overall concept as laid down by the APENet consortium. The next challenge is to expand the Archives Portal Europe as a publication platform for all European institutions holding archival material and the 'de facto' archives domain aggregator for Europeana.

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First production release of the Archives Portal Europe

With the major functionality upgrade of the intermediate November release as a basis, the APENet team continued improving and fine-tuning the Archives Portal Europe, focusing on usability and multilingualism,, resulting in a fully functional and well documented portal containing state-of-the-art features such as:

- **Extensive auto-completion and auto-suggestion functionalities** based on the full content of the portal, to assist users by suggesting related or similar search terms when they enter their own. This helps them to navigate the huge amount of archival material already available and shows them the richness of the content as well as representing a first step towards multilingualism.

- A **navigated search**, an innovative way of searching, enabling the users to select countries and archives for their search. It furthermore allows users to browse the archival material within the framework of its original structures and to directly access the full display of all holdings guides and finding aids available, in order to evaluate these documents before including them in a search. With this new approach users can easily select all kinds of combinations of whole countries and particular institutions and include all their material in a search via a single step.
- A user-friendly **list view** for giving access to search results in a Google-like way, offering a variety of options to either sort or refine search results as best fitting the user's needs to narrow down as quickly as possible to those results in which he/she is most interested.
- A smart **preview function** giving access to additional details of the search results in the pages of the "list view" and the "context view" via 'mouse-over' functionality, which also enables users to immediately switch to a particular search result in the full context of its finding aid.
- A basic **user registration functionality** for users to register themselves in order to be able to store search queries to be used later.
- An extensive help facility or **navigation guide** in several languages, explaining the most important functionality of the portal in detail as well as how to use it in the best possible way.
- An improved **Directory** section which now also facilitates the inclusion of information on archival institutions not yet contributing to the Archives Portal Europe as well as links to national and regional portals and overviews of archival institutions, thus starting to fully document the European archival landscape, visualised by capturing all that information in a Google map.

Dashboard access handed over to partners



The most visible part of the Archives Portal Europe is of course the front-end but the APENet team has not forgotten to improve the portal's back-end as well. The "Dashboard", which gives content providers the opportunity to upload, convert, validate, index and publish their data themselves, is also more user-friendly now and in addition, it is loaded with many extra features which makes it much easier for content providers to manage the data they want to publish via the Archives Portal Europe and Europeana.

During the Communicating Archival Metadata conference in Stockholm in June and the CITRA conference in Toledo in October of last year, the APENet team organised workshops to show the partners and representatives of other interested archival institutions how to use the Archives Portal Europe's Dashboard. As a result of this, the APENet team had already transferred the responsibility for the data administration to each individual partner after the intermediate November release of the Archives Portal Europe, providing them with full control over the processing of their data via the Dashboard. With the release of the first production version and representatives of the APENet consortium partners behind the buttons of the Dashboard, the Archives Portal Europe can now truly fulfill its role as a publication platform for European archives.

Update of the Data Preparation Tool to be released

In order to enable the content providers to integrate the preparation of data for the Archives Portal Europe and for Europeana as much as possible in their usual workflows, the APENet project has – in addition to the centrally used Dashboard – developed a standalone version of the project's tools, the Data Preparation Tool. This desktop application can be downloaded and installed on any local standalone computer in order to enable content providers to convert finding aids from locally used data formats to the formats as defined for the use within the Archives Portal Europe, to create holdings guides based on their finding aids or to create information pages on the archival institutions themselves encoded in EAG (Encoded Archival Guide). In the upcoming release of the Data Preparation Tool, these functionalities will be further enhanced by steps to prepare data for publication on the Europeana portal. The tool will become available for download as version 1.1 via the project website www.apenet.eu (section "About us > Developments").





Europeana interoperability now ESE v3.4 compatible and fully active

Finalising the interoperability with Europeana, the APENet team has upgraded the APENet EAD to ESE functionality to make it compatible with the current Europeana metadata format, ESE v3.4, and has successfully tested the Archives Portal Europe's OAI-PMH interface in cooperation with the Europeana ingestion team. So the APENet consortium partners can now start using the built-in APENet EAD to ESE functionality in the Archives Portal Europe's Dashboard to forward their data to Europeana. It is envisaged to transfer data from at least two more APENet project partners –Sweden and Spain – to Europeana via this facility during the next few weeks.

Content Checker remains available

In addition to the Stockholm and Toledo workshops and in order to enable the APENet consortium partners to familiarise themselves with the functionality of the Archives Portal Europe's Dashboard before they embarked on managing their data in the intermediate November release, the APENet team had set up a complete demo environment of the Archives Portal Europe software on a dedicated webserver of the Nationaal Archief in the Netherlands.

This demo environment, called Content Checker, contained all functionality of the "real" Archives Portal Europe (except for the OAI-PMH functionality) and provided the partners with the opportunity to educate themselves in using the possibilities of data administration and publication via the Archives Portal Europe without any consequence for their "real" data set in the November release.

The APENet team is happy to announce that this demo service will be continued and not only for all APENet consortium partners, but also for any institution interested in exploring the possibilities of the Archives Portal Europe as a publication platform for archival content.





4th and Final General Assembly held in Madrid

The first production release of the Archives Portal Europe with all its accompanying tools and facilities was presented to the APENet project partners during the 4th and Final General Assembly of the APENet project held on 12 January 2012 in Madrid. All partners present at this meeting will continue to work jointly on the further enhancement of the Archives Portal Europe with regard to its functionalities and the content available via the portal within the framework of the APEx project. Therefore the last General Assembly was not only an occasion to show and discuss the common goals achieved so far, but also to look to the future of the Archives Portal Europe.

APENet goes APEx

While the entire APENet technical team was finalising the Archives Portal Europe's production release, the APENet Project Management Team negotiated with the European Commission on the terms for the follow-up project, APEx (Archives Portal Europe network of eXcellence).

The APEx project will continue the work of the APENet project but will also focus on expanding the Archives Portal Europe network by getting more partners/countries on board, helping regional and local institutions holding archival content to publish their data via the Archives Portal Europe and thus forwarding more archival data towards Europeana. The first stated objective has already been reached (more or less) because the APEx consortium will consist of the national archival institutions of 28 European countries, plus ICARUS. The fact that all those institutions – among which almost all APENet consortium partners – were very eager to cooperate within the new project can be considered as a major success of the APENet project.

It is expected that the ongoing negotiations will be concluded successfully with the signing of the APEx Grant Agreement mid-February, after which the project will officially start on 1 March 2012 and will be kicked-off by a series of meetings mid-March in The Hague, to be organised by the Nationaal Archief (The Netherlands), which will take the lead in the new project. More details about the APEx project will be made available in due course at www.apex-project.eu.

You can find a comprehensive overview of the Archives Portal Europe [here](#) ([PDF-document](#)). Read more about the APENet project development in the public reports [here](#).



APENet is a collaboration between [nineteen European national archives](#) and [Europeana](#).