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## NEXT GENERATION EUROPEANS – ARCHIVAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

### Abstract

**Purpose:** In 2013, the Historical Archives of the European Union embarked on a new experience by introducing an education programme for primary and secondary school students. In preparing this unprecedented programme, archival staff reflected on how to combine elements of civic education, history and archival memory on the European Union and its institutions to an appealing programme for young European citizens. An assessment of existing literature and of education programmes run by other Archives in Europe showed that much more could be done by the archival profession to raise interest and engagement of young learners with the archival world.

**Approach:** This paper investigates into the various existing approaches, aims and goals of archival educational programmes and, thus, contextualises the educational activities of the Historical Archives of the European Union with those of other Archives. Furthermore, the paper addresses specific issues and challenges related to the management of archival education programmes in a transnational European context.

**Results:** The Historical Archives of the European Union faces particular challenges due to the geographical scope of the European Union, its multilingualism and the diversity of existing approaches of EU Member States in the field of education activities. The in-presence programme of the archives mainly targets schools in the proximity of the metropolitan area of Florence. At the same time, the archives have the ambition to reach out to schools throughout the European Union and to organise workshops for schools in other EU Member States.

**Conclusion:** While school students are not considered a primary target audience, archives should have a keen interest in involving young learners that represent new generations of potential users and supporters of the unique mission of archives in democratic societies.

**Keywords:** international archives, school students, communication, education, archival pedagogy

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, the Historical Archives of the European Union offers educational programmes designed for school students at all ages, reaching from kindergarten to high school levels. The students are introduced to main historical topics related to the history of European integration and to the decision-making processes and policies of EU institutions by using original documents preserved at the Archives. The programme provides space for discussion, reflection and learning about Europe and its values, and promotes active European citizenship.

To translate the topic of European Union to students, the HAEU seeks partnerships with specialised pedagogical institutions, local, regional and national school authorities, and European organisations, such as the Former Member Association of the European Parliament. The latter collaboration involves former Members of European Parliament who meet school students participating in the programme and share their experience in European politics and their views on the European Union.

This paper analyses archival education programmes and defines school students as target audience for archival communication and education activities. Moreover, the paper outlines the strategic objectives and learning outcomes of archival education programmes, identifies potential partners and stakeholders in developing such activities, and looks at the variety of methodological approaches to be considered, particularly looking at the challenges of educating future Europeans in an archival context.

## 1 ARCHIVAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The mission of Archives concerns primarily the preservation of records of public institutions and private organisations, and the provision of access and research on these unique materials. While school students are certainly not a main target audience of Archives, since years there is growing reciprocal interest between schools and Archives, particularly in the framework of extra-curricular activities. School authorities consider that visiting archives could bring students closer to original sources as historical memory and cultural heritage preserved therein. Bastian Adam states:

„In den vergangenen Jahren zeigte sich der begrüßenswerte Trend, Archive zunehmend in den Rang der außerschulischen Lernorte zu nobilitieren bzw. stärker in schulische Kontexte zu integrieren ... Tatsächlich gestaltet sich der Einsatz von Archivalien bzw. Archivbesuchen jedoch zumeist als marginale Initiative einzelner engagierter Lehrerinnen und Lehrer und vollzieht sich oft ‚lediglich‘ im Rahmen von Geschichtswerkstätten, AGs oder innerhalb von Projektwochen“ (Adam, 2011).

Archivists have an interest in opening their treasures to new generations and young learners to prepare them on the one hand for active citizenship and their future roles and responsibilities in democratic societies, on the other hand to raise their knowledge and critical thinking as regards information given in schoolbooks with sometimes subjective or biased points of view. Archivists may act as educators and take an active role in front of school classes (Robyns, 2001). Peter Carini says:

“For too long, archivists have limited themselves to a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, a neutral approach that simply introduces students to the rules and tools of research. It is time we expand the concepts of the archivist’s role as educator” (Carini, 2009).

The earliest public instructions for schools to visit archives dates from 1880 in Belgium. The ministerial instruction asked school principals to visit historical exhibitions organised by public archives as activity additional to regular school teaching. In

1912, a similar instruction, this time by the French Government, informed teachers on the potential of visiting archives for the teaching of history. It was the French archival community that took the activity forward. In 1950, the French National Archives introduced for the first time a systematic education programme, which, since 1952, was also introduced in departmental and municipal archives. Regular Education Services were established in these archives, initially equipped with teachers detached from their schools and charged with the preparation of historical exhibitions using archives, accompanying texts, and guided tours for students. In 1988, 88 such services existed in departmental archives and 11 in municipal archives. Statistics show the success of the initiative with 30.000 students visiting archives in 1958, 200.000 in 1979, and 300.000 students in 2014.

A first international round table conference on "Archives and Education" took place in Paris in 1954 and various Western European archives started introducing similar initiatives. While British schools had previously, in 1906, introduced source books with printed extracts from original archival documents to supplement regular school text books, regular publications of primary sources were produced for school classrooms since the 1960s. In the United States, the National Archives and Records Administration NARA started in the 1970s, in partnership with the National school administration, to integrate the use of primary sources into school curricula (Carini, 2009).

In Germany, a yearly Conference on archival pedagogy (Archivpädagogik) was introduced in 1986, and since 1998 the conference has been organized on a yearly basis by the Working Group „Archivpädagogik und historische Bildungsarbeit“ at the German Archivist Association 'Verein Deutscher Archivare VDA' (Franz, 1990; Pétillat & Guigueno, 2016).

## 2 SCHOOL STUDENTS AS TARGET AUDIENCE

Archivists reach out to the research community and to citizens. They communicate publicising their role in preserving and making accessible the written memory of public institutions or private bodies and persons. But what can archivists offer to young people? This is the leading question for archivists to reflect on the introduction of archival education programmes.

These programmes can reach school students at all levels and ages, from kindergarten through elementary, primary and secondary, up to high school. School students would normally know just the archival documents preserved by their own family, and see, if at all, otherwise archival documents only in public exhibitions. Archival education programmes, instead, valorise school students as future citizens with political rights and responsibilities that have a stake in the mission of archives, particularly the public ones, and might return to Archives as potential users (Cook, 1997).

Teachers and school principals play a key role for archives in reaching out to students. Teachers in particular may have a keen interest to learn about historical records and the research potential in archives, and may wish to find out in which ways archives can be used for their teaching purposes in a curricular or extra-curricular context. Parents, family and friends of school students obtain a role as multipliers for spreading the information and learning opportunities in archives (Bröckling, 2011).

The opening of Archives towards the school environment is a rather recent development and is part of a general trend of archives to move from material-centered towards user-centered services. Moreover, the teaching and research offers of archives are not the main target of teachers and curriculum developers, scholarly interest in archives is, therefore, mostly part of extra-curricular activity offers in schools.

The role of archival education programmes, particularly for secondary and high school classes, but also for undergraduate university students, is to present archival evidence, confront the primary sources with the interpretations provided by historians and schoolbook authors, and assist the young learners with the shaping of their own informed opinions. An important element of these programmes is, therefore, the production of teaching material based on primary sources for scholarly use (Şentürk, 2013; Spraggs, 2008).

Extra-curricular school activities depend on the availability of human, financial and time resources on both sides, at archives and in schools. Furthermore, a certain decline of teaching history in national can be noted in recent years, which limits archival education activities. Finally, the current Covid pandemic puts at risk the tradition in-presence and hands-on approach of archival visits and requires a re-thinking of educational offers towards online and virtual programmes. More needs to be done to broaden the scientific basis, to evolve common pedagogical standards and best practice, and to provide archivists with an appropriate education and training in this sector (Schaller, 2019).

### 3 OBJECTIVES OF ARCHIVAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Archival education programmes are usually conceived as extra-curricular activities. They contribute and supplement in-class teaching by enriching the students' knowledge and critical understanding of historical events and processes. Offering access to the Archives to schools also bears advantages for the archival institution. It can broaden its public profile and raise public awareness by creating a positive image and appreciation of its services to citizens.: „Archive leisten somit einen einzigartigen Beitrag zur außerschulischen Bildungsarbeit und tragen dazu bei, dass wichtige Schlüsselqualifikationen, wie z. B. Recherche und Informationskompetenz, gefördert werden“ (Sturm, 2011).

In running school programmes, archives facilitate the autonomous acquisition of competences and skills that otherwise could not be developed in a classroom context. Using authentic and original documents for educational purposes facilitates the students' critical research and interpretation and allows for a student-centered learning approach on different local, regional, national and transnational levels. While this extra-curricular activity cannot replace the history lessons in school, it certainly enriches the students' experiences and analytical skills in the interpretation of historical texts and in drawing lessons for the present and future (Adam, 2011).

The programmes also enhance research competences, the appropriate use of inventories and catalogues, reading and transcription skills and critical analysis of texts and interpretation of facts. The hands-on experience with original documents enriches the textbook learning, confronts students with the original sources, and provides them with an open space for reflection, discussion, and interpretation. Archival education may also provide aspects of civic education, foster an active citizenship and deliver a better knowledge and positive attitude towards the values, principles and functioning of democratic societies, its legislative, executive and judicial pillars.

The production of outputs, such as posters, articles, oral or visual documentaries or presentations, can be additional success factors for these programmes (Berkessel, 2021).

### 4 ACTORS AND PARTNERS

A successful education programmes requires a close cooperation between archivists, pedagogical specialists, teachers and principals, school authorities and other potential partners. The French approach developed in the 1950s sought to detach school teachers

to form the first education services in public archives, while more recently the education services in Archives consist of part-time or full-time staff dedicated to the development of pedagogical programmes and materials.

These teams may consist of teachers and trainers, pedagogical specialists, and archivists. During the sessions with students, the professional teams can be supported by peer students from school or university.

In addition to specialized pedagogical services, archives may also establish partnerships with relevant organizations and associations that can transmit first-hand historical experience, knowledge, and testimonials, particularly if the archival education programme covers contemporary history.

School administrations on national, regional and local levels should be consulted and become partners in order to achieve successful archival education programmes. The close cooperation facilitates the selection of topics to be studied, the pedagogical approach, and the relevant methods (Sturm, 2011).

Archives may also consider partnering in Erasmus school exchange programmes or in twinning activities between municipalities, which often comprise school exchange and extra-curricular initiatives.

## 5 METHODOLOGY

Archival education programmes are based on the idea to provide school students a hands-on learning experience using primary sources and to reflect and debate on historical events in a way different to how history is presented in school manuals and textbooks in a classroom environment. The methodologies used can be multifold and may comprise visits to the archives, its facilities and storage vault, interactive and participatory workshops, visits to historical or documentary exhibitions. The activities are organised either in presence or using interactive, audio-visual and online resources (Sturm, 2011).

Archival education programmes comprise a variety of methods for a student-centered learning approach reaching from face-to-face to remote learning. The visits to the archives can be enriched adding interviews with depositors and witnesses of contemporary historical events, potentially combined with oral history initiatives. The exchange can also include other professions, such as historians, or other archives users.

Teacher training programmes should be an integral part of the archives' education offers. These programmes deepen the teachers' knowledge in the chosen topics, familiarise them with the activities of Archives, and prepare later school class visits to the archives.

The use of audiovisual material, posters and drawings facilitates the students' access to archival material. Dedicated programmes can be established for students with special educational needs and disabilities. All programmes should entail the production of tangible outputs, such as creative writing, films or audio projects, playwriting, drawings and posters. Finally, the education activities should undergo regular monitoring and evaluation exercises within the archives (Sturm, 2011).

## 6 ESTABLISHING AN ARCHIVAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME FOR YOUNG EUROPEANS

The Historical Archives of the European Union preserves and makes accessible the historical documents of EU institutions, bodies and agencies. It also collects private archives from organisations and individuals that contribute to European integration and facilitates the consultation of primary sources on the history of European integration in a central and single location.

European integration is not generally taught as part of school curricula in European Union Member States. While European integration could be taught in schools within contemporary history it is more likely a subject of civic education, introducing students to the European Union, its institutions and decision-making processes. Since the European Union has no 'acquis' in the education sector, school curricula are under the control of EU Member States. The EU only has an informal role, in particular in the field of transnational mobility of students within the Erasmus programmes, or as part of European twinning initiatives.

The concept of European archival education programmes targets a highly diverse, multi-cultural and multi-lingual audience in a political space comprising approximately 400 Million EU citizens. Furthermore, a European programmes is challenged to connect the individual experiences of students beyond their local, regional and national context towards a transnational European narrative. The personal or family history of school students needs to be associated to historical events and processes in the supranational European sphere.

Under such circumstances, the Historical Archives chose the subject of common European societal values, such as human dignity, democracy, solidarity, tolerance, justice, and the rule of law. As a contemporary experience, teaching European integration in an archival context is open to the involvement of former political actors, who may be depositors of their private papers. They can provide a testimony of their political ambitions and actions for a united Europe. As organiser and curator of exhibitions on European integration, the Historical Archives of the European Union uses these materials to illustrate in a visually appealing way European Union to school students.

The primary geographical scope of in-presence education activities of the Historical Archives refers to the territory of its seat, Florence and Tuscany. Open for all school levels from kindergarten to upper secondary schools and promoted by the Municipality of Florence and the Metropolitan City of Florence, the programme aims at improving the knowledge on the history of European integration and promotes the understanding of active European citizenship. The lessons are based on original documents preserved at the archives, and the programme provides space for common reflections and discussions. The archives also organise training sessions, mostly online, for teachers, that cover subjects of specific curricular interest and organise online workshops for school classes outside the geographic scope that would allow for a physical visit to the archives.

The use of audio-visual materials, such as photos, posters, audio recordings or videos, as well as artefacts and objects from archival collections or brought along by the individual students help connecting the individual student's experience and knowledge to a European narrative: "If you can narrate something from your family, and then learn from your peers, you start to understand the connections among yourselves and with the history of Europe" (European University Institute, 2021a). The school programme helps young learners to understand what it means to be European and to realise that they themselves are actors and creators of tomorrow's Europe.

Topics covered by the HAEU's school programme change from year to year in line with main European political topics or events, and the archives also provides à-la-carte sessions on topics of specific interest to school classes or teachers. As an example, the 2018–2019 programme focused on the elections to the European Parliament, the activities of the 2019–2020 school year focused on the **free movement of persons** in the EU. Within few years after the start of the programme in 2013, it developed to registrations of 1.141 students from 58 classes in 24 Florentine schools in the school year 2019–2020, with the majority of students at upper secondary level.



Regular monitoring and the preparation of yearly evaluation reports are an integral part of the programme and serve to point out areas of potential improvement, such as the development of more interactive and online activities during the Covid pandemic and for schools outside the geographical Florentine scope.

The education programme is organised in close collaboration with the regional and local school authorities and the Former Member Association of the European Parliament. The cooperation with the latter association aims at providing students with the opportunity to meet a former Member of European Parliament and learn from his or her experience in European politics and their perception of the European Union, its history and institutions. In a session during the 2019–2020 programme, former MEP Niccolò Rinaldi said: "The European Union is either the future or it is nothing. This is why new generations must identify themselves with the process of European integration. The only way to keep a place in the sun in today's world is to be part of the European Union and to be a European citizen before being a citizen of its own country. Global forces, emerging powers, create an ever-greater need to affirm in the future our common identity of European destiny" (European University Institute, 2020).

The education programme also entails competitions amongst different schools on European topics. At the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rome Treaties in 2017, a competition was launched under the patronage of the Italian Prime Minister's Office and in cooperation with the Florence Metropolitan City for high schools on 'A New Treaty for Europe'. Participating classes proposed a new treaty text reforming the educational policies in the EU with a view of educating students towards a common European citizenship. 16 school classes from 10 different Florentine metropolitan schools participated in the project.

Tangible outputs are usually prepared during the workshop sessions at the archives by the participants, in particular visual material, written texts, drawings, videos and oral testimonials. The material is also shared with the public on the website of the archives. All materials produced as outputs of the education programme are gathered in a specific archival collection in order to serve as research material in the future (Material collection on free movement in the EU, 2020).

The education programme also connects to exhibitions prepared by the archives. The school year 2020/2021 focused on the theme of de facto solidarity, a key element of European integration. The multi-lingual exhibition "Europe and Europeans 1950–2020: 70th Anniversary of the Schuman Declaration" curated by the archives, served as background for the workshop activities. One student said: *"Europe for me is like the moon, almost always in sight, always present. It seems that it moves around you with little consequence, but in reality it contributes to our well-being in direct ways, although we may not realise it then and there"* (European University Institute, 2021).

## 7 CONCLUSION

The paper analysed the emergence, objectives, scope and methodologies of archival education programmes. School students are not a primary target audience for archival communication and education activities, but the author argues that archives have a keen interest in involving young learners that represent new generations of potential users and supporters of the unique mission of archives in democratic societies.

Amongst the numerous archives that manage educational activities for schools, the Historical Archives of the European Union faces particular challenges due to the geographical scope of the European Union, its multilingualism and the diversity of existing

approaches of EU Member States in the field of education. The in-presence programme of the archives mainly targets schools in the proximity of the metropolitan area of Florence. At the same time, the archives have the ambition to reach out to schools throughout the European Union and to organise workshop activities (mainly online) for schools in other EU Member States. Moreover, the archives are involved in Erasmus and twinning school projects and produces teaching materials in different languages.

The relevance of archival education programmes is broadly acknowledged, and numerous articles have been published on the topic by scholars and archival practitioners. Moreover, academic conferences and workshops have been organised on national and regional levels on a regular basis. Nonetheless, much still needs to be done in this field, in particular in preparing archivists and pedagogical experts for this specific field, in developing common approaches and scientific standards, and in sharing good practice on a transnational level.

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