ARCHIVE IM WEB FAHRUN Thomas Aigner, Stefanie Hohenbruck, Thomas Just und Joachim Kemper (Hgg.)



## Archive im Web – Erfahrungen, Herausforderungen, Visionen

# Archives on the Web – Experiences, Challenges, Visions

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Thomas Aigner, Stefanie Hohenbruck, Thomas Just und Joachim Kemper

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Towards the Creation of a Learning Environment within the Monasterium Project: Teaching Experiences of Diplomatics.

By Antonella Ambrosio

### Abstract

This article describes some learning experiences concerning the teaching of Diplomatics at the University of Naples Federico II initially within some traditional Diplomatics lectures and then within a complete course which is part of the Monasterium project. These experiences provided for the use of the EditMOM collaborative tool and are also useful for planning a Learning Environment in Diplomatics which will be completed in the next few years.

The new information and communication technologies have been inspiring us to reconsider the perspectives, methodologies and tools in academic teaching for some years. When teachers and students are involved in this new kind of learning, both of them are motivated to be creative, energetic and this creates a kind of renewal in teaching although it is true to say that the models, tools and methods for producing this renewal are not many in Italy at the moment.<sup>1</sup>

As regards the teaching of Diplomatics, it still seems to be done in a traditional way in Italy.<sup>2</sup> As far as the teaching of Diplomatics at the University of Naples Federico II is concerned, I have undertaken some new teaching activities since 2008. The first results look encouraging and they will hopefully inspire constructive discussions and useful ideas in the future.

The Monasterium project offers new technologies for this new kind of teaching.3

Ghislandi, Patrizia: Verso la eUniversity: Contributi per una nuova didattica universitaria. (Trento 2007).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For a close examination about the teaching of the discipline see: Ansani, Michele: L'insegnamento della Diplomatica nell'attuale assetto universitario. In: Scrineum Rivista 6 (2009) (accessed on December 30, 2010 at http://scrineum.unipv.it/rivista/6-2009/ansani.pdf).

About the Monasterium project see Monasterium.net portal (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://www.monasterium.net). See also: Heinz, Karl: Monasterium.net: Auf dem Weg zu einem mitteleuropäischen Utkundenportal. In: Digitale Diplomatik. Neue Technologien in der bistorischen Arbeit mit Urkunden, hg. von Georg Vogeler. In: Archiv für Diplomatik 12 (2009), pp. 40 – 55; Krah, Adelheid: Möglichkeiten der Bereitstellung und Erschließung von Urkundenbeständen. In: Archivalische Zeitschrift 91 (2009), pp. 221 – 246; Aigner, Thomas: Monasterium.Net-Documenti Europei online. In: Archivi V/2 (lug. -dic. 2010), pp. 123-128.

Being one of the many projects coordinated by ICARUS (International Centre for Archival Research), its main purpose for many years has been the digitization and the study of charters from the monastic or church archives which are gradually opening themselves to documentation by other sources. Sixty participants in ten European countries have worked to put more than 200.000 photographic reproductions of medieval and modern documents together with their metadata online at Monasterium.net.

When I began to work on this project in 2007, I coordinated the editing of some digital archives in Southern Italy<sup>4</sup>. These archives are the result of an interesting research in collaboration with archivists, researchers and young scholars. Innovative teaching activities based on this research have developed. During the academic year 2008-2009 I gave some lectures as part of the History course and, in the academic year 2009-2010, an entire course in order to experience these new teaching activities as part of the Master's degree in Library and Archival Science and Methodology of Research.

I do not intend to describe the contents and purposes of the lectures and of the course in detail here. I will rather emphasize how the Monasterium project and its new technologies helped to make Diplomatics teaching far richer and more stimulating than the course carried out in a traditional way.

I will describe in the first paragraph of this article how I used the EditMom tool in some lectures in regular teaching, while in the second paragraph how I used the same tool to cover a whole course of Diplomatics. Thanks to the results of these experiences in the next few years I will be able to plan a learning environment within the Monasterium project.

# I. Using the EditMOM collaborative tool within regular Diplomatics lectures

The first experiences took place within a traditional teaching model which remains dominant in the teaching of Diplomatics. The teaching model of Diplomatics is generally characterized by lectures usually given to a small group of students, during which students and teachers alternate and mix theoretical and practical work on facsimiles of medieval charters.

The only innovation introduced in this type of activity during my lectures was the use of the EditMOM tool which can be found online on the website Monasterium. net. It was, of course, necessary for the lectures to take place in a computer lab.

EditMom is an online XML editor based on Java. It allows you to process the data associated with documents reproduced on the website and allows collaborative

The digital archives are in Monasterium.net in the following section: Italia/Campania. There are: Archivio di Stato di Benevento, Archivio di Stato di Napoli (archivio virtuale del monastero dei SS. Pietro e Sebastiano), Biblioteca della Società Napoletana di Storia Patria, Archivio privato Carrano di Teggiano, Biblioteca del Seminario vescovile di Teggiano. Soon online: Archivio di Stato di Cagliari, Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli. See: Ambrosio, Antonella: Il progetto Monasterium in Italia: le prime esperienze a Napoli. In: Archivi V/2 (lug.-dic. 2010), pp. 129-145.

activities among several users, editors and moderators. EditMOM editors are archivists, scholars and students from various European countries led by moderators and experts in Archival Science and Diplomatics. They offer online archival description, abstracts and critical editions of charters. All the information produced in this way can be found on the website thanks to advanced net-surfing<sup>5</sup>.

I would like to report a concrete case of experience in the classroom represented by some lectures regarding one of the crucial issues of Diplomatics; the forms of the written document or, more precisely, the internal features or what Italian Diplomatics traditionally call 'caratteri intrinseci's.

Medieval documents, despite their inevitable differences, are known to have a certain typical structure. This structure must be carefully analyzed by scholars as it allows them to know the various stages of its genesis and the historical context in which it was produced. This is a useful operation to draw up the either traditional or digital critical edition of documents.

Diplomatics teachers are aware that it can be quite difficult to understand such contents well. Students could do the structural analysis of documents automatically enclosing it in a rigid system. Two further factors worsen the situation: the small number of hours dedicated to this type of activity in a course and the small number of documents, usually reproduced in facsimiles that can be viewed. All this may lead students to neglect the fact that, despite its typical formal structure, any medieval document is still a product of its own world and that it contains endless variations which need to be fully grasped and evaluated.

In our case, the lectures on the forms of the document were carried out with reproductions of some official documents and private deeds in archives currently online on the portal Monasterium net. They were analyzed within the editing area in which the project team members write documents data in EditMOM.

A papal document can be very effective way of illustrating the activity carried out during the course?

About the EditMOM tool: Burkard, Benjamin - Vogeler, Georg - Gruner, Stefan: Informatics for Historians: Tools for Medieval Document XML Markup, and their Impact on the History-Sciences. In: Journal of Universal Computer Science 14/2 (2007), pp. 193-210 (accessed on December 30, 2010 at http://www.jucs.org/jucs\_14\_2/informatics\_for\_historians\_tools); Burkard, Benjamin: Wiki goes Humanities. Kollaborative Erschließung mittelalterlicher Urkunden. In: Wikis im Social Web - Wikiposium, (2005/06), hg. v. Stockinger, Johann u. Leitner, Hclmut, (Wien 2007), pp. 130-144; Burkard, Benjamin: EditMOM - ein spezialisiertes Werkzeug zur kollaborativen Urkunden-Erschließung. In: Digitale Diplomatik, cit., pp. 255-270.

Milagros Cárcel Ortl, Maria, ed.: Vocabulaire international de la Diplomatique, Commission Internationale de Diplomatique, (Valencia 1994) Nr. 162, p. 51.

It is here used a papal document present online at Monasterium.net as example for the work carried out in the classroom. There are the litterae gratiosae by Honorius III saved at the Stiftsarchiv Reichersberg. The present transcription is not the online nineteenth-century one (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://www.mom-ca.uni-koeln.de/MOM-CA/show\_charterDetail\_Action.do?id=301852), but it has been remade according to up-to-date standards of edition. Thanks to Daniel Jeller's information about the photographic reproduction of the charter.

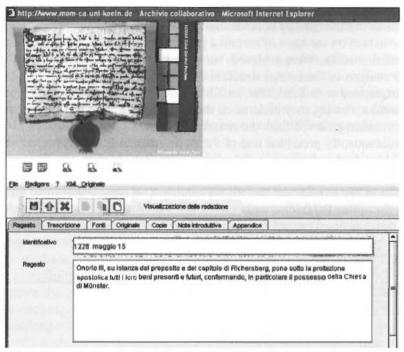


Picture 1: The litterae gratiosae by pope Honorius III in the portal Monasterium.net

The picture shows how the document can be viewed in EditMOM. Above, the enlarged photographic reproduction of the document in high definition can be seen and below one can see the transcription in the editing area in EditMOM.

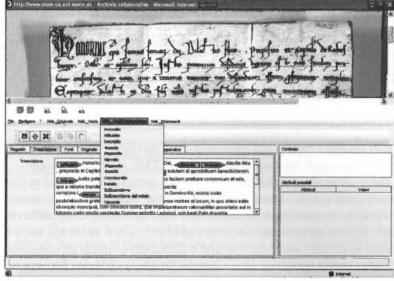
The vision is rich and stimulating. The picture permits the examination of the original document, where the color of ink and parchment, its external features, its condition, the shape and size of the seal make themselves available for in-depth analysis. It also gives an impression of the charm of the medieval document which is kept well in the archives.

Furthermore, the working area under the picture immediately casts the document in a very unusual perspective in a university classroom. This perspective is not only an exercise in Diplomatics, but it also allows students to take a broader view of documents. The presence of tabs (dedicated to abstracts, transcriptions, sources, originals, copies, etc.) in the editing area allows the detection of a great amount of data from documents. These findings are useful not only to students but also to a wider audience of portal users. This perspective was extremely appealing to students and useful in gaining their attention.



Picture 2: The vision of the document offered to students thanks to the EditMom tool.

It becomes now easy to proceed with the presentation of the internal features of the document. The presentation is facilitated by the markup operation performed in an intuitive way - thanks to the mouse cursor and to the drop-down menu, as you can see in the following picture.



Picture 3: The drop-down menu eases the possible way of encoding in EditMom

The next step was to invite students to make the transcription, the analysis of internal features and the markup of other charters on Monasterium.net. Finally, a search was carried out on the basis of certain a priori questions.

Different results were achieved, but students learned the methodology of diplomatic analysis of the formal structure of documents. At the same time, they became acquainted with EditMOM, an XML editor specifically developed for medieval charters. Finally, they understood the usefulness of markup and encoding using information gathered from the examined charters.

I subsequently presented one of the documents in EditMOM again showing them, firstly, how it appears in the editing area and, secondly, its XML encoded version.

I would like to point out that the underlying XML grammar cannot usually be seen in the online EditMOM tool.

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Picture 4: The XML file of the litterae gratiosae by pope Honorius III.

In this way students carried out the encoding of medieval charters in a simple and intuitive way although they were not experts in XML markup language.

In short, using the EditMOM tool within a group of traditional methodological lectures gives various benefits. The contents of the discipline are more appealing and readily recognizable by students who have now completely different preferences and intellectual approaches compared to only a few years ago since they are accustomed to dealing with the Web and collaborative virtual environments (such as Wikipedia, social networks, etc.). Complex learning concepts become less tiring to learn. Students really understand why medieval documents are particularly suit-

able for encoding with XML because of their formal structure.<sup>8</sup> They also experience how a digital environment could be useful in the historical research of online historical records and to carry out critical editions.<sup>9</sup>

An interesting aspect is the coexistence of various points of view from which the medieval document can be read in EditMOM. It can be seen simultaneously not only as an object of study, of research or of criticism, but also as a physical object produced by a particular institution, stored in an archive and described according to certain standards. An effect so rich and structured is difficult to achieve in such an immediate way during regular lectures.

Given that the software was not developed specifically for teaching, I inevitably encountered difficulties in carrying out a teaching use of EditMOM. As a matter of fact, my students and I sometimes felt the need to do operations which are now impossible to do in EditMOM. For example, acting on the pictures by marking specific components, characteristics and parts of charters (such as graphics manipulation software), operating simultaneously in different versions on charters by different students, creating a digital archive (such as a portfolio) visible temporarily only to students and teachers.

Despite these limitations EditMOM tool showed undoubted qualities of flexibility in teaching activities. On the whole, it has been particularly effective in traditional teaching while still being linked to 'Learning by doing'. These principles are essential for a discipline such as Diplomatics which always requires some practical work on the texts of documents.

### II. Some possible effects of the Monasterium project in a Diplomatics Learning Environment

Thanks to the encouraging results achieved, I organized a whole course by using the EditMOM tool within the Monasterium project during the academic year 2009-2010.<sup>10</sup>

Concerning the relation between the markup language XML and medieval documents see: Ansani, Michele: Diplomatica (e diplomatisti) nell'arena digitale. In: Scrineum, I (1999), pp. 1-11, (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://scrineum.unipv.it/biblioteca/ansani.htm); Vogeler, Georg: Towards a Standard of Encoding Medieval Charters with XML. In: Literary and Linguistic Computing, vol. 20/3 (2005), pp. 269-280, (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://llc.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/fqi031?ijkey=2g2Wfp4rzPQT).

About an essay in Italian from which it is easy to go back to the now large debate about the digital approach to the methodology of critical edition, see: Ansani, Michele: Edizione digitale di fonti diplomatiche: esperienze, modelli testuali, priorità. In: Reti Medievali-Rivista, 7 (2006), 2, (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://www.dssg.unifi.it/\_RM/rivista/forum/Ansani.htm); for an overview of the online digital Editionen cf. instead Virtual Library Historische Hilfswissenschaften, hg von Patrick, Sahle – Georg, Vogeler, Sektion Diplomatik, (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://www.vl-ghw.uni-muenchen.de/diplomatik.html); Sahle, Patrick: A catalog of Digital Scholarly Editions, v 3.0, snapshot (2008), (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://www.digitale-editionen.de/index.htm).

About the detailed programof the Master degree course see Università degli studi di Napoli Federico II Sitewebin: Docenti, Antonella Ambrosio, Insegnamenti (accessed on December

Some good aspects of the course were: students learned to use an international website as Monasterium.net, they did some collaborative activities and were involved in an assessment process in EditMOM and they took part in an international learning community.

The course is divided into several stages: an initial phase identifying the prerequisite skills of students, a series of few lectures on the basic concepts of traditional and digital Diplomatics, a collaborative activity on the web and in a computer lab to make collaborative critical editions of charters in EditMOM and ongoing and final assessments. This course was aimed at students of the Master in Library and Archival Science and Methodology of the Research at the University of Naples whose background allows them to work harder on medieval charters; a useful exercise considering their future career.

I will not describe again which methodology I used during my lectures as I mentioned it in the first paragraph; I will only highlight relevant aspects which emerged. They will lead to other reflections relating to the future creation of a Learning Environment taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the Monasterium project. For that purpose, an expert in Educational Science will help in a first stage. The next step will be experiencing the Learning Environment with a different number of students in a different period of time comparing similar experiences taking place simultaneously in Germany, Austria, Czech Republic and Hungary<sup>11</sup>. Only at the end of these stages I will gather the needed data to proceed towards the set goal.

I would like to describe the effective conditions in a Learning Environment. Also I would like to show how I carried out a Learning Environment in Diplomatics within the Master degree course.

The expression 'Learning Environment' is at the present time used in Educational Science and underlies a new psycho-pedagogical approach which has spread in the last twenty years. It is an approach by means of which the Student-Centered-Learning model takes over from the traditional teaching model. In this perspective I can define the Learning Environment as the learning activities organised by the teacher in order to make the learning process as effective as possible. The teacher is responsible for planning an effective Learning Environment. According to two

<sup>30, 2010</sup> at: https://www.docenti.unina.it/antonella.ambrosio).

The Monasterium project and the EditMOM software have been used in the European university classrooms since 2009. For Munich University see: Übungen of dr. Georg Vogelcr: Einführung in die Digitale Edition von Urkunden, (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://www.hgw.geschichte.uni-mucnchen.de/studium\_lehre/lehrveranstl/som mersemester\_2009); Krah, Adelheid: Digitale Medien in der Geschichtswissenschaft - Virtuelle Urkundenportale und ihre Benutzung als Quellenbasis für historische Recherchen im österreichisch-bayerischen Raum (in Verbindung mit Fachtutorium). (Universität Wien Wintersemester 2008/09) (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://online.univie.ac.at/vlvz?lvnr=070 224&semester=W2008&include=kurzkommentar,literatur,methoden). Similar learning activities experience is provided for ENArC project (European Network on Archival Cooperation (2010 - 2015), European Union Culture Programme 2007 - 2013.

National Research Council committees, a Learning Environment must be centered on: students, knowledge, assessment and community.<sup>12</sup>

Firstly, the Learning Environment should enhance the skills, attitudes and prior knowledge of students. Teachers do not exercise authority over them but they are members of the learning group. So we can say that, in a Diplomatics course carried out in the Monasterium project, students are absolute protagonists.

Students attending the Master degree course at the University of Naples are postgraduates mostly graduated in Humanities but also aspiring archivists. They attend a course which will allow them to take up their future career as diplomatists and archivists. These students live in the Digital Age and they know that information technology will be very important to their profession. They are European citizens and are aware that, to be competitive and up to date, they must take part in a transnational cultural debate.

The insertion of learning activities within the Monasterium project is suitable for students of this kind. The use of the Monasterium net website in particular permits the presentation of a huge amount of historical documents in an appealing way. They can surf the website as they need; it is, indeed, the only resource in the world which allows free access to more than 200,000 sources preserved in huge areas of Central and Eastern Europe:



Picture 5: The ten European Countries involved in the Monasterium project.

About the definition of learning environment and the bibliography referred see: Ghislandi, Patrizia: Didattica online. In: Elearning: Didattica e innovazione in università, a cura di Patrizia Ghislandi. (Trento 2002); also in: Reti medievali - Rivista (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://centri.univr.it/rm/didattica/discussioni/elearning.htm#ghisl). In this contribution the study of National Research Council is mentioned as well: Bransford, John D. - Brown, Ann L. and Cocking, Rodney R.: How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school (Washington D. C. 1999).

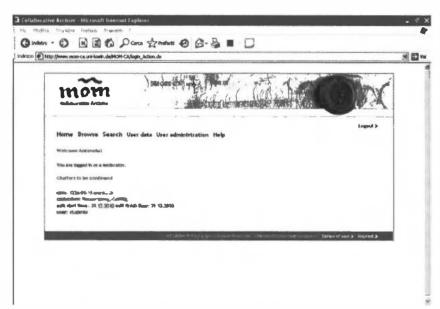
It also allows a direct approach to the charters in EditMOM and it makes archival description, with the standards of different European countries enclosed in only one editing area and responding to common exigencies, possible. This has a macroscopic cultural meaning for the construction of a common identity for documents professionals.

Secondly, the Learning Environment must be centered on knowledge not as mere memorization of facts and concepts but in order to develop useful skills. The cooperation activity made possible thanks to EditMom is of great importance to this kind of learning. Through EditMOM students learned easily how to develop a mindset suitable to their future career in which they may find themselves describing charters, writing abstracts, compiling critical editions of charters and finding and consulting historical online sources.

The practical use of the EditMOM tool provoked interesting discussions among students during my lectures. They realized, for example by examining photos of documents, how some standards of critical edition of medieval documents, now fixed by use, are completely useless in a digital environment. They also discussed how the digital approach was suitable for the virtual reconstruction of monastic archives highly scattered into reality. Therefore, the practical work and the discussion during such a collaborative activity permits students to learn the contents of Diplomatics and to develop skills essential to solving problems of the discipline in a creative manner and to create significant products.

Thirdly, the Learning Environment must be centered on assessment. A teaching tool allows learners to monitor their progress and teachers to correct wrong learning paths. In the computer lab., students self-assessed their performance. They also expressed opinions on others students' work seeing the editing applications produced in EditMom and using the photographic reproductions. Students also sent the moderator the test in EditMom aditing applications. The teacher, acting as moderator, assessed their own work.

The debate on this issue was prompted by the consolidation in a digital environment of the archives of the Neapolitan monastery of SS. Peter and Sebastian, performed by the writer in the Monasterium.net portal and treated in the course. For this reconstruction see: Ambrosio, Antonella: Il progetto Monasterium in Italia: le prime esperienze a Napoli, cit. Concerning other examples of a digital approach applied to the reconstruction of the monastic archives see: Codice diplomatico della Lombardia medievale a cura di Michele Ansani: (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://cdlm.unipv.it) and in particular the interesting case treated by Barbieri, Ezio: Per l'edizione del fondo documentario: la ricomposizione dell'archivio antico. In: S. Giulia di Brescia: Archeologia, arte, storia di un monastero regio dai Longobardi al Barbarossa. Atti del Convegno internazionale (Brescia 4-5 giugno 1990) (Brescia 1992), pp. 49-92, (accessed on December 30, 2010 at: http://cdlm.unipv.it/edizioni/bs/brescia-sgiulial/introduzione).



Picture 6: Sent to the moderator the work by students are assessed and if needed published online.

In the final examination, students discussed their work with the teacher.

The moderators system in EditMOM tool used to carry out the final publication on the website, revealed its adaptability to a learning context and it permitted more meaningful assessment. Students felt extremely responsible for their products but they were also able to test alternate stages of assessment, in person and at a distance.<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, the Learning Environment must be centred on the community according to the pedagogical socio-cultural constructivist approach. According to this approach, learners should not remain isolated but they should be involved in meaningful actions, discussions and reflections for the community they belong to (classroom, university researchers or professionals community, etc.). Learning is indeed a social phenomenon. The best learning takes place within a community of practice within which learning is a sort of apprenticeship. 15

In this case, a Learning Environment conceived within Monasterium benefits from a huge virtual transnational community which is the community of Monasterium itself. Students have felt since the very beginning motivated by the fact that their teaching was placed in a large project – the construction of digital archives in Monasterium.net. They understood well how to interact with people who devote

In this perspective, although the publication of the results of the work of the students on the portal Monasterium net was not possible, it would be highly desirable in the future.

Brown, John - Collins, Allan - Duguid, Paul: Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning. In: Educational Researcher 18 (1989) p. 32-42. Concerning the definition of 'community of practice' see: Wenger, Etienne: Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity. (London 1998).

every day to such projects, primarily the Monasterium Southern Italy work group but also many archivists and scholars across Europe. In some cases, students felt part of the Monasterium community and they were able to work effectively in it. This aspect strengthened their learning path.

In conclusion, the results of the course were very satisfying. Furthermore, the idea of planning a future Diplomatics Learning Environment within the Monasterium project is very encouraging. This would be a new and exciting challenge for traditional Diplomatics.

It would show once again a remarkable openness to modernity.

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Von 23. bis 25. November 2010 fand die internationale Konlerenz "Archive im Web – Erfahrungen, Herausforderungen. Visionen / Archives on the Web – Experiences, Challenges, Visions" im Österreichischen Staatsarchiv in Wien statt. Der vorliegende Band vereinigt einen großen Teil der Beiträge zur Tagung aus Deutschland. Italien, Kroatien den Niederlanden, Österreich, Polen, Portugal, Rumänien, der Schweiz, der Slowakischen Republik, der Tschechischen Republik und Ungarn. Der vorliegende Band vermittelt einen eindrucksvollen Überblick, auf welchen Wegen die europäischen Archive und benachbarte Kultureinrichtungen den Herausforderungen des digitalen Zeitalters begegnen.

From 23rd to 25th of November 2010. the international conference "Archive im Web - Erfahrungen. Herausforderungen. Visionen / Archives on the Web -Experiences, Challenges, Visions" took place in the Austrian State Archivesin Vienna. The volume at hand presents a large part of the contributions to the conference from Austria, Croatig, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland. Portugal Romania Slovakla and Switzerland. This volume provides an impressive overview of the ways in which European archives and neighbouring cultural institutions encounter the challenges of the digital age.

The "tiger" of the new media can and must be ridden, the articles presented in this volume demonstrate this very clearly!