Can the archives become as cool as a museum?
Data Circulation in the Budapest Time Machine

Creative stakeholders & citizen scientist around the Budapest City Archives

Data is power and not only for present information. Users of all kinds turn to archives as a foundation nowadays, entitled to access the data and archival documents they need. The research room of Budapest City Archives (BCA) manages 3000 researchers per year. 56-58% of them are interested in architectural sources of various types, therefore this phenomenon needs to be addressed urgently.

Our online databases and digitized materials give smooth access to the citizen scientists and average users to discover stories & histories of the city and its buildings. Many of them don't even have to visit us in person. A huge joint database offers several Hungarian cultural institutions' materials on a very user-friendly surface. Hungaricana is not only a home for databases and digitized cultural heritage but gives us an opportunity to synchronize and unify different layers of data on the same page at the same time with the help of georeferenced historical map layers. The idea of the Time Machine is to travel back to the past just as we do nowadays with the help of Google Street View. This requires a huge amount of work, but we have taken a few steps on the road already: switching between the different time layers offered by the historical maps presents a great opportunity to discover the changes in the structure of the city. We also added four types of georeferenced archival documents, so anyone can reveal the former inhabitants or shops of the building, or to check the original drawings & some vintage postcards, photographs of the neighborhood. Many of the latter have been annotated by AI.

3D reconstructions of some historical buildings are already available on the site, so we can compare different states of the city and the building density.

Offering easy access to our materials, some of our stakeholders were able to start building their own databases and create new documents based on our collection. The recurring cooperation with the Budapest100 (celebration of 100-year-old houses with volunteer researchers) and the ÓE YBL Architecture Faculty lead us to an agreement on offering the digital copies from our materials in exchange for the newborn documents they create. We will archive the house data sheets and the 3D building models and publish them as well, which creates "data circulation".

In the framework of our joint project, "City Memories" we are working together with two city archives, Stockholm and Copenhagen, to bring the architectural archives closer to the wider audience, sharing our experiences int Best Parctice Guides.