

**Ref: Foundation of the READ-COOP SCE (Societas Cooperativa Europaea)**

Innsbruck, 2019-05-07

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN!**

This letter is an invitation to become member of the European Cooperative Society (SCE) – READ-COOP SCE with limited liability which will be set up by the University of Innsbruck, together with a number of other European institutions on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2019 in Innsbruck – Austria.

The main objective of READ-COOP is to offer services and tools for the digitization, transcription, recognition and searching of historical documents. Namely with the research platform Transkribus researchers, students, librarians and archivists as well as members of the general public are enabled to train their own models for handwritten and printed texts and to apply them to large collections.

Current recognition results are excellent: Even for challenging printed documents, such as historical newspapers, Transkribus achieves results below one percent character error rate.

For handwritten documents, may they be from the middle-ages or from modern documents, may they be in German Kurrent, in Latin, Greek, Arabic, or Hebrew, character error rates for single hands will be in general below 3% CER and for multi-hand documents below 6 to 7%. This enables users not only to transcribe historical documents much faster, but also to find (nearly) every word in a document or collection. This is owed to the special technology of keyword spotting, which is also integrated in Transkribus.

Since its introduction to the public the Transkribus platform has gained a lot of interest and is currently the only platform worldwide which offers the full range of services necessary for processing historical documents with state-of-the-art tools. All documents in Transkribus are private and are stored centrally on the platform in order to benefit from the full power of a central infrastructure. Some figures for the platform:

- Transkribus doubled its registered users every year. Starting in 2015 with 2000 users to currently more than 22.000 registered users.

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- About 300 researchers are using Transkribus daily, up to 1000 per week.
- About 70.000 images are uploaded every week to the platform by users from all over the world
- 200 neural networks are trained by users every month
- Thousands of machine jobs are performed on the Transkribus servers every day
- The total amount of training data produced by users sums up to more than 200,000 pages, constituting a monetary value of about 2-3 mill. EUR

All this became possible since the H2020 Project READ gathered some of the best research groups from Europe, such as the PRHLT group from the Technical University of Valencia, the CITlab team from the University of Rostock, the transcribe Bentham team of the University College London and many more research groups, archives and scholars from all over Europe.

Based on this success we will set up an independent organization to further sustain and develop the platform. We decided to go for a European Cooperative Society (SCE) since it offers the most attractive model to continue collaboration on a European and even worldwide level. The reasons are the following:

- An SCE is a legal entity which enables institutions and natural persons to collaborate by keeping their own independency. The EU directive on European Cooperative Societies was ratified by each member state in 2006 and provides an excellent legal basis.
- An SCE is open to new members, it is easy to join a coop and also simple to leave it. Members enjoy benefits from the SCE, such as discounts and sharing of data and technology with other members.
- The main objective of every SCE is the direct benefit of its members. In our case the main benefit is that historical documents can not only be easier accessed by the public but that humanities scholars are enabled to work with historical documents in a completely new and exciting way. The prospects for Digital Humanities research are great and go far beyond current approaches.
- An SCE is a for-profit organization, but the profit is always reinvested into the READ-COOP. There is no shareholder value for members, instead the nominal value of their share remains always the same. Also the risk is low: A member will never lose more than its share in case of insolvency or bankruptcy. The maximum amount of shares which can be acquired by using members are 5000 EUR.
- And last but not least: An SCE is a democratic organization consisting firstly of a board of directors which is responsible to run the daily business and secondly the

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General Meeting where all members have the final say about all issues of the SCE.  
Members have between one and five votes, depending on the amount of shares.

We are aware that similar to any other kind of research or innovation the foundation of the READ-COOP is something new, however we are convinced that it is a highly powerful model which will facilitate the further success of the Transkribus platform.

We hope that you will support us in our endeavor and are looking forward to our collaboration!

Sincerely,

(Günter Mühlberger)