Community Heritage with Citizen Participation: Schwalmtal Brings Local History to Life

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How can local history not only be preserved, but told and passed on together with the people who lived it? The municipality of Schwalmtal presents a new participatory format for exactly that: five APHEUM Frames in the town hall connect historical photographs from residents with the personal memories behind them.

At first glance, the images in the APHEUM Frames look like classic framed fine-art prints. In fact, they are managed entirely digitally: new themes and images are uploaded centrally to the APHEUM system, with no need to print, frame, or physically exchange any prints.

At the end of June, the exhibition "Remember? Schwalmtal in the 60s and 70s" opened in the town hall foyer. It is the first project realized together with APHEUM by Newstyle under the guiding theme of "community heritage." Numerous historical photographs were submitted by residents for the opening.

"The response to the exhibition has been fantastic. People come to the town hall, recognize places and faces, and start talking to one another about them. We're already receiving new topic suggestions from the community. It's visibly bringing the administration and the public closer together – which is exactly what we hoped for," says Andreas Gisbertz, mayor of Schwalmtal.

Private Photographs Become a Public Memory

The images document, among other things, former rail connections, schools, churches, local businesses, meeting places, and social events. What matters is not just the historical subject itself, but the memory behind it: Who is pictured? What happened at this place? What did it mean for life in the community?

The photographs appear in regular rotation across the five APHEUM Frames, with the display schedule set by the local administration. A QR code on each frame links to background information and to the personal stories of the people who submitted the image. In this way, a single photograph becomes an accessible piece of local history.

"It mattered to us not just to display the images, but to give them context. It's the stories that turn a photograph into a piece of living local history," says Christopher Colshorn, inventor of the APHEUM Frame.

The exhibition is not conceived as a closed retrospective, but as the starting point for further calls for contributions. New topics, submissions, and additional information can be added on an ongoing basis.

Fine-Art Look Instead of a Typical Screen Feel

The APHEUM Frames are designed for calm, focused viewing of photographic content. Rather than resembling an actively backlit display, the presentation looks like a printed image. A specially calibrated tonal rendering produces a finely differentiated grayscale look equivalent to high-quality fine-art prints.

The exhibition is designed to run permanently: the APHEUM Frames display new content regularly as part of everyday life at the town hall. Data is transmitted via WLAN, and the frames are powered by AAA batteries. This allows them to be positioned independently of power outlets and fixed cable runs. Lithium batteries are deliberately avoided – a safety and maintenance advantage in public spaces.

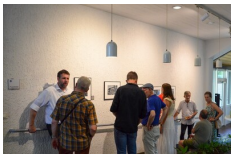
A Transferable Model for Municipalities, Associations, and Institutions

The format piloted in Schwalmtal can be adapted to a wide range of municipal and institutional purposes – for example, thematic series on individual districts, structural or industrial change, migration, community associations, volunteering, schools, natural and cultural landscapes, or influential local figures.

The project combines citizen participation, curatorial work, and technical publishing in a clear process: the municipality sets a theme, collects photographs and memories, curates the submissions, and publishes them via the APHEUM system. Editorial control remains with the municipality, and the exhibition can be updated flexibly without new prints or labels.

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Associations, museums, archives, libraries, educational institutions, and social organizations can use the same principle to connect existing collections with personal perspectives. This keeps history present in everyday life and turns the display into an occasion for exchange.

The result is a dynamically growing visual archive – shaped by the people who live in a place or have witnessed its development. The permanent exhibition at Schwalmtal town hall is open to the public during regular opening hours. The municipality will announce the next topic of the participation project soon.

Municipalities, associations, and institutions can obtain further information on process, technology, and possible applications for their own community-heritage projects from Christopher Colshorn.

Full details on the APHEUM Frame: https://shop.apheum.com
You can find the Schwalmtal case study here: https://shop.apheum.com/pages/case-study-schwalmtal
The most frequently asked questions about the Frame are answered here:
https://shop.apheum.com/pages/faq-haufig-gestellte-fragen-unsere-antworten

Contact for journalists: TDUB Kommunikationsberatung Daniel Gerloff Paulinenallee 32 20259 Hamburg T: 040/8079212-27 E: apheum@tdub.de

Contact for municipalities, associations, and institutions: newstyle UG Christopher Colshorn Neue Weinsteige 20 70180 Stuttgart E: info@my-newstyle.com

About APHEUM APHEUM develops connected e-paper photo frames and the accompanying platform for high-quality presentation of photographic content. The solution combines the calm look of a framed print with the ability to manage, schedule, and regularly refresh content centrally. Areas of application include municipalities, cultural and educational institutions, businesses, hotels, and public spaces. More information: https://shop.apheum.com

Company Contact:

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newstyle ug

E. info@my-new-style.com
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