

Graduates of 10 gymnasiums founded by the Empress Maria Theresa contributing to cultural heritage development and promotion

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The graduates of the 10 gymnasiums founded by Empress Maria Theresa form a unique transnational intellectual community whose shared heritage dates back to the Enlightenment reforms of the 18th century. These schools—established as part of her education reforms (notably the 1774 *Allgemeine Schulordnung*)—were designed to strengthen state, culture, and knowledge across Central Europe.

These schools span present-day Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Belgium, reflecting the geographic breadth of the Habsburg cultural sphere.

Graduates of these gymnasiums contribute to cultural heritage in several key ways:

1. Creation of digital heritage (eMonuments)

- Alumni collaborate on online platforms that collect biographies, archives, photos, and testimonies.
- These “living monuments” allow continuous expansion of knowledge and public participation.

Example: The initiative led by graduates of Novo mesto Grammar School includes digitized alumni records and publications in Slovenia’s digital library.

2. Preservation of collective memory

- Projects like the “Memory eMonument” record generations of students, teachers, and principals.
- This transforms school history into accessible cultural archives for research and education.

3. Cross-border cultural collaboration

- Alumni networks connect people across countries once united under Maria Theresa.
- They promote:
 - joint research
 - exchange of best practices
 - shared European identity

This reflects the original Enlightenment idea of education as a unifying cultural force.

4. Promotion of local and regional heritage

- Graduates actively link their schools to:
 - city history
 - museums

- tourism initiatives
- Cultural heritage becomes a driver of sustainable local development and tourism.

5. Educational and scholarly impact

- Many alumni became scientists, artists, writers, and public intellectuals
- Gymnasiums like Novo Mesto Grammar School and Matija Antun Reljković Gymnasium have long traditions of producing influential figures in culture and academia

Why this network matters today

The graduates' initiative (revived strongly in 2018–2026) shows that cultural heritage is no longer static:

- It is digital, participatory, and evolving
- It connects past (18th century reforms) with future (digital knowledge sharing)
- It strengthens a shared Central European cultural identity

In short

Graduates of Maria Theresa's gymnasiums contribute to cultural heritage by:

- Preserving and digitizing historical records
- Building cross-border alumni networks
- Promoting education as cultural legacy
- Supporting research, tourism, and public history

They transform their schools from historical institutions into active hubs of cultural memory and innovation.

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During her 40-year reign, Empress Maria Theresa founded 10 public gymnasiums throughout the Habsburg Monarchy to modernize the state and educate a loyal civil service. These institutions became regional cultural and educational hubs, producing graduates who have significantly shaped European science, art, and politics.

While these schools were founded at different times, many are now part of the [Empress Maria Theresa Gymnasiums Network](#), established in 2018 to promote their shared historical and cultural heritage.

Notable Graduates & Cultural Contributions

Graduates of these institutions have played a vital role in developing and promoting cultural heritage through various fields:

Literature & Arts:

The [Novo mesto Grammar School](#) counts among its alumni poet [Oton Župančič](#), painter [Božidar Jakac](#), and composer [Marjan Kozina](#), all of whom are central to Slovenian national identity.

Diplomacy & International Relations:

The [Theresianum](#) has produced numerous diplomats and world leaders, including former UN Secretary-General [Kurt Waldheim](#).

National Identity:

Graduates from the Croatian and Serbian regions often formed networks in Vienna that helped define their academic and national identities during the 19th century.

Today, the [Maria Theresa Gymnasiums' Graduates Network](#) works to digitize historical records and create "eMonuments" to honor this legacy and use it to boost sustainable tourism in their local communities.