

Qualitative Archives: Short Descriptions

"Deutsches Gedächtnis" ("German Memory") in the Institute for History and Biography, FernUniversität Hagen, Germany

Team: Dr. Alexander von Plato, Almut Leh M.A.

1. Fields of Research

The focus of the institute's research is the experienced and "digested" history, in other words: the history of mentality. The investigations are centred around people and their historical experiences. Life-histories—often collected by interviews—, biographical (self-) constructions and the development of consent and dissent in a society are explored. One of the main questions is, how people of different sexes, and various social backgrounds have assimilated history with its numerous political breaks—especially in Germany—and what significance past experiences have for the later course of history.

2. Aims and Work of Archive / Kinds of Data

The "German Memory" is considered an archive for "subjective sources of memory" of all kinds and therefore archives audio- and video interviews with witnesses, autobiographical texts, diaries, letter collections, photo albums and such like. The basis of the archive are documents that originate from the institute's own research, but in the meantime the archive has also become a collection centre for the narrative life History interviews of other researchers and for single biographical documents given by witnesses. At the moment approx. 1,500 life History interviews with witnesses from East and West Germany are archived, one tenth of the stock is also available in the form of video films. The oldest interviews were done at the beginning of the 80s. Since then the collection has been growing steadily. Special emphasis is put on interviews with active members and officials of trade-unions, members of works council, refugees, people with traumatic experiences of concentration or other camps, National Socialist or Stalinist persecution and deportation and interviews from the German Democratic Republic. Apart from this, written documents were archived. At the moment there are about 600 autobiographies, diaries and letters, parts of the "Kempowski-Archive" and a collection of 75,000 essays about social and political subjects written by German pupils in the 50s.

3. Archiving Concept

The interviews mostly originate from researches done by the Institute for History and Biography but also from other researchers, who want to enable the verification of their results and at the same time make their sources available for other research projects. Most of the interviews are transcribed, so that the archive can offer transcripts in the form of data text files and printouts. As far as the quality of the data allows, the interviews and the written documents are made accessible via an electronic data bank.

4. Presentation of the Archive

After advance notice, the archive can be used for research and teaching by scientists, journalists, pedagogues, in fact by all those interested inside and outside the university. Furthermore, the archive tries to extend its stock. If you possess "subjective sources of memory" or biographical interviews, please contact us.

Contact:

Dr. Alexander von Plato, Almut Leh M.A.

Institut für Geschichte und Biographie
Liebigstr. 11
D - 58511 Lüdenscheid

Tel.: ++49 / (0)2351 - 24580

Fax: ++49 / (0)2351 - 39973

E-mail: almut.leh@fernuni-hagen.de

URL: http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/INST_GESCHUBIOG/

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