

DFG-Projekt „Sozialdaten als Quellen der Zeitgeschichte. Erstellung eines Rahmenkonzeptes für eine Forschungsdateninfrastruktur in der zeithistorischen Forschung“

where: German Historical Institute London, 17 Bloomsbury Square

when: 28-30 October 2021 (beginning Thursday 2 p.m., ending Saturday 1 p.m.)

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Call for Papers

Workshop:

Contemporary historians and the re-use of social science-generated data sets: An international dialogue on the challenges presented by ‘social data’

Historians working on the second half of the 20th century are increasingly confronted with new types of sources: so-called social data. They are the remains of state-sponsored data collection or social science and humanities research projects – such as tax data, polls, interviews or recorded participant observations. In the course of the ‘scientization’ of the social that took place in the twentieth century, these sources have become ever more numerous and complex, but they often present in obsolete formats such as punchcards, old statistical software or magnetic tapes. They can also include tables, texts, card indexes, transcriptions, video interviews, questionnaires, photographs, etc. These sources may be found in retired scientists’ or pollsters’ attics rather than in state archives, and their re-use may present unresolved questions of ownership and data protection. If scholars of the contemporary social, gender and economic history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are to do justice to their task of providing a critical appraisal of the recent past, they cannot bypass social data as a source. They have to tackle the ethical, legal, methodological, and conceptual challenges tied to these heterogenous, complex, research-generated sources. To date, the re-use of social data by contemporary historians is still rare, but this is bound to change over the coming decade.

To open up the research potential of quantitative and qualitative social data for the field of history, the German working group on ‘Social Data and Contemporary History’ has since 2017 held annual workshops at the Werner Reimers Foundation (Bad Homburg). The working group brings together historians, social scientists working in historical fields, and representatives of data-holding institutions. It is headed by Lutz Raphael (University of Trier), Sabine Reh (Research Library for the History of Education, BBF-DIPF Berlin), Pascal Siegers (GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences), Kerstin Brückweh (University of Erfurt) and Christina von Hodenberg (GHI London). In January 2020, work began on a two-year feasibility study exploring the development of a research data infrastructure for the use of social data by historians, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

At present, historians often have to put considerable effort and expense into making social data accessible, and classifying and processing them for re-evaluation. Legal questions arise: who do the data belong to? Do the ethical standards and data protection regulations in force when the data were collected permit their use by historians? Which methods do we choose to anonymise and re-classify sources, and to what extent should we pursue individual cases

across different datasets? To what extent does the use of social data render historians' accounts more 'representative'? In addition, the context in which the sources were created is often only incompletely documented, and most historians lack training in the statistical skills and software required for the re-use of many such social data sets.

The upcoming workshop at the GHI London aims at an international dialogue between curators of data, contemporary historians, digital humanities experts, and practitioners in related social science disciplines. It takes stock of existing projects in the social, gender and economic history, and in the history of education of the post-1945 era which use social data, and aims to compare approaches, methods and archival holdings across national boundaries.

We invite papers falling into the following categories:

- Presenting any aspect of a study in the post-1945, social, gender or economic history, or history of education, of any country which makes substantial use of social data
- Papers on the ethical and legal challenges faced by historians, archivists, or data holding institutions
- Papers by data holding institutions on their holdings, and the challenges they present
- Presentations on specific training modules offered to historians aiming to re-use social data.

The conference language is English. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered. In the event of a virus-induced lockdown, proceedings may be moved online.

Applications should include:

- a description of the proposed paper (2 pages, double-spaced)
- a CV (including institutional affiliation, postal address, and e-mail)

Please e-mail all application documents in a single PDF file to: **Clemens.Villinger@gesis.org**

The deadline for submissions is **5 February 2021**.

For practical information, please contact Anita Bellamy at a.bellamy@ghil.ac.uk
