

# Curation and Dissemination of Lifestory Interviews for the Humanities

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## Abstract

Based on the special nature of audio and video interviews with eyewitnesses of National Socialism and survivors of the Holocaust, we would like to demonstrate current approaches to make audio visual testimonies accessible online by introducing the Online- Archive “Forced Labor 1939-1945. Memory and History”.

Conducted in 27 countries in the native languages of the witnesses, the interview collection contains 583 comprehensive life story interviews (192 video and 391 audio interviews) with concentration camp survivors, prisoners of war, and “civilian” forced labourers. Content based indexing, full text search and an interactive map application showing sites of biographical relevance to the interviewees (place of birth, deportation, camps, companies and prisons, places of residence after 1945) allow for a targeted search that leads directly to individual passages of the interviews. An annotation feature allows users to benefit from the specific knowledge of other users to add to the understanding of the interviews. We will discuss considerations on designing an online platform to avoid the use of the interviews as a mere quotations quarry and instead supporting a comprehensive understanding of the whole testimony in its narrative structure and its biographical meaning. The paper demonstrates a powerful tool which enables academics in the fields of history, political and social sciences as well as cultural studies to work effectively with testimonies to answer their specific research questions. Finally, we will describe perspectives for future developments such as a Meta Online Archive.

**Keywords:** Online Archives, Oral History, Audio-visual Data, Interviews, Biographical Data

## 1. Introduction

The following article deals with developments and perspectives of online archiving and the retrieval of oral history interviews. The first chapter presents oral history as a special method for research into contemporary history, which has led to an extensive collection of interviews with witnesses from various eras, many of them survivors of Nazi persecution. Due to the narrative form of the interviews and the biographical dimension of the narrative, these sources are of particular value for secondary analyses. At the same time, the very personal data requires a high degree of sensitivity when archiving and passing them on to third parties, especially when the archive makes the interviews available online. The second part discusses the special requirements for archiving such sources in general, before the third part presents the online archive “Forced Labor 1939-1945. Memory and History” as a best-practice example of the state of the art in online archiving of oral history interviews. The features of the online archive are presented in the context of legal and technical challenges. The article concludes with perspectives and potentials in the area of online archiving of biographical interviews such as a meta-search engine across several databases and an open online archive.

## 2. A brief introduction: What is oral history?

Research based on interviews with witnesses to historical events has a long tradition in the social sciences and humanities. However, in Germany, as in various other Western European countries, it was in the 1970s and 1980s that research based on life-story interviews really boomed in almost all areas of the humanities.

For all the differences among the various academic dis-

ciplines they all emphasize the subjectivity and the relationship of the individual to society. In other words: they all focus on biographical processes and subjective personal information.

It is significant that this field of research initially met with great resistance in established historiography. But outside the universities, oral history enjoyed great popularity. In the course of the social movements of the 1980s, the so-called history movement emerged, which was organised in local history workshops and preferably used the method of interviewing contemporary witnesses. Equipped with cassette recorders, which had just conquered the market in the 1970s, lay people interested in history set out to let the so-called “little people” have their say and thus catch up on their view of history. The slogan of this period was “history from below” or also the history of “little people”. This was underpinned by a democratic impulse, namely to bring into history those who had always been ignored by the ruling historiography, which had the great politics made by great men in mind.

In Germany, this research was primarily focused on the period of National Socialism and the Second World War, especially in the 1980s. However, interview-based research has also come to include many other topics and historical periods, and as a result, the past forty years have seen a multitude of witnesses to a wide range of historical events interviewed by researchers (Apel & Andresen, 2015).

Although not in the university mainstream, oral history gained reputation in scientific research and appeared with the claim to offer not only a special method in questioning contemporary witnesses, but also a new approach to the past that takes into account subjective experience, the processing of history and the influence of historical experience on future history. In connection with the establishment of oral history in science, methodological and

analytical reflections on physical, psychological and social aspects of memory, the influence of the interviewer and the representativeness of interview-based historical research were conducted (e.g. Niethammer, 1985; Portelli, 1992; Thompson, 1978, Thompson & Bornat, 2017). Over the years, professionalization can be discerned in the attitude to oral history interviews. The historical profession has largely abandoned its initial reservations, and today it is hard to imagine the presentation of historical information in exhibitions, documentations and films without the use of witness accounts to the relevant events. The process of professionalization relates to the development of a specific methodological approach (Perks & Thomson, 2006; Ritchie, 2011; Ritchie 2015). This method goes back to the sociologist Fritz Schütze (1976) and is characterized by the fact that rather than structuring the interview around questions, the interviewer encourages the interviewee to freely narrate his or her life story. The outcome is qualified as a narrative life-story interview. This approach is based on the assumption that the narrative will accord with the sequence of past events and that narratives hence are the appropriate linguistic form for the recollection of past realities. The principles of narration are regarded as creating a framework in which the narrator relates events as they happened.

The interview should ideally proceed in three phases. In the first phase, the interviewee is asked to narrate his or her life story in detail and according to his or her own determination of what is relevant. During this phase, the interviewer intervenes as little as possible and motivates the interviewee to continue the narrative solely through attentive listening. At the conclusion of this free-wheeling phase, the interviewer asks questions designed to clarify what he has heard. In a third phase, the interviewer can address themes and ask questions that are of interest to him but have not been addressed yet. In all phases, the conduct of the interview should be oriented to eliciting the impromptu narration of events in which the narrator was actively or passively involved.

From research on memory and recollection, we can assume that narration, especially in the context of a life story, is particularly suited to activate recollective capacity. Furthermore, the narrative form of conducting interviews has the advantage of a degree of openness. The more space the interviewee is granted, the less the interview will be burdened by presuppositions on the part of the interviewer that may prejudice the result.

It is easy to conceive of such an interview as representing a highly individual testimony in which the interviewee has presented large parts of his life story and his world view in a way that is often unguarded and sometimes contradictory. Moreover, the result is also one in which the interviewer has played a part not only as an initiator but also as an interested and sympathetic listener. Given this framework, it is also easy to appreciate that the archiving of such subjective, sophisticated sources presents particular challenges.

### 3. Archiving oral history interviews

Whereas the early oral history research projects preserved their interviews largely for reasons of thoroughness, it soon became clear that these sources could be of value beyond the initial project and, as such, needed to be safeguarded and made accessible for future research. This change in attitude, which became evident in the late 1980s, was also motivated by the appreciation of the time and effort required to gather such material and of the materials' complexity, the potential of which can hardly be exhausted by a single analysis.

In addition, it is basically sensible and good scholarly practice to publish empirical research data, to document the research process and allow results to be reviewed, if not reproduced. Relevant funding organisations such as the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* have, since several years, been stating according guidelines and policies as mandatory funding criteria.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, many lifestory interviews are curated and maintained by the institutions that originally conducted them. On the other hand, in Germany, archives specialized in oral history interviews are rather rare,<sup>2</sup> and a number of those that do exist are limited to very specific research topics.<sup>3</sup> On the part of the researchers, this makes it more difficult to search for suitable sources and to submit self-guided interviews to the archives that are willing to host the recordings.

<sup>1</sup> In 1998, the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* published the memorandum "Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis" (Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice) with recommendations for the provision of research data for reanalyses, which were supplemented and updated in 2013 (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive oral history archive is the *Archiv "Deutsches Gedächtnis"* at the *FernUniversität in Hagen* (Leh 2015).

<sup>3</sup> For example „*Digitaler Gedächtnisspeicher: Menschen im Bergbau*“ (Digital memory storage. People in mining), Bochum,

<http://isb.rub.de/sbr/drittmittelprojekte/gedaechtnisspeicher.html.de>; „*Sprechen trotz allem. Das Videoarchiv der Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*“ (Speak after all. The video archive of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe Foundation's video archive), Berlin, [www.sprechentrotz allem.de](http://www.sprechentrotz allem.de); „*Archiv der anderen Erinnerungen. Zeitzeug\_innen-Interviewprojekt der Bundesstiftung Magnus Hirschfeld*“ (Archive of other memories. Contemporary witness interview project of the Federal Foundation Magnus Hirschfeld, interviewing lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgender, inter and queer people), Berlin, [http://mh-stiftung.de/en/zeitzeug\\_innen-interview-projekt-der-bundestiftung-magnus-hirschfeld/](http://mh-stiftung.de/en/zeitzeug_innen-interview-projekt-der-bundestiftung-magnus-hirschfeld/); „*Individuelle Erinnerung und gewerkschaftliche Identität*“ (Individual memory and trade union identity), Bonn/Düsseldorf, <http://www.zeitzeugen.fes.de/>; „*Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte*“ (Museum for Hamburg history), Hamburg, <http://toepfer-stiftung.de/museum-fuer-hamburgische-geschichte/>.

In fact, archiving oral history interviews is a great challenge, both technically and in terms of content. The most technically demanding aspect is the long-term preservation of audio and video recordings, which requires digitization of analog recordings. This is demanding because it means dealing with both historical and current recording technologies and because decisions regarding formats and storage media must take into account both current and future technological developments. All this can quickly overtax archives that lack special expertise regarding audio and video material in general and interviews in particular. In this regard the British and Austrian examples are instructive: there sound archives manage oral history collections.<sup>4</sup>

The challenge in terms of content is based on the qualitative nature of the interview. The open form and narrative structure make the interviews interesting for secondary analyses. The interviews offer so much information and aspects that they can be analysed beyond the first evaluation to further questions in other research contexts and with new knowledge gain. Nevertheless, the content indexing is demanding and not always satisfactory.

Making such interviews a usable source requires at least a classification of the material according to predefined thematic characteristics or keywords. Another form of disclosure entails the transcription of interview material so it can be subject to a full-text search. Unfortunately, both indexing and transcription are very time-consuming even with today's technology. Due to the high costs of proper indexing and long-term preservation, archiving oral history interviews involves a great deal of effort.

In addition, there is the uncertain legal basis for archiving witness interviews. In order to ensure the interviewee's personal rights, the access to oral history interviews has until now usually been confined to the proprietary archives. Here, archive users are required to sign an agreement that they will not make use of personal data and in the case of publication ensure that the interviewee and other featured persons are adequately anonymized. As a result, it is difficult for users to locate appropriate interview material, and actually using the material tends to be time-consuming and bound to a particular physical location.

Nevertheless, for some years now, pertinent archives have been facing a growing interest in oral history interviews (Apel 2015). In parallel to the increased user interest, however, relevant archives have also identified changing expectations on the part of users. Accustomed to rapid access to all types of information on the internet, users of archives now expect at least the possibility of online research in databases and preferably the online provision of the sources themselves. The archives are, however, hesitant about these questions and expect the archive

<sup>4</sup> In Great Britain the "British Library Sound Archive" is leading in the field of archiving oral history collections <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-history>. In Austria several oral history collections are archived by the "Österreichische Mediathek" (Austrian Media Center) at the *Technisches Museum Wien*, <https://www.mediathek.at>.

users to do the often very time-consuming work in their institution, which is run as a presence archive.

In digital humanities, the provision of sustainable repositories, standardized metadata, interoperable interfaces and exchange formats has made considerable progress in recent years, not least through major collaborative projects such as CLARIN or DARIAH, offering, amongst other features, complex solutions for generic search across multiple collections of heterogeneous metadata formats. However, feature requirements regarding AV media formats such as a graded access rights management, the automatised anonymisation of personal data in AV data, or a transmedial search - such as, for example, a geo-referenced place on an interactive map linking to a specific point of reference in a video -, do not exist as default features in current repositories. These requests hardly exist as out-of-the-box solutions, but require project-specific adjustment and the respective development resources. While it is undeniable that modern and user-friendly forms of the provision of interview material need to be developed, it is also true that the sensitive nature of the documents and the personal rights of the interviewees must not be neglected. It is the responsibility of the archives to protect the personality rights of the interviewee and at the same time to meet the demands of the archive users for up-to-date conditions of access..

The online archive "Forced Labor 1939-1945. Memory and History" is an example of an online archive dedicated to these challenges. It is presented in the following section.

#### 4. The online archive "Forced Labor 1939-1945. Memory and History"

The "Forced Labor 1939-1945. Memory and History" archive holds over 390 audio- and 190 video-interviews with people forced to labour for Nazi Germany. The interviews were conducted in 2005 and 2006 within the framework of "Documentation of Life Story Interviews with Former Slave and Forced Laborers," a project involving 32 research institutions and project groups and coordinated by the Institute for History and Biography at the FernUniversität Hagen.<sup>1</sup>

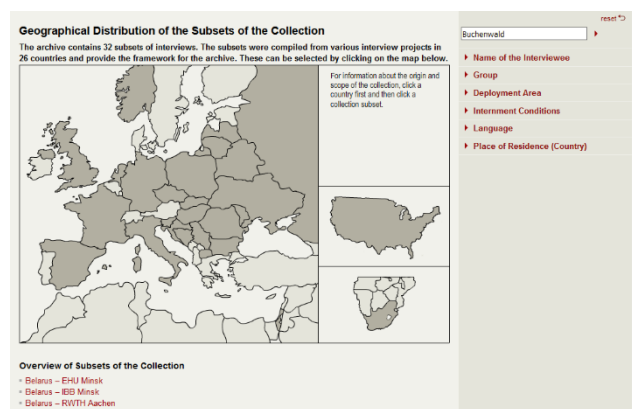


Figure 1: Geographical distribution of the subsets of the collection

The archive contains interviews with survivors of Nazi forced labour in 25 languages; interviews were conducted in 26 countries, above all in Central and Eastern Europe. The interviewees were free to choose the interview language. Interviewees include former concentration camp inmates, prisoners of war and members of victimized groups that are often “forgotten” such as Roma and victims of forced Germanization.

The interviews in the “Forced Labor 1939-1945” archive are narrative life-story interviews and begin with an open question. They follow a structure that begins with the stating the time, date, location and participants of the interview (in text form on an opening slide, and often verbally as well), followed by the narration of the witness’s life story, and concluding with the presentation of documents and artefacts. The interviews are unedited. They have an average duration of 2.5 hours.

Each interview is accompanied by a short report by the interviewer (which is not made public), along with biographical questionnaires and a brief biography of the interviewed person. In this project, transcripts and translations of the interviews have been produced, and these allow for the provision of particularly detailed research options and a user-friendly environment.

The Center for Digital Systems of the Freie Universität Berlin – in cooperation with the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future – created an online archive from the analogue audio and video collection.<sup>5</sup> The interview archive is available for education and research and embedded in a Web site which provides contextual information about the collection, the project, oral history, forced labor, compensation of forced laborers and activities for education, teaching and exhibits. Thematically related links are available as well as literature references.

The original tapes have been archived for an unlimited time by the Deutsches Historisches Museum, where they are stored under optimal conditions (like film material, cool and dry, in a constant climate. The standard for the storage of magnetic tapes was defined in ISO 18923:2000) However, it is still unclear whether transfer to other digital formats will be possible in twenty or thirty years without quality losses. High-quality (albeit lossy in comparison to the original) digital reference copies in DV Pal format has been made of the interviews. Copies of the video recordings were also transcoded for the internet originally into Flash and MPEG 4 end-user formats, but technical development has meanwhile led to dropping the Flash format and re-encoding to X264 (using the mp4 container) in three different resolutions optimizing for different mobile end devices. MPEG 3 copies have been

made of the audio recordings. The reference copies are intended to provide a basis for generating other up-to-date formats for end-use in the future.

Access to the online archive is open to registered users only. Potential users must apply for registration and provide not only personal details but also precise information about their interest in the material. This information is checked manually by the project team of the Freie Universität Berlin for plausibility, and within two days applicants either receive personal access data or are informed that their application has been declined. Users must also agree to abide by the comprehensive conditions of use.

The issue of confidentiality for interviewees has been approached with great care. Access to the documents is controlled in a similar way to that used in traditional, physical archives that the user must visit in person. This indicates that the concerns repeatedly raised about confidentiality in the context of digital or online archives can, in fact, be adequately dealt with.

Metadata is assigned to each interview and enables a quick search for biographical key data. It is desirable for the future to make these metadata available in other directories as well (e.g. Europeana<sup>6</sup>). These data are not found unconditionally in the interview itself, but they are collected for each interview in the interview process.

In the online archive the uncut interviews have been processed by the CeDiS team in such a way as to make possible a number of navigation and search tools for archive users. One popular, standard option is the combination of biographical search criteria. For each interview, the following information is recorded: persecuted group, labour deployment area (e.g. mining, private household, agriculture, etc.), internment conditions (e.g. prison, concentration camp, private lodgings), interview language, (current) place of residence (country). The user can select for certain categories to, for example, identify everyone who gave his/her interview in Polish and belonged to the group of “politically persecuted”. In this case, 32 interviews from the archive would be immediately found. Such a search can be refined in various ways to get more and more specific (and fewer) results. For example, the search above can be refined to include only those who laboured in the field of “industry”: for which 13 results can be found in the archive. This search possibility identifies complete interviews (rather than particular segments in the interviews).

The “Forced Labor 1939-1945” archive also offers users the possibility of targeting concrete passages in the interviews. For this purpose interviews have been transcribed and translated into German,<sup>7</sup> and divided into individual

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<sup>5</sup> The creation of the online archive was carried out by a project team supported by free lancers. The project was led by Prof. Apostolopoulos. Dr. Doris Tausendfreund was responsible for the project management. The author of further articles mentioned here, Dr. Cord Pagenstecher, was also on the project team. Further project members can be found under the following link: <http://www.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de/team/index.html>.

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<sup>6</sup> Europeana is the European Commission’s digital platform for cultural heritage, [www.europeana.eu/portal/de](http://www.europeana.eu/portal/de).

<sup>7</sup> This has been done manually by a large amount of freelancers. Their work was quality controlled by the Institute for East European Studies of the Freie Universität Berlin. Additionally, all names (companies, locations, camps and persons) were provided with aliases that were synchronized with each other.

segments, with each segment corresponding to a sentence. The text-based segments are linked with the video and audio time codes with the result that a full-text search shows the individual segments as well as the corresponding sequences in the video and audio files. The type of linking has the additional function of allowing for the synchronous presentation of image/sound and the accompanying text, which is shown in subtitles. The full-text search, which is made possible by the transcription and translation of the interviews, offers the advantage of allowing every word to be searched and found.

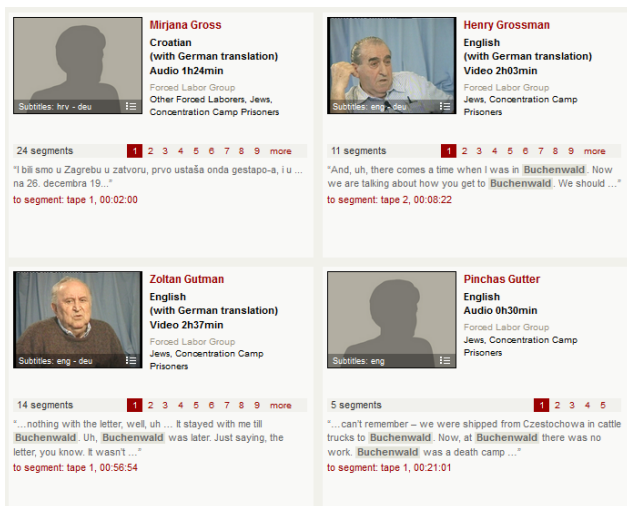


Figure 2: Full-text search results of the term “Buchenwald”

The disadvantage is that these words are not weighted. For instance, a place name can refer to somewhere an interviewee stayed for several years or to one of many cities through which someone traveled en route to a camp; the latter result is unlikely to be interesting for the researcher.

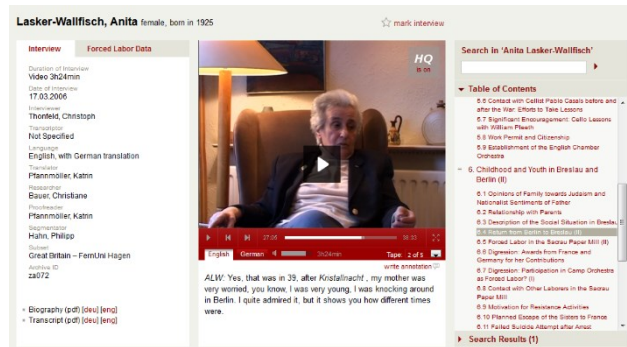


Figure 3: Display of the interview in the online archive

In order to counteract such irrelevant search results and to provide archive users with tools in addition to the full-text search, headings have been written and a register was set up. The headings provide the user with a quick overview of the interview structure and the main points covered. Thus, for example, recurring topics become immediately

visible. They can also be used to locate more abstract connections, even if the familiar terminology does not appear in the spoken text. For instance, an interviewee might speak vividly about the riots during the November Pogrom without using this term or one of the other common synonyms for it (e.g. “Kristallnacht”). A full-text search would thus not locate this thematic segment. Headings are a great help to users in such cases, as they link familiar, technical terms to the segment in question. The headings are located right next to the player and are therefore easy to access.

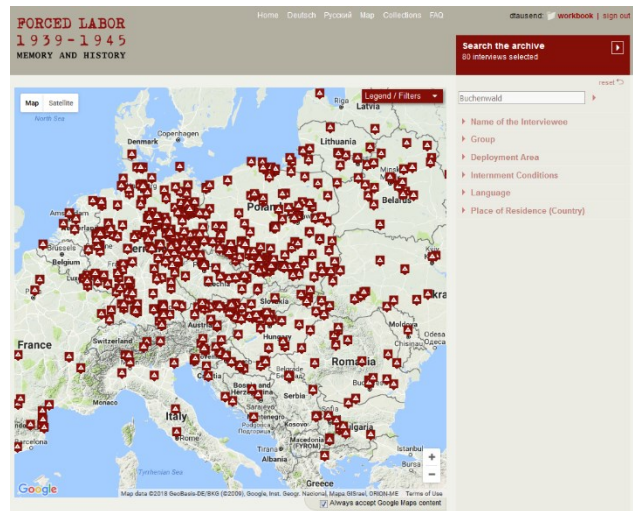


Figure 4: Visualization of the camps where interviewees were held

The registers include all geographical locations of relevance to the interviewees’ biography, the names of companies connected to the labour years, sites of persecution as well as any individual whose full name was mentioned in the interview. The registers build the foundation for additional functionalities of the archive, which are partly still being developed. In general, it is important to note that the archive is being constantly expanded and improved upon. A first version went online in January 2009, and a second version with additional functionality was released in June 2010. More modifications are planned or already in progress. In 2018, the archive will become more responsive so that a convincing design and user guidance on various mobile terminals will be possible. This process reflects a compromise between making the interviews available to research and education as soon as possible and advancing interview processing or “disclosure” and technical research capabilities. Thus, some of the archive’s interviews do not (yet) offer the full variety of search functionalities described. Information regarding the processing stage is displayed with the interview so that a user can see which of the consecutive steps (proof-reading, segmenting, translating, and register/headings processing) the interview has been through. The register allows maps to be generated. These collection maps display, for example, birth place, location of deportation or forced labour, or the post-war residence of

all interviews. Users can select a particular location on the collection map and will be taken to a list of interviews that mention that location in the particular connection (as birth place, for example). Similarly, in the future information from the register can be used to make and display individualized maps for each interview; they would display and designate (e.g. by colour code) the most relevant locations (birth place, internment location) of that interviewee's biography.

To summarize, the archive offers a highly user-friendly interface and helpful research tools. The capacity to locate thematically relevant segments, or particular names and terms within the interview has been made possible by an immense input of time and personnel, which has produced, among other things, the complex indexing of the content of every interview, including producing transcripts and translations as well as registers and headings. The archive online platform also required complex programming, which includes an editing system, a documentation and indexing system, a search engine, and an interactive user-interface with multimedia elements. Furthermore, digitization and archiving also represent a substantial challenge in terms of navigating the prevailing technical parameters and financial constraints. Thus the "Forced Labor 1939-1945" archive had to find a pragmatic solution that guarantees the preservation of the interviews without astronomical costs, this entailed a loss in terms of quality compared with the original recordings. The archive is designed for use in research and education. The user interface features comprehensive search functions that are particularly suited to researchers and teachers at the university level. The archive is used by teachers and students from a diverse range of disciplines. Apart from the more obvious fields of history and cultural studies, the testimonies are being used, for example, in seminars run by departments of sociology, political science, English philology, East European studies, Jewish studies, film studies and educational science. Some seminars focus completely on the interviews, while others use them as supplementary sources.

The use of such testimonies in school contexts has proved particularly effective to raise a general awareness of the existence of forced labour during the Second World War. Since pupils respond very well to accounts by witnesses to historical events and direct encounters with the few surviving witnesses are seldom possible due to their advanced age. However, the use of these archives in their existing form without a didactic framework and contextualization is unsuited to the 13-18 year-old target group. In particular, the vast number of interviews seems to confuse pupils and quickly overtaxes them. For this reason Educational materials based on the testimonies have been developed. A project team at Freie Universität Berlin has used the interviews to produce a multimedia application that allows for independent learning. The application was originally distributed on dvds, but is now online at [www.lernen-mit-interviews.de](http://www.lernen-mit-interviews.de) available. The learning software supports independent and competency-oriented learning both in regular lessons as well as

during project days and presentation examinations in schools. The focus is on abridged videographed life reports with tailored work proposals. Additional materials such as documents, maps, pictures, songs, short biographies, methodological tips, etc. help with editing and contextualization.<sup>8</sup> The software is also supplemented with a printed teacher handbook that includes in-depth historical, contextual background to the interviews' content. DVD and teacher handbooks are still being distributed by the German Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung).

Finally, learning materials for other countries were developed. Together with teams in the Czech Republic, Russia and soon Poland, new content was generated that takes into account not only the respective language, but also the culture of remembrance and the requirements of the schools. The learning application for the Czech Republic can be found at the Internet address ([www.nucenaprace.cz](http://www.nucenaprace.cz)). The Russian version is provided under (<https://obuchenie-na-osnove-intervyu.org>) (Wein, 2018).

Due to the special nature of the materials it holds and the aids it provides, the Forced Labor 1939-1945 archive is of particular interest for the field of historical-political education and research. For scholars, online access to interviews relevant to their research provides a real advantage that will lead to greater utilization of the interviews. Whereas previously time-consuming and costly visits to archives were reserved for scholars involved in projects with adequate financing, online offerings now also enable students and pupils, as well as lay researchers, to make use of interviews with witnesses to historical events. The increased visibility and use of their holdings is also of benefit to the archives, since it enables them to acquire greater significance and recognition, which could in turn lead to more resources in terms of staff and financing. Finally, for the interviewees, the improved access to and increasing use of the material they have provided represents a recognition of their role as witnesses and a confirmation that their memories and experiences will continue to be appreciated by future generations.

## 5. Perspectives and potentials

Today, there are numerous collections of oral history interviews. Each collection follows its own guidelines with regard to interview management, interview focus, archiving, metadata, search features, standardized biographical and bibliographical reference and, if necessary, indexing of interviews, storage and preservation of tapes, (standardized) data formats etc.

For researchers, these collections are very valuable, but there is no curated, complete catalogue of individual collections. Such a directory would be a first step towards making the interviews entirely available to the academic world. It would be even more desirable to implement a

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<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive presentation of the educational materials see Pagenstecher, C., Wein, D., 2017.

meta-search that searches the directories of the different collections, implying both standardized metadata schemes and mapping tools/features, allowing for cross-searching a variety of given collections, combining user-specific parameters.

Open standards such as the Resource Description Framework (RDF) would serve as a basis for semantic web solutions. These standards allow for a constant extension of assignments that is not possible in the more static metadata schemas. Links to ever new open data sources are supported. In addition, data fields can be mapped to each other without loss and thus guarantee interoperability of data.

With the semantic processing of information from biographical interviews, these are also compatible with the databases of larger initiatives for curating, storing and archiving the digital cultural heritage, also aiming at the differentiated use of large quantities of digital multimedia by advanced technologies and concepts of the Semantic Web and Web 2.0.

In addition to the search for metadata on various collections, the preservation and indexing of "neglected" smaller collections appears to be necessary in the near future. In order to preserve them and make them available for research and educational purposes in the future, it seems necessary to create digital copies. These should be collected, indexed and made available to others. To this end, it would make sense to create a central platform as an infrastructural solution to which the individual owners of the collection would upload and edit their audio and video interviews with associated transcripts, biographies, images, etc. and make them accessible to the scientific community by means of a differentiated user administration. The configurable sets of tools, some of which have been tried and tested (the solutions of the "Forced Labor" archive could serve as a model) and some of which are to be newly developed, would support the researchers working with the interviews through annotation and analysis. Such a platform would have to be offered open access for holders of interview collections and thus be available for use free of charge. In this way, a possibility of sustainability would also be created for the biographical data of smaller financially very poorly equipped projects, which is not available at present.

Both proposals, the meta-search as well as the online archive, would contribute to the long-term preservation and visualisation of the large and small interview collections that have emerged over the past decades and thus make them accessible to further research.

The increased use of the interview documents would also be an opportunity to promote content indexing and transcription through the participation of users, which is difficult to achieve under current conditions. The machine-readable, standardized indexing of the interviews is ultimately the most important prerequisite for keeping them alive as historical sources and opening them up to questions that future generations of researchers will address to them.

Clearly, respective efforts are difficult to achieve by

single disciplines, projects and smaller institutions depending on restricted resources and budgets. Current discussions and initiatives such as those on generic and/or discipline-specific national research data infrastructures show the need of a sustainable commitment by large institutions and/or structures. Discipline-specific infrastructural requirements, as they emerge through research fields such as oral history, can serve as a valuable basis for designing respective solutions.

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i Both authors are engaged in the project at different stages. Almut Leh as part of the coordinating team was in charge for the conducting of the interviews and building up a consistent collection. Doris Tausendfreund as project manager at Center for Digital Systems is in charge for the creation of the multimedia archive “Forced Labour 1939-1945”. For reports on the interview project see Plato/Leh/Thonfeld, 2010.