

Rob Perks

British Library, United Kingdom

Mass digitisation of oral history archives for online web access: 'Unlocking Our Sound Heritage' Part 1 – the context and technical infrastructure

The British Library has recently embarked on 'Unlocking Our Sound Heritage', a new £19m project which is one of the world's largest initiatives to digitise at-risk and vulnerable oral history and other audio content for web access. Over a five-year period 150,000 recordings from around the UK – half of them oral history interviews – will be digitised at the British Library and ten regional partner organisations and made publicly accessible for a wide range of audiences. Rob Perks will place this new initiative into a wider context and highlight the key issues which the project team are facing.

This panel continues the series led by Rob Perks at successive IOHA conferences over the past decade reflecting on the challenges which the web has posed to our practice as oral historians. At IOHA 2016 in Bangalore the panel looked at the shift to history-making through social media and the direct upload of memories; the changing role of the archivist; and wider impacts on the interview relationship following wider global exposure and the demand for open access.

Mary Stewart

British Library, United Kingdom

Mass digitisation of oral history archives for online web access: 'Unlocking Our Sound Heritage' Part 2 – devising systems to assess sensitivity

In this panel Mary Stewart will reflect on the new systems which the British Library has been developing to document and manage mass digitisation workflows, and especially on the legal and ethical issues involved the large-scale clearance of oral history recordings for public access, including the concerns emerging around access to sensitive personal data (derived from new European legislation which will impact on all oral history projects).

She will address issues such as: what counts as 'sensitive', particularly for third parties mentioned in recordings? Do ideas of what is sensitive change over time? How can we make proportionate efforts to assess these issues, with limited resources and specific targets for online access? How do we add the oral historian's voice to institutional discussions about risk? What steps can we take as an oral history community to better contextualise our oral histories online? These issues effect all of us – as web access to content is increasingly regarded as a default by researchers and funders alike.

****This paper is part of a panel with Rob Perks. Please schedule our presentations together****

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Ukrainian public oral history online archive (civic initiative and oral history projects: advantages and difficulties of collaboration)

Since the end of the twentieth century, as oral history became widespread in Central and Eastern Europe, it has been playing a great role in an important epistemological shift in the humanities and social sciences of former socialist countries. There has been a move away from focusing on the past of social classes and their institutional and corporate histories towards an examination of the lived experience of individuals, whose life unfolded either in or outside these institutions and corporations. Oral history has also produced and legitimized, often retroactively, new agents of national histories. It allowed its subjects to speak for themselves and emphasized the legitimacy and relevance of personal experience to the study of history.

Working with oral histories entails not only the planning and collection, but also cataloguing and preservation of interviews, their online accessibility as well: ensuring their visibility in the virtual and physical spaces and creating opportunities for utilizing them in research, education, exhibitions, and civic projects. This task is very important in current Ukrainian situation, characterized by a reinterpretation of the past, "battles" for memoirs as the capital of history politics, and the instrumentalization of memory as a legitimizing tool of certain political projects.

In 2017 owing to cooperation of Ukrainian Oral History Association and Polish Fundacja "Dobra Wola" the Ukrainian public oral history online archive was created. In our presentation we are going to: 1) demonstrate general design of Ukrainian public oral history online archive, 2) provide the information about projects, which oral histories are placed in archive, 3) discuss the public role of oral history and the crucial need to return collected materials to the community that supplied them in one form or another.

Doris Tausendfreund

Center for Digital Solutions, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

The Online Archive "Forced Labor 1939-1945. Memory and History"

The online archive contains 583 comprehensive life story interviews with concentration camp survivors, prisoners of war, and "civilian" forced laborers. In 27 countries, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe, 192 video and 391 audio interviews were conducted in the native languages of the witnesses. Each interview is accompanied by additional material: a short biography, a transcript of the interview, a translation of the transcript into German, a table of contents showing the structure of the interview, additional photos and documents, as well as basic biographical information. All content is accessible worldwide for any users who registered with the site.

We will describe our indexing method, with its internal working interfaces and the process involved, as well as the public online application and its functionalities. We will present the different functionalities (content-based indexing, full-text search and an interactive map application) that enable a targeted search that leads directly to individual passages of the interviews.

We will also discuss considerations involved in designing an online platform to avoid the use of the interviews as a mere quotations quarry and instead supports a comprehensive understanding of the whole testimony in its narrative structure and its biographical meaning.

An annotation function will be presented. The function is meant to benefit from the specific knowledge of users to add to the understanding of the interviews.

Finally, the archive has been designed multilingually and runs in German, English, and Russian in order to accommodate the needs of a greater international audience.

This presentation doesn't focus on a special research problem. Instead it shows a powerful tool which enables academics to work effectively with testimonies to answer their own research questions.

An additional online-learning-environment aims to support education as well, and there is the option to give an overview of our approaches in this context, too.