

Archiving machine-readable historical data: data services of the Center for Historical Social Research

Reinke, Herbert

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Reinke, H. (1979). Archiving machine-readable historical data: data services of the Center for Historical Social Research. *Historical Social Research*, 4(4), 36-38. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.4.1979.4.36-38>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

ARCHIVING MACHINE-READABLE HISTORICAL DATA:
DATA SERVICES OF THE CENTER FOR HISTORICAL SOCIAL RESEARCH

"By building up archives of data for further analysis you ensure continuous cumulation of knowledge" (Stein Rokkan).

Thanks to the efforts of Stein Rokkan, Erwin K. Scheuch and many other social scientists in cumulating knowledge by making research data available for secondary analysis, nowadays research data archives are an integral part of social science infrastructures. Nevertheless, the practice of archiving and preparing historical data and their use for secondary analysis is still underdeveloped. This holds true especially for the German-speaking countries and is here mostly due to a lack of experience in archiving machine-readable historical data. The Zentrum für historische Sozialforschung (Center for historical social research) has now taken up the task of archiving historical data.

The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German National Science Foundation) has granted means

- to archive machine-readable historical data
- to provide assistance in creating new machine-readable historical data sets
- to develop methods and techniques for archiving and for secondary analysis of machine-readable historical data.

The Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung of the University of Cologne supports this archiving of historical data by making available its experiences in archiving survey data and special software.

The further work of the Zentrum includes:

- training of "unexperienced" collectors of quantitative historical data (courses)
- development of teaching packages
- supporting ongoing research projects in collecting and preparing machine-readable data files, in acquiring existing data files, or in analysing quantitative historical data
- assistance in creating machine-readable data sets comparative in time or space.

Data bases of historical social research

The inventories of quantitative history and of historical social research in German-speaking countries have shown, that there is a wide variety of machine-readable historical data (1). The research projects which have or are producing machine-readable data files, concentrate on the following research fields:

- social change and social structure
- urban and regional research
- collective biographies
- attitude and opinion research.

Besides these topics, there are a number of further important research questions. Among these, the most important are economic history and electoral behavior.

Urban and regional research, producing quantitative historical data, falls in two broad categories

- again research on stratification systems and processes, on mobility and migration, on the spatial distribution of population in villages and towns, and on historical land use patterns,
- besides that, there are a number of projects which investigate demographic behavior patterns.

"Collective biographies" is a research field which includes investigations of a variety of groups, in the first place collective biographies of elite members, e.g. members of parliaments but also of members of other groups, which range from union members to members of the German resistance to the Nazi regime.

Research on attitudes and opinions within historical social research is done using a specific research technique: content and document analysis. The data bases of these projects differ quite a lot: Among them are e.g. bulletins of the German catholic clergy about marriage and family, high school examination papers, and petitions to the German 1848 National Assembly. Besides the technique applied, these projects have in common that they give us a picture of past attitudes.

Historical statistics are a further data base of historical social research. The extensive nineteenth-century statistics and other historical statistics are gaining importance as a data base for historical research.

In the German-speaking countries, economic history has traditionally applied quantitative techniques. Producing machine-readable data files is therefore a continuation of this tradition.

The archiving of historical data by the Zentrum concentrates on the research mentioned above. Besides that, the Zentrum archives single data sets which do not fall into these categories but which are important for historical social research.

Providing data for reanalysis and comparative research

The Zentrum archives historical data and supports projects which compile quantitative historical data. The Zentrum assists the transformation of these data into machine-readable form.

An important task in this context is the integration of hitherto isolated files. Especially among the data files from urban and regional research, there are a number of studies whose files should be integrated to allow the creation of linked files covering a broader geographical area or time period, and thus making comparative research in time and space possible. This is the more important as comparative research - although its necessity has often been postulated - is still lacking. Providing data for comparative research is one of the preconditions for the cumulation of knowledge in historical social research.

Developing methods for archiving and for secondary analysis of historical data

Archiving machine-readable historical data is an activity which cannot yet be established on safe ground. Although foreign social science data archives have gained already some experience in archiving historical data and in preparing them for historical social research, certain problems are only touched, but not yet solved. These problems concern mainly the indicator quality of historical data, and sampling questions in historical social research.

As a part of its archiving activities, the Zentrum für historische Sozialforschung aims at developing criteria for evaluating the indicator quality of historical data. Furtheron, it will try to improve the sampling techniques available for historical social research.

Training courses

Scholars are not always aware of the possibilities secondary analyses of historical data offer for their research. Therefore the Zentrum has decided to carry out courses to train "unexperienced" collectors of quantitative historical data. This will ensure that the services of the Zentrum can be used by sufficiently trained scholars.

The development of teaching packages is part of the training of "unexperienced" collectors of quantitative data. In sociology and even more in political science teaching packages are used as a normal part of the training program for students, but in historical social research they have not yet been developed and used for this purpose.

Cooperation with users

The Zentrum für historische Sozialforschung mainly serves the needs of historical social research. It works in close cooperation with the association QUANTUM, which is at the same time the organized user group of the Zentrum für historische Sozialforschung. This will ensure the proliferation of services in need.

(1) For detailed descriptions of the data bases cf.

W. Bick, P. J. Müller, H. Reinke, Quantitative history in transition. Social Science Information, 16(6) 1977, pp. 697-714 and the same authors, Quantitative historische Forschung 1977, Stuttgart 1977, Historische Sozialforschung 1978, Stuttgart 1978, Historische Sozialforschung 1979, Stuttgart 1979.

Herbert Reinke
Zentrum für historische
Sozialforschung
Universitätsstr. 20
D - 5000 Köln 41