The Press Archives of the Herder-Institut: Potential, Problems and Prospects
Karl von Delhaes[1]

Formation and structure of the collections

The *Herder-Institut* started collecting newspapers from East Central Europe in 1952. At the same time, clippings were filed systematically according to an index of (currently) 450 topics. At first, these rapidly growing archives mainly served the staff as internal sources of information on the countries behind the Iron Curtain. In accordance with the objectives of the Institute, special consideration was given to the former German territories and areas of settlement in this region. Thus, a unique coverage of local and regional newspapers has become a special feature of the collections. By the 1960s, materials were systematically filed from the 150 titles to which the Institute subscribed.

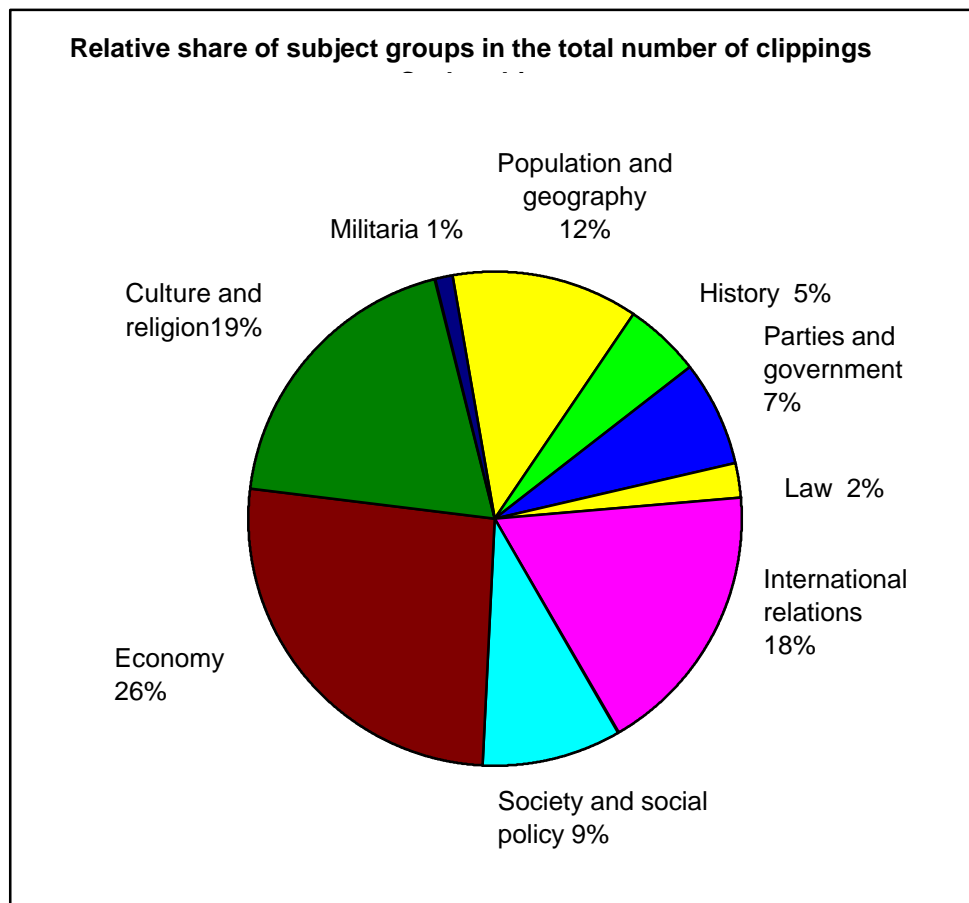An overview of the structure and present size of the collections are given in the following table.

The press archives of the *Herder-Institut* (Inventory Jan. 1998)	
Clippings filed systematically 15422 files with 350 clippings (average) and 8476 microfiche with 60 photos each (totaling 5.9 million clippings)	**Newspaper collection** 9797 volumes and 205 reels of microfilm

Subject files (Files+microfiches)	Biographical files (Files)	Topographical files (Files)	667 dailies and weeklies on paper and microfilm (Volumes+reels)
Estonia 606+ 216	Estonia 436	Estonia 39	Estonia 332
Latvia 448+ 77	Latvia 298	Latvia 30	Latvia 375
Lithuania 388+ 95	Lithuania 303	Lithuania 21	Lithuania 439
Poland 3362+5144	Poland 2018	Poland 491	Poland 5295+129
Russia/Northeast-Prussia 200+ 17	Russia/Northeast-Prussia 86	Russia/Northeast-Prussia 9	Russia/Northeast-Prussia 325
Czechoslovakia (since 1993: ÈR, SR) 3559+2927	Czechoslovakia (since 1993: ÈR, SR) 2446	Czechoslovakia (since 1993: ÈR, SR) 470	Czechoslovakia (since 1993: ÈR, SR) 3031+ 86
Others 191			

The diagram below shows the distribution of clippings on different subjects

Relative share of subject groups in the total number of clippings

- Population and geography 12%
- Militaria 1%
- History 5%
- Culture and religion 19%
- Parties and government 7%
- Law 2%
- International relations 18%
- Economy 26%
- Society and social policy 9%

National and international comparison

In order to furnish its users with information on similar or complementary collections and to establish its position relative to comparable institutions and potential partners, the Institute held a survey of 40 relevant libraries or archives in Germany and 15 other countries. Due to the fact that after 1945 a limited concentration of materials from the Soviet Union could be expected and socialist countries did little open research on the fellow members of their bloc, the result of the survey was somewhat surprising:

Although there are several institutions that file newspaper clippings from the same region and period as our press archives, their objectives are quite different. The archives of the *Kieler Institut fuer Weltwirtschaft* for instance are exclusively interested in economic topics and the Institute for Literary Research of the *Polish Academy of Sciences* library only collects material on literary subjects and persons of literary significance. Furthermore, none of these collections are even remotely comparable in size to the press archives of the *Herder-Institut* as far as the given region and period are concerned. The only exception in this respect is the *Open Society Archives* at the *Central European University* in Budapest, which took

over the materials of the documentation departments of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*.[2] Whereas these collections -- ending at the beginning of the 1990s -- are rather oriented towards human rights issues, totalitarian abuse and malgovernment, and underground activities in accordance with the interests of the respective radio stations, the archives of the *Herder-Institut* give a more general outlook on the contemporary history of the countries in the region.

Although they are not always accessible, the national libraries in East Central Europe naturally possess fairly complete collections of newspapers published in the country (which excludes the exile publications). However, our survey found only three institutions which are able to furnish the scholar with newspapers of the entire region for the relevant period. These are the *Hoover Institution* (Stanford, California) with a total of 405 titles for the time from 1945 to 1989 and 75 titles currently subscribed, the *British Library* (London) with 321 titles over all and 111 titles currently subscribed[3], and finally, for the time until 1990, the *Open Society Archives* (Budapest) mentioned above. Due to geographical proximity and manifold historical interrelations, other considerable collections are to be found in Germany. These are dispersed over different locations in accord with the federal structure of our country, however. Direct comparisons showed that more than two-thirds of the 382 titles (for the relevant region and period) held in the *Staatsbibliothek Berlin*, as well as all 67 relevant titles held by the *Bayrische Staatsbibliothek Muenchen*, are also among the 667 titles available in Marburg.

User profile: Motives of and obstacles to research in the archives

From its initial function as a source of topical information otherwise not obtainable for the staff, the press archives have continually grown into a collection predominantly used by scholars from outside the Institute, mainly from universities. At the same time, the distribution of users changed geographically. Today, scholars from other German states and from abroad make up the majority of users.

A count of research objectives over the last ten years shows that more than 80 percent were exclusively devoted to scholarly purposes. Again, nearly half of these cases aimed at academic qualifications, the distribution of which is shown in more detail in the following table.

Purpose of research	Total	(relative share)
Undergraduate studies	183	(20%)
MA thesis	92	(10%)
Doctoral thesis	68	(8%)
Habilitation thesis	4	(1%)
Other scholarly research	385	(43%)
Others	162	(18%)

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[2] Cf. Pavol Salamon: Open Society Archives: An Overview, also available in Intermarium.
[3] In 1993 the British Library to a large part incorporated the collections of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum.

Presenting the distribution of research by subject always poses a problem of definition, as exemplified by the case of contemporary history and political sciences. History with a share of one-third, however, was clearly the most important single discipline involved. More than 40 percent of all queries concerned subjects from the social sciences.

Queries by subject	Total	(relative share)
History (especially contemporary history)	337	(32%)
Political sciences	199	(18%)
Sociology	100	(9%)
Economics	133	(13%)
Geography , ecology	54	(5%)
Media research	70	(7%)
Literary sciences and linguistics	123	(12%)
Fine arts, music	26	(2%)
Others	18	(2%)

A major problem in using newspapers as a historical source is that most of the scholar's time is spent sifting through them and discarding irrelevant or redundant parts. Evidence suggests that systematically filed clippings such as the ones in the *Herder-Institut* -- even if they provide only first clues -- are extremely valuable aids in this respect. The frequency of demand for files and microfiches is higher than for volumes or microfilms of complete newspapers. These , however, remain indispensable as the original source, a point which we will return to later.

Without any doubt, the most important obstacle to research in press archives specializing on East Central Europe is insufficient knowledge of the relevant languages, a state that began to slowly improve only in the last few years. Our materials are predominantly written in the languages of the region. The newspaper collection contains only a few titles (mostly minority newspapers and publications from exile) in German or English. Around ten percent, of the clippings are in these languages. The languages of the region -- beginning with those more frequently spoken -- are Russian (with only a relative small portion of the materials), Polish, Czech, Slovakian, Lithuanian, Estonian and Latvian. Barriers to understanding are obviously higher, the less frequently a language is used. From the supply side, these obstacles could only be overcome by a translation service that would greatly overtax the capacities of our Institute.

Until the post-1989 changes, the seclusion of the region by the Iron Curtain further diminished incentives to learn the languages concerned. The rise in the number of users of our archives in the 1990s might be taken as an indication that the opening of borders has considerably improved motivation in this field.

Priorities in documentation: Service to the academic user and preservation of the materials

In contrast with the majority of press documentation established for journalistic and other commercial purposes, press archives for academic use have an important function in preserving material for longer periods; for research on contemporary history or the social

sciences where they are empirically based on time series, archives of other types are often not an alternative. Official waiting periods are seldom less than 30 years. Furthermore, it seems doubtful whether complete documentation could be expected here for all reaches of life. Not all facts that are reported by the press have left traces in official records. Some have been intentionally destroyed as examples from the last days of the GDR illustrate. The discontinuities in organization and personnel during the first years of transition in East Central Europe have made systematic access difficult for years to come, even if interested parties have not used the opportunities of general chaos to delete traces of certain activities. After all, it is only from the press that one may draw conclusions as to the probable informedness of the public at a given time. At the same time, newspapers are the original source to document the efforts undertaken to influence this informedness and consequently public opinion.

At first glance it might seem as if there were no trade-off between preservation and optimal service for the user. In fact, efforts to lead the user directly and exclusively to the material relevant to his/her research may serve to protect the rest, for instance. On the other hand, measures to protect the newspapers can impair their use; binding of complete titles in volumes has the advantage of minimizing the influx of air, but hampers copying. Frequent exposure to strong light and mechanical wear and tear while copying endangers the filed clippings. Finally, on account of the inferior quality of paper in those years, the oldest parts of the collection rapidly approach a state where further use endangers their existence.

At this point a decision about conversion of the material into a more durable form is required. From the point of view of preservation, the experts clearly recommend filming.[4] This recommendation has been implemented for the current filing of clippings by microfiche since 1991 as well as for the acquisition of early years of important newspapers as microfilms. Due to the lack of funds, backward conversion of our materials by filming has only been possible in the form of special projects of very limited scope. Optimal service for the user would require digitalization for on-line access and full-text research.[5] Problems of physical aging and rapid obsolescence of hardware and software however, make this medium fall short of preservation standards.[6] Thus, given limited funds, the two main priorities of documentation are once again in conflict.

Prospects of a more comprehensive service: Digitized access data

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[4] For more detail cf. ANGELIKA MENNE-HARETZ and NILS BRUBACH: Der intrinsische Wert von Archiv- und Bibliotheksgut. Kriterienkatalog zur bildlichen und textlichen Konversion bei der Bestandserhaltung [On the intrinsic value of archive and library materials. Criteria for facsimile and text conversion for preservation purposes] (= Veroeffentlichungen der Archivschule Marburg, Bd. 26), Marburg 1997, 67 passim. This study reports the results of a project sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and is also concerned with exactness, durability and "migration" problems of digitalization of source material.

[5] For a rather advanced method combining full-text research and bit-mapped images cf. Ronald Zweig: From Newsprint to Screen: Lessons from the Palestine Post Project, in: Eduard Muehle (ed.) Vom Instrument der Partei zur "Vierten Gewalt", Marburg 1997, 285 – 296.

[6] Cf. the preliminary report of technical experts on the program „Retrospektive Digitalisierung von Bibliotheksbestaenden" (financed by the DFG), especially 13, 42 and the literature listed there.

Keeping in mind the requirements of preservation, improvement of service in the immediate future will mean digitizing access data (also avoiding possible copyright problems). At present, access to the collection of clippings is exclusively guided by the filing system, that is, by a general subject (from a list of around 450 topics) and the date of publication. Information on the contents of certain files other than mere quantities might at best be obtained from the documentarian responsible at the time of filing. The degree of their relevance to specific questions can -- as a rule -- only be established by looking them up. To remedy this situation, a plan to supplement the information on lectured materials is underway. Apart from the signature used for systematic classification, a complete bibliographical identification and additional key words will be noted for every article filed and subsequently made available in an access data bank. The keywords are intended to give additional information and establish links to other relevant files. They will be amenable to electronic search. This access data bank could be additionally enriched by outside sources such as newspaper indices or national bibliographies where they also comprise newspaper articles. For preservation purposes, however, the access data should also be periodically stored on microfiche.

This concept offers several advantages:

- availability of more detailed information on all parts of the collections even in the absence of the staff that originally lectured the relevant newspapers,

- internal and external on-line access to this information for potential users, irrespective of opening hours of the archives,

- automated electronic identification of relevant clippings by additional keywords,

- a direct guide to our own newspaper collection or similar collections in other locations with the help of complete bibliographical identification of all filed clippings and the additional information from outside sources mentioned above,

- supply on demand of scanned or copied clippings identified on-line.

At the same time, this option recommends itself for retrospective application to the existing subject files.

The present state of hard- and software in the field of processing, storing and accessing printed data would also allow the scanning of all clippings, at least those currently filed, storing them in a "juke-box" where they can be retrieved via the access data bank. In fact, many commercially operated archives already use such a configuration. For our purposes however, preservation requirements would still necessitate additional filming. Only such progress in compressing bit-map data that would make it feasible to hold all lectured papers in this form would present us with a technically optimal and financially viable solution. Scanning could then be done from the films necessary for preservation of the newspaper collection and there would be no conflicts between users needing the same reel at a given time. Furthermore, a specific clipping would always be viewed virtually in its original surroundings, an advantage especially to the historian.

Insufficient funds and copyright considerations (which take account of complications and potential financial risks of electronic copying under German law), however, have led us to the compromise outlined above. Since users who want to reap the synergetic benefits generated by the unique ensemble of all our specialized collections in books, maps, photos

etc., which may not be digitized for years to come, will have to visit us anyway, this seems a fair solution.

Current efforts to enhance the accessibility of our archives

Apart from planning the access data bank which will hopefully start with the year 1999, we have worked on two projects that aim to provide a more detailed description of our collections, providing information on their contents on-line as well.

The first of these projects is an inventory of the newspaper collection. For every one of the 667 titles, the yearly issues and numbers available were registered. Ordered by country, every title is shortly characterized as to its specialization, political affiliation, circulation, publication dates, history and relevant literature. For each country a short introduction into its press history since 1945 was added.[7] The titles registered and their inventories are also available on-line in the *Zeitschriftendatenbank* [Data bank on periodicals] *Berlin*.[8]

Another project is the description of the biographical files. Since there are dossiers on about 200,000 persons from East Central Europe with contents varying in quantity (from 1 to more than 1000 clippings) and quality (articles from or about the person, interviews, short biographies, obituaries etc.), a selection had to be made that limits the description to the more substantial files. Experience with the first 5,000 persons selected shows, that we will probably end up with around 50,000 dossiers described. Apart from the identification of the person (name, first name, date of birth/death, place of birth) and contents of the dossier (number of clippings, number of biographies, year of first/last entry) we have added to the description certain features which we felt would interest the contemporary historian or social scientist working on the material. These are: profession, education, qualification and up to three functions in each of the following fields: parties and organizations, state and government, economy, police and military, church and other religious communities, culture and science. A first volume with Polish dossiers (names from A to G) has appeared in print January 1998.[9] The same data has been placed in the *Datenbank „Biographische Materialien aus der Presse Ostmitteleuropas"* [data bank "Biographical Materials from the East Central European Press"] which is accessible via our home page (http://www.uni-marburg.de/herder-institut/pressehp.html). Work on biographical files of the other countries (see table 1) has also begun and by the end of the year we hope to provide another 5,000 descriptions. All data will be periodically transferred to the data bank.

As a by-product to this work, a rather voluminous list of abbreviations has been compiled that should be useful to the scholar interested in contemporary history of the region. In the course of the century, the use of abbreviations, especially for organizations and

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[7] Zeitungen aus den Laendern Ostmitteleuropas und der Emigration. Beschreibung der Bestaende im Pressearchiv des Herder-Instituts [Newspapers from the countries of East Central Europe and their emigrants . Description of the holdings of the press archives of the Herder-Institut], berarbeitet von REINER BEUSHAUSEN u.a. = Sammlungen des Herder-Instituts zur Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung, Band 3, Marburg 1997.

[8] *http://www.dbilink.de/en* [Choose "databases"and log on as guest!]

[9] Biographische Materialien aus der Presse Ostmitteleuropas nach 1945 [Biographic materials from Central East European newspapers after 1945] A. Polen, Band 1: A –G, bearbeitet von KARL VON DELHAES u.a. = Sammlungen des Herder-Instituts zur Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung Band 6, Marburg 1998

institutions, has continually increased. The list is periodically augmented -- also from other sources -- and may be consulted on-line under the same address as the data bank.