

Call for Papers

for

the Interim Conference
of the Research Network “Biographical Perspectives on European Societies”
of the European Sociological Association (ESA)

and

the Annual Conference
of the Research Section “Biographieforschung”
of the German Sociological Association (GSA)

in cooperation with

the Faculty of Social Sciences
of the Georg Simon Ohm University of Applied Sciences Nuremberg, Germany

“Applied Biographical Research”

18th - 20th September 2010, Nuremberg, Germany

The issue of practical applications had already been a major topic in the early phase of biographical research. In this context the classical studies of Chicago sociology, e.g., Clifford Shaw’s “The Jack-Roller” (1930), but also similar studies of social scientists at the University of Poznan (under the influence of Florian Znaniecki) like Stanislaw Kowalski’s “Urke Nachalnik” (1933), come to mind. A first interest in a “clinical sociology” (Louis Wirth) emerged in working contexts in which sociologists developed a special interest in the life histories of their research subjects and encouraged and supported them to articulate and to write down “their own story”. Life history studies were not just relevant in the context of academic sociological research (in a more narrow sense) but were supposed to enlighten professional practitioners, the public and local elites. At the same time the act of collecting data was marked by the fact that research “subjects” intensely participated as co-workers or even co-authors: They were prompted to actively turn to and reflect about their life history and by doing so they gained new insights. This aspect was more or less neglected in basic theoretical considerations of the early phase of biographical research – as compared with new developments in which, e.g., the creation of knowledge in story telling and “biographical work” (in the sense of Anselm Strauss) become topics of inquiry.

The Nuremberg conference will focus on the practical uses and consequences of biographical research. Such uses and consequences might be intended, registered, surprising, subtle, neglected or just rhetorically invoked or imagined. The idea is to reflect about our studies and to reconstruct what we want to accomplish, whom we want to reach and how we have to deal with restrictions and limitations. Biographical researchers in different countries have gained quite different experiences and specific traditions have developed (cf. the relevance of the concepts of “user participation” and “user empowerment” in the UK and other countries). It will thus be very stimulating and rewarding for colleagues from different European countries to share their experiences and discuss their insights and ideas.

In the last years the topic of practical applications and the applicability of biographical research had been mainly discussed in the context of professional work and education (cf., e.g., the articles in Chamberlayne, Bornat and Apitzsch, eds., 2004). We would like to broaden the focus and invite colleagues who are working on quite different substantive areas to reflect about their studies in terms of their practical uses and consequences. This is just a list of possible topics for our discussion which might be expanded:

- Biographical research for whom: clients, professionals, institutions, social policy makers, the public? How is it possible to deal with possible conflicts of interest?
- The possible tensions between basic and applied biographical research
- The acquisition of skills of biographical research among professionals and the development of settings for acquiring such skills (workshops for reflecting professional practice etc.)
- The application and further development of procedures of data collection and analysis (of biographical research) in professional interventions: chances, risks and limits (in terms of legal barriers, ethical considerations, institutional restrictions etc.)
- The relevance of biographical research for different spheres of activity (counseling, educational support, working with unemployed persons, rehabilitation, therapy, organizational development, medical diagnosis and treatment, counseling of drug addicts, community organizing, supervision, etc.), policy areas (social policy, health policy etc.) and political discourses
- Biographical research and the arts
- Biographical research as a “meta” counseling procedure in order to sensitize professional counseling of clients with regard to their biographical processes
- The influence of funding institutions and officials on different phases and the results of a research project
- Strategies of dissemination of research results in fields of professional practice and their social arenas
- The relationship with research subjects and processes of creating knowledge in the research process
- Practical applications in early “classical” biographical studies
- Practical implications of different approaches of biographical research (including oral his-

- tory research)
- Specifics of applied biographical research in different countries
- Arenas and debates in which the usability of biographical studies is contested and defeated or defended

PLEASE NOTE

There will be both English and German language sessions. In any case the organizers will do their best to make sure that the bilingual character of the conference will be an asset for all participants, that everyone will be able to participate in discussions and that no one feels excluded.

We invite colleagues from different countries and different disciplines of the social sciences to submit abstracts until 30th April, 2010.

The abstracts should be no more than one page and can be written either in English or German. They should be sent to Thea Boldt (theaboldt@gmx.de) for the Research Network “Biographical Perspectives on European Societies” (ESA) as well as to Gerhard Riemann (gerhard.riemann@ohm-hochschule.de) for the Research Section “Biographieforschung” (GSA).

It is also possible to express an interest in research workshops for discussing data from ongoing research projects (with reference to the topic of the conference), to present posters and to opt for other forms of presentation.

Conference venue: Georg Simon Ohm University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bahnhofstr. 87, 90402 Nuremberg, Germany.