

The first aim of this project is to attempt the elaboration and establishment of methodological rules for exploiting letters to the central authorities in the Polish People's Republic (PRL) period as sources for researchers into social history. The second aim is the inter-disciplinary and a multi-aspected analyses of letters flowing in to four selected state institutions (the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, the Cabinet Office, the Council of State Office, Radio and Television)

Detailed archival and press inquiries will be conducted within the framework of the project. Audio-visual materials (in this letters used in postwar broadcasts) will also be analysed. Based on materials gathered thus, analyses of letters sent in to the selected institutions will be carried out. Among others, an attempt will be undertaken to establish the hierarchy of problems that were significant for Polish society in the successive periods of PRL history. Treating letters as a specific and important form of two-way communication between society and the authorities, an attempt will be made to reproduce the mechanisms governing its functioning. The interdisciplinary composition of the research team also facilitates advanced analyses of the linguistic aspects of the letters' sources (embracing both a semiotic and stylistic analyses of the epistolographic discourse). The achievement of each of the mentioned research tasks shall take into account the dynamic perspective and the research that is conducted shall concentrate primarily on the aspect of changes occurring throughout the entire PRL period.

Methodological reflection over epistolographic sources, the working out of work methods with this type of historical source, highlighting its weak and strong points, and detailed descriptions of scope of problems raised therein, together with producing a guide – that is helpful to historians and other humanists – to the vast collections of letters written after the war to central institutions; this will constitute an important practical tool facilitating further work with these epistolographic sources. The work of the research team designed thus will contribute not only to the development of a methodology of research into Polish history after 1945, but also it will constitute an important contribution to practical aspects of postwar social and cultural history studies of our country.

Disseminating the results of the planned research will take place by proxy of the planned publications and also via a project website, run in Polish and in English, constituting at the same time a place for information exchange and establishing contacts with other researchers engaged in analogous types of mass sources, produced by societies of the remaining eastern bloc countries.

Reasons for undertaking this research themes;

Undertaking the outlined research problem areas stems from the fact that the exploitation of postwar epistolographic mass sources in Polish historiography remains relatively rare and is usually of a supplementary character. Such an approach of researchers stems on the one hand from the scattered nature of the source materials, and on the other hand it is associated with the surfeit of sources and the lack of their systematic arrangement according to problems. Especially the latter and the time constraints incumbent on researchers often makes it very difficult if not impossible to locate letters with much to offer researchers in terms of unique character (e.g. produced by marginalized minorities or so-called excluded groups).

Also the variegated form these letters themselves and their accompanying - usually very complex - supplementary documentation (copies of other letters, official adnotations, correspondence associated with the given case between various institutions, press cuttings, witness accounts etc.) imposes numerous additional problems of a practical nature – demands on the one hand the necessity of working out an original and plausible research method, and on other the hand, it poses fresh questions to the historian analysing the epistolographic materials which so far have not been the subject of broader historical reflection.