

Description for the general public

The project will head toward an understanding and representation of the way in which the migrants to the Polish Western Territories after World War II, as well as subsequent generations of its inhabitants, have interpreted the social processes undergoing in the former western voivodships (szczecińskie, poznańskie, wrocławskie) in the years 1945 – 1970. We want to investigate, present and explain the manner in which the experience of migration and settlement in the Western Territories was described at the time of occurrence, as well as how they have been interpreted from the contemporary perspective, i.e., from the point of view of later events and experiences.

When it comes to the post-war experiences recorded contemporaneously with the processes under investigation (in the years 1945-1970), they can be accessed on the basis of a corpus of 1141 autobiographical narratives of settlers as well as subsequent generations of the inhabitants of the Western Territories, which were produced within the framework of personal-journal contests organised by the Institute for Western Affairs in Poznan. Those journals have now been digitised, thanks to a separate project financed by the Polish National Program for the Development of Humanities, which would allow for a computer-aided content analysis. The present project proposal involves a qualitative content analysis of personal journals originating from three different periods (1956, 1966, 1970), which were written by individuals coming from diverse social and geographical backgrounds as well as having undergone different migratory trajectories. The research project will allow for discerning the relationships between various aspects of different autobiographical narratives, between the content and form of expression, as well as between the biography and the course of life-events.

The approaches to the description and interpretation of events involved in the processes of migration and settlement on the Western Territories will be investigated on the basis of In-Depth Interviews. The project will allow for conducting such interviews with the authors of selected journals (if that remains possible) as well as with the members of their families and with individuals, who played the roles of opinion leaders in the local communities of the authors.

In the course of conducting the project, a number of specific research goals will also be realised; these include the investigation of the processes in which the journals were produced for the contests, their social and individual determinants. The project will lead to the popularisation of knowledge on the post-war phenomenon of journal-writing as well as shall contribute to a better understanding of the social processes occurring in the post-1945 Poland.

There are multiple reasons for taking up such research questions. Firstly, migrations and settlement on the Western Territories played a major role in the transformations of the structure of Polish society in multiple dimensions (demographic, social, political and economic), shaped local and regional identities in the former western voivodships (szczecińskie, poznańskie, wrocławskie) and introduced new elements to the national identity. Secondly, migrations and settlement on the Western Territories has not yet been systematically and comparatively researched from the vantage point of the way in which the settlers and inhabitants understood those processes. Thirdly, existing qualitative data have not yet been fully investigated with the use of advanced techniques of qualitative data analysis – the content of the archives of the Institute for Western Affairs has not been partially investigated. Fourthly, the present period is the final moment when it remains feasible to gain access to the authors of the oldest journals, which would allow for an investigation into the influence of journal-writing had on the perception of the individual, family and local histories, as well as into the determinants of differences between the past and present perceptions of the processes taking places in the post-war Polish Western Territories.