



Exploratory Workshop Scheme
Standing Committee for the Humanities

ESF Exploratory Workshop (07-104)

Ego-documents in an European Context
First-person writings in Europe from the end of the
Middle Ages
to the beginning of the twentieth century
(Bordeaux, 22-24 May 2008)

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

Convened by François-Joseph Ruggiu
University of Bordeaux 3

Executive summary

The object of this exploratory workshop was to enable the creation of an European network about egodocuments, a kind of texts that scholars from several academic fields (history, literature, sociology...) are increasingly scrutinizing. The main objective was to assess what the building of such a network would require, whether all the participants would like to get involved and also among the several programs of the European Science Foundation which one would be the most appropriate.

The convener has invited eighteen historians, mainly specialists of the early modern period, in order to draw up a project : three from France, members of the Groupe de Recherches CNRS n°2649 “Les écrits du for privé en France de la fin du Moyen Age à 1914” (www.lesecritsduforprive.fr); two from Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Spain ; and one from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Great-Britain, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Switzerland. Eventually three of them apologize for not being able to come for professional or familial reasons. The ESF was represented by Pr. Naomi Segal (Great-Britain).

Some of these scholars belong to well-established scientific teams working on egodocuments. They organized international seminars and are in charge with websites providing references and contributing to the spreading of information about egodocuments in their respective countries. So, in these countries, the national funding agencies have recognised for a long time the importance of the research on egodocuments. In others countries, egodocuments are less studied but they benefit from a growing scientific interest and they already made available some printed or manuscripts lists of references. The publications of original texts are more and more numerous (and meet a public outside the academic circles) and, of course, they provoke in these countries an increasing number of scientific studies.

The exploratory workshop was divided in two parts. During the first part, the attendants have exposed the state of the art about egodocuments in their respective countries in twelve dense and lively speeches. They trigger some very interesting discussions which allow to make quick and astonishing progresses.

During the second part of the workshop, the attendants talked about the possibility of building a research network around egodocuments. They dwelt on the definition of the field “egodocument” and the boundaries they wish to assign to it, on the period covered, on transdisciplinarity, and on the title – i.e. the general orientation – of the project. Then they made out a list of the specific themes they wish to research. The discussions were very exciting and constructive. All attendants agree that the best European Science Foundation action for their project will be the **ESF Research Networking Programs**.

Scientific content of the event

It appears from the first part of the EW, that the texts designated by the expression “egodocuments” such as family books, diaries (private diaries, travel diaries etc.), autobiographies, or memoirs, are present in all European countries.

The participants did not ever agree on the precise definition of what “egodocument” exactly means but they share the same general understanding of the word. All also agree to consider that any text narrating the life of a person but produced at the request of an institution (such as the Inquisition, or a diplomatic department...) or for an official purpose (such as the wills or the petitions...) does not belong to the inner core of “egodocuments”. However such document could well somehow be taken into account. While the participants all agree that the aim of the project is to consider the definition of “egodocuments” or of the several genres (“diaries”, memoirs...) it includes, they were reluctant to come up with a too narrow definition.

The use of these texts by historians is very uneven. In some countries (France, Germany, Great-Britain, Italy, Netherlands...), they are well-known, have been used for a long time and have inspired a wide range of research. In other countries, there are known and used by a few number of historians trying to renew the ways of making political history (Poland), economic and social history (Denmark, around peasant diaries), religious and cultural history (Lithuania, Spain, Switzerland, Russia). In the Czech Republic, they could be found in archives but they are not really used. But, everywhere, it is admitted that egodocuments bring invaluable information about some of the most important topics in history such as the rise of written culture, the ordinary life of various social groups (and not only the elites), the formation of the autonomous self, the relation between the state and the individual, the shaping of the different European subcultures, the question of memory, the notions of public and privacy etc.

In some countries, a census or several censuses are currently being made using the resources of Internet (France, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland...). Raul Mordenti (University Tor Vergata, Roma), who was unfortunately absent, was a pioneer with the project of the *Biblioteca Informatizzata dei Libri di Famiglia* (<http://www.bilf.uniroma2.it>). In Trento, Giovanni Ciappelli lead (in the frame of an Italian PRIN, led by Silvana Seidel Menchi, about « Storia della famiglia. Costanti e varianti in una prospettiva europea (secoli XV-XX) »), a team which is building a database about early modern Tuscan family books (15th-19th centuries). In Netherlands, Rudolf Dekker and Arianne Baggerman, of Erasmus University, Rotterdam, have built a database (<http://www.egodocument.net>) which gives to the public a list of 630 references of ego-documents down to 1814. The team based at the University of Basel and animated by Pr. Kaspar von Greyerz undertook a similar census for the *deutschschweizerische Selbstzeugnisse der Frühen Neuzeit* and has already listed 850 texts dated between 1500 et 1800 (<http://selbstzeugnisse.histsem.unibas.ch>).

In other countries, historians could use printed inventories with a general or limited view of the situation (Great-Britain, Denmark). Elsewhere, there is no methodical inventory of this kind of sources and in one or two countries it seems that archivists do not really know the value of them..

Some official teams, funded by their national agencies are currently developing specific scientific projects using “egodocuments” in a thematic perspective like *Controlling Time and Shaping the Self* in Netherlands (Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam) or *Selbstzeugnisse in transkultureller Perspektive in Germany* (Freie Universität, Berlin).

In some countries, this kind of sources seems to appeal to a broad audience. The number of publications of text is rising ; the collections devoted to these texts are more and more numerous ; some texts are even put on line by amateurs or scholars.

The integration of the correspondences – a particular field with an immense accumulation of material and bibliography – is a pending problem. All participants agree that to integrate them completely would endanger the feasibility of the project and thus correspondences should not be central to the project.

Results assessments, contribution to the future direction of the field

The participants reckoned that they all worked on a particular historical object which can be called “egodocument”. Thus the general title of the project has to show explicitly this dimension. It could be, following the proposal of Yuri Zaretsky : **“European past from the first-person perspective: documents for a new history”**. Some adaptations could be, of course, made afterwards but all the participants felt at ease with such a formulation and the latter has been adopted. Another proposal has been made : “European egodocument in a transnational perspective”. It contains very important words and themes which should also appear in the project presentation.

Several general topics – each of them being the theme of a working group – have been identified : 1) Egodocuments as social and cultural practices (ESCP) ; 2) Individual and collective identities (ICI) ; 3) Space, place and circulation (SPC) ; 4) Memory and time in egodocuments (MTE) ; 5) Life-stages, affects and the body through egodocuments (LSAB).

Several subtopics have been identified ; these subtopics need to be completed and developed :

- WG 1 : ESCP : models, reception and intertexts ; from private to public: egodocuments and prints (commercialisation) ; writing practices ; why people wrote (or did not write) egodocuments ; marginalia (signatures, portraits, drawings...) ; materiality (paper, book, registers, agenda...).

- WG 2 : ICI : Individual and collective identities (family, parents and children relations, household, dynasty, gender, class) ; egodocuments and the self ; egodocuments and religious differences (providence ; secret sins) ; egodocuments and politics or state.
- WG 3 : SPC : egodocuments and the relation to space and to region ; geography of egodocuments (including the relation with city and country) ; egodocuments and travels, and Europe, and the rest of the World, and the Other (understanding of alterity).
- WG 4 : MTE : experience of crisis ; cultural heritage and construction of memory ; perception of time.
- WG 5 : LSAB : The body, health and illness ; sensibility and affects ; family and animals ; life stages.

The repartition of the actual members of the project is the following :

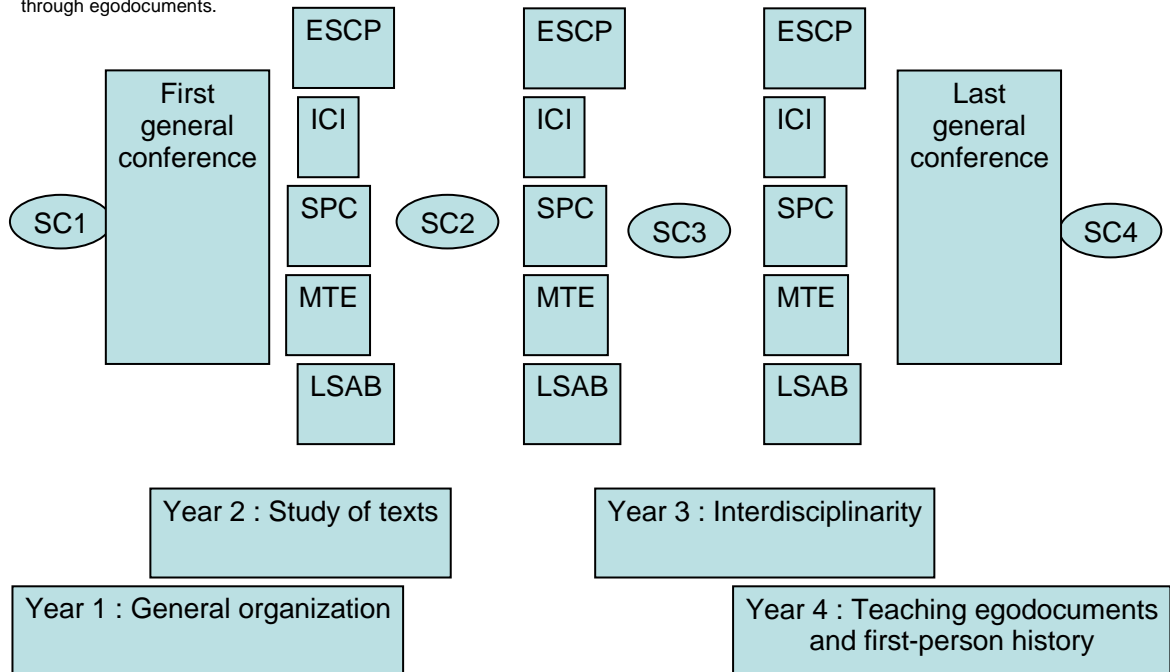
- WG1 : Jim Amelang, Ariane Bagermann, Arvydas Pacevičius, Ralph Houlbrooke, Antonio Castillo-Gomez, Stanislas Roszak.
- WG 2 : Jean-Pierre Bardet, Sylvie Mouysset, Yuri Zaretsky, Kaspar von Greyerz, Milos Reznik, Giovanni Ciappelli, Claudia Ulbrich, Ralph Houlbrooke.
- Claudia Ulbrich, Ralph Houlbrooke, Michael Harbsmeier, Yuri Zaretsky.
- WG 4 : Ariane Bagermann, Milos Reznik, Arvydas Pacevičius, Giovanni Ciappelli.
- WG 5 : Jean-Pierre Bardet, Elisabeth Arnoul, Kaspar von Greyerz.

These scientific working groups could be crossed with a yearly methodological approach. The second year of the action could be devoted to an approach through texts (i.e. each working groups has to work on specific texts or extracts of texts in order to compare the approach of each scholars towards some great general themes like the difference between public and private or the question of intimacy). The third year could be devoted to an interdisciplinary approach (i. e. each working groups has this year to plan to work with specialist of linguistic, literary, anthropology, sociology). The fourth and last year could develop sessions about teaching on egodocuments and the kind of first-person history

So, the scheme that the participants intend to build could be summarized under the following diagram.

European history from a first-person perspective. Sources for a new history

SC = Steering Committee ; ESCP = Egodocuments as social and cultural practices ; ICI = Individual and collective identities ; SPC = Space, place and circulation ; MTE = Memory and time in egodocuments ; LSAB = Life-stages, affects and the body through egodocuments.



All participants agree that a slight overlapping between two or more working groups may occur ; it should not be considered as a problem but as a way to apprehend the same question through different lenses.

A website is to be opened soon in order 1) to present the project, its title and its working group ; 2) to act as a gateway towards all the websites of the teams involved in the project ; 3) to give the text of the presentation given during the workshop. The French team agree to undertake the development of this common website and will buy the name of the domain.

The project should be a long term basis and has to take in account that in several countries the definition of “medieval”, “early modern” and “modern” history are far from coinciding. Thus the participants prefer to use as a criterion centuries than periods. The starting point could be “the end of the thirteenth-century” to finish during “the first decades of the twentieth-century”. It is clear that the members of the projects do not wish to go beyond the second world war but it could be scientifically coherent to integrate the 1920’s and 1930’s.

Creation of a database.

The formation of a database listing and presenting egodocuments from public archives or libraries could be a national objective for all the countries which participated to the project. Indeed the ESF Research Networking Programs seems to favor the creation of such a database. The most advanced countries in this way could share their experiences

and disseminate their best practices in seminars or academic visits beside the regular meetings of the working groups. The constitution of a European database, with an Euroform (with a common set of information) could be a long-term objective. Nevertheless, the participants understand that there could be a kind of contradiction between the work of archivists (who have to integrate the highest number of texts as possible) and the work of historians (who need a manageable sample of sources).

Final Programme

Part I. The state of the research about egodocuments in Europe Thursday 22 May 2008 pm

First session

14.00-14.30	<i>Welcome and introduction</i>
	Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF) <i>Naomi Segal</i> (Standing Committee for the Humanities)
14.30 – 15.00 (20 minutes of presentation, 10 minutes of discussion)	of F.-J. Ruggiu , Egodocuments in France
15.00 – 15.30	J. Amelang and A. Castillo-Gomez , Egodocuments in Spain
15.30 – 16.00	A. Baggerman , Egodocuments in Netherlands
16.00 – 16.30	<i>Coffee break</i>
16.30 – 17.00	S. Roszak , Egodocuments in Poland
17.00 – 17.30	G. Ciappelli , Egodocuments in Italy
17.30	<i>End of the session</i>

Friday 23 May 2008 am

Second session

09.30 – 10.00	M. Harbsmeier , Egodocuments in Denmark
10.00 – 10.30	M. Reznik , Egodocuments in Czech Republic
10.30 – 11.00	<i>Coffee break</i>
11.00 – 11.30	Y. Zaretsky , Egodocuments in Russian Federation
11.30 – 12.00	K. von Greyerz , Egodocuments in Swiss
12.00 – 12.30	R. Houlbrooke , Egodocuments in Great-Britain
12.30	<i>Lunch</i>

Friday 23 May 2008 pm

Third session

14.30 – 15.00 **A. Pacevicius**, Egodocuments in Lithuania
15.00 – 15.30 **C. Ulbrich**, Egodocuments in Germany
15.30 – 16.00 *Coffee break*

Part II. Building a network about egodocuments in Europe

First session

16.00 – 17.30 **General Discussion 1**
17.30 *End of the session*

Saturday 24 May 2008 am

Second session

09.30 – 10.30 **General Discussion 2**
10.30 – 11.00 *Coffee break*

Third session

11.00 – 12.30 **General Discussion 3**
12.30 – 14.30 *Lunch*
14.30 *End of the workshop*
20.00 *Dinner*

Statistical information on participants

1) Age structure

30-40	2
40-50	9
50-60	3
60-70	2
Total	16

2) Gender repartition

F	3
M	13
Total	16

3) Countries of origin

Czech Republic	1
Denmark	1
Deutschland	1
France	4
Great-Britain	1
Italy	1
Lithuania	1
Netherlands	1
Poland	1
Russia	1
Spain	2
Swiss	1
Total	16

The final lists of participants (16)

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