

## **AUDIOVISUAL COLLECTION IN THE OCCUPATION MUSEUM OF LATVIA**

There were different political systems in Latvia during the twentieth century: Tsarist Russia, Latvian Republic (3 periods: the first parliamentary republic (1918–1934), authoritarianism (1934–1940), and the second parliamentary republic (1991–...)), Soviet occupation (3 periods: 1919, 1940–1941 and 1944–1991) and Nazi Germany occupation (1941–1944/45). Many documental and material historical testimonies (documents, photos, manuscript documents, letters etc.) were destroyed during this time. We need to keep in mind that many important facts were documented from governmental point of view and even falsified, but some facts were not documented at all.

It isn't possible to understand and research Latvia's history in twentieth century without testimonies of eyewitnesses. We need to look at historical sources in this period on the whole, to compare testimonies of eyewitnesses with documents, to think logically how it was.

There are 4 institutions who gathered narratives of 20<sup>th</sup> century in Latvia for different purposes and in different formats. The one who record life stories on video is Occupation museum of Latvia.

The video testimonies in the collections of the Occupation Museum of Latvia are narratives of persons whose life was dramatically influenced by the Soviet or Nazi occupation policies (e.g., deportees, refugees, or eyewitnesses of significant historical events) as a historical source.

Video testimony is a modern method of documents in a narrative. Information in the form of a video recording as compared to written information makes it possible to preserve not only facts, but also the emotions of eyewitnesses. It thus helps to uncover the consequences of the narrated events—the moral and physical injuries of the interviewed persons.

### **The Audio–visual Collection of the Occupation Museum of Latvia**

**a) The Audio–visual Collection:** The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (1940–1991) was established in 1993. Its purpose to show and explain to Latvians and foreign visitors the real fate of Latvia under the occupation by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, wrongdoings committed by the occupation powers against Latvia and its people, and the consequences of the occupations.

Latvians, who suffered under the occupation, have come to the Museum to tell their life stories and give testimonies starting from the very beginning. The staff understood the importance of these testimonies for historical research. It also knew that it isn't simple to

record the video testimonies and to obtain long-suppressed information because of its forbidden nature. The Museum hired a specialist, director and operator of historical films, Andrejs Edvins Feldmanis, to do this work.

Work was started thanks to the initial support of the Soros Foundation in Latvia. At present the Audio-visual collection works with two filming groups. The expeditions take place regularly. There are more people who could give testimonies, but our group is too small to interview them all. Therefore, our priority is to record people who are over 80 years old and whose testimonies contain information for the Museum's current research. The interviewees are from different nationalities.

Two years ago we collected a large number of testimonies thanks to financial support by the European Commission. We could record more people's life stories than had been possible before.

Up to now (1 September 2007) 1570 video testimonies of total length of approximately 2770 hours (0.5–11 hours each) have been professionally recorded. Almost every video testimony is so significant that we could make a documentary on its basis.

*The selection of interviewees.* We find the interviewee in different ways:

- 1) they sign on by themselves in the Museum (letter, telephone);
- 2) persons recommended by their friends, other interviewees, their children, their region history researcher etc.;
- 3) we ask the council of parish or town and the associations of the repressed people to send us the register with a person's names, addresses, phone numbers who live locally;
- 4) persons who we look for during the Museum's research work, (this person could be mentioned in some article in newspaper or magazine, in archive document etc.).

After every interview, the interviewer, video operator, interviewee sign a video testimony act, which determines the utilization of this testimony and possible restrictions.

During the expedition we also collect significant artefacts, documents and photo materials. We note the history of the given things and the descriptions of photographs. Sometimes we take photograph stove with us to take copies from important photographs for the Museum.

In the Museum we do further processing of the video testimony—summarising, deciphering (extracting information in 14 categories) and recording in the registry book. From this, a researcher can easily determine the main themes, people, and geographical places in the interview. The entries are made in the order of recording, so everybody can find them in the interview and understand the context.

There is a document “Agreement on Use of Video Materials” of the Occupation Museum if somebody wants to use a video testimony in his/her research or something else. It is not allowed to give copies to a third person, copy and multiply materials without the permission of the Museum, use it for commercial purposes, use it against any person to cause moral harm, or to technically transform video material in order to manipulate the historical facts.

**b) The use of video testimonies:** There is growing interest in video testimonies. They are used in more and more projects, research, articles etc. in different fields of science and culture. It motivates us to continue our work. Unfortunately, we and you can get acquainted with the video testimonies only in Latvian (except those who are recorded in Russian or German). The Museum is planning to make short video films from our collection with English and Russian subtitles.

Every person who is interested in these video testimonies can get acquainted with them noting the procedure:

- 1) getting acquainted to the descriptions;
- 2) selection of the appropriate video testimony;
- 3) contract about the use of the testimony (main aim, restrictions).

**c) The preservation of audiovisual collection, mainly video testimonies.**

In the Museum’s audiovisual collection we have not only S-VHS videos (video testimonies gathered from 1996 - 2004), Mini DV’s (Video testimonies after 2004) but also 16mm and 35mm films, that document everyday life in Soviet Latvia and the political struggle of Baltic refugees in the West to liberate their countries. There are also about 100 audio cassettes in the collection, which represent the early phase of recording.

We try to preserve the audiovisual collection in proper conditions regulating temperature and humidity, regularly rewinding the video cassettes.

Because of new technologies, there are changes in video recording and playback formats. We make sure that the Collection is available in new formats. At the same time, we need to preserve the original playback systems, too.