Local History Research Databases in Latvian Public Libraries

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the collections and databases of the online local history research created by Latvian public libraries, as well as describes the content of the databases as well as available sources of information and its formats. The research base is websites of the main libraries of Latvia's regions and the digital local history research available online.

The result of the research led to the conclusion that Latvian public libraries offer a wide range of online local history research resources and databases: local countyman databases and encyclopedia, libraries history materials, information about county, oral history collections: personal records and memory stories. The interviews can be evidenced in audio format. The full texts of the interviews have also been published. Several Latvian public libraries also offer a video format.

It is concluded that the local history databases of Latvian public libraries store and provide unique information about the time, place, historical events and people in the region. The sources of oral history included in the local history databases in the collections of Latvian public libraries are an important part of the historical heritage.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Local History, Databases Oral History.

1   Introduction

Along with other memory institutions - archives, museums, other cultural, educational and research institutions - the public library has accumulated considerable experience in creating local history collections. Collecting local research sources, creating high-quality collections and ensuring accessibility is one of the directions of the work of Latvian public libraries. Oral history sources also form an important content of local history collections. The life stories of the older generation e.g. the stories of memories, unique testimonies and facts provide evidence of the social and cultural life in the county, the neighborhood, the life of the countrymen, the fate of the county and the neighborhood as well as historical events. The availability of the collection of local library sources in Latvian public libraries has become an important issue, especially during the last two years, when library collections were not available in person due to

the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to make the materials of local history collections available to the general public, it is necessary to think about the digitization of life stories and the creation of databases, as well as to continue supplementing the existing collections.

Oral history as a research method and collection of sources began with the "Human Archives" ('Cilvēkarhīvs') program at the Latvian Cultural Foundation in 1988. The rapid development of biographical research allowed the public program of the Human Archives to be brought to a scientific level and it has continued as a research project since 1992. The sample was borrowed from the Oral History Archive at the British Library in London[1]. The collection of memories written in the Human Archive has been deposited in the Manuscripts and Rarities Department of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, but the first audio recordings of life stories form the basis for the study and collection of the National oral history[2].

In addition to the research project on the National oral history, other research centers and collections have grown and being developed, the task of which was not only to collect, compile and interview, but also to study, share knowledge and provide training in the methodology of oral history. Latvian public libraries were also actively involved in this process. New possibilities were opened by technology (audio, video recordings, computers). Project funds were raised to digitize oral testimonials and to make the collections available online. In recent years, sources of oral history have supplemented the local history collections of several Latvian public libraries and are included in the databases created by libraries.

2   Public Libraries in Latvia

The network of Latvian public libraries consists of 770 public libraries, incl. 755 municipal public libraries and 8 Libraries for the Blind with branches[3]. There are 29 main regional libraries in Latvia: Aizkraukle City Library, Alūksne City Library, Balvi Central Library, Bauska Central Library, Cēsis Central Library, Dobele Central Library, Gulbene County Library, Jēkabpils Library, Jelgava City Library, Jurmala Central Library, Kraslava District Centra Llibrary, Kuldiga Main Library, Latgale Central Library, Liepaja Central Scientific Library, Limbazi Main library, Livani District Central Library, Ludza City Main Library, Madona district library, Ogre Central library, Preili Main Library, Rezekne Central Library, Riga Central Library, Salaspils District Library, Saldus City Library, Talsi Main Library, Tukums Library, Valka District Central Library, Valmiera Library, Ventspils Library. It is the main regional libraries that offer online local history resources and create databases of local memories and life stories.

In addition to the traditional local history materials (county history, county members, family history, library history), the collections of online local history databases offered by the main libraries included in the research also include life story interviews, stories

[1] Mutvārdu pētniecības centri Latvijā. [Pieejams: https://mutvarduvesture.lv/mv-latvija]

[2] Mutvārdu pētniecības centri Latvijā. [Pieejams: http://www.dzivess-tasts.lv/lv/free.php?main=502]

[3] Latvijas bibliotēkas 2021.gadā. [Pieejams: https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/statistika-bibliotekas]

about past events, memory stories and interviews. Both librarians and county members have taken part in providing such historical evidence.

Local history information is available on the websites of the main libraries in all regions, which is one of the most important services provided.

One of the most popular databases created by public libraries is the countyman database. For example, Madona County Library creates an extensive database with search capabilities of local personalities[4]. The database can be searched by several criteria - occupation, county (parish, county), as well as by keyword. The entries in the database are arranged in the alphabet of the names of the county members with the field or profession of the county member, for example, a poet, a publisher, an actor, a breeder, etc.

The database of local residents is also created by the *Jelgava City Library*. The database "Notable people in Jelgava" contains biographical information about individuals who have been or are related to Jelgava, Jelgava region, surroundings e.g. as a place of birth, place of study, work, place of residence, etc.[5]. Information is obtained from encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries, reference editions, monographs, periodicals, e-resources, etc. The criterion used for grouping the counties is the sector in which the county has operated. Thus, cultural workers, educators and scientists, legal practitioners, religious workers, political and social workers and others are distinguished. The database does not have a search engine. This aspect could make it difficult for users to make full use of the database.

The *Cēsis Central Library* offers a database of residents with extensive search options[6].

Both simple search and advanced search are possible according to several criteria - scope, occupation, country, native region, etc.

Gulbene County Library offers online access to several digital collections:

1) 'Children of happiness. Kokari - 100' . The collection reflects the vision of the youth of the region about the life and work of choir conductors Imants and Gido Kokari in four video short films[7].

2) "Story help" It is a collection in which the residents of Gulbene region share their memories of school, living conditions, everyday life, games, plays and also the work done. The collection includes descriptions, audio recordings and videos. The collection was created with the support of the cultural project call "Latvian State Forests and State Cultural Capital Fund Vidzeme Culture Program 2019" announced by Vidzeme Planning Region[8].

3) "My Community 2020" . The collection includes 16 video short films about the places, personality, history and cultural activities of Gulbene region. The project "My Community 2020" is implemented within the framework of the ERASMUS + strategic partnership adult education program[9].

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[4] https://biblioteka.madona.lv/lv/novadpetnieciba
[5] http://www.jelgavasbiblioteka.lv/par-jelgavu/novadpetnieciba/novadnieku-datubaze/
[6] http://www.biblioteka.cesis.lv/lv/sakums/novadp%C4%93tniec%C4%ABba.html
[7] https://www.gulbenesbiblioteka.lv/lv/novads/novada-kolekcijas/laimes-berni-kokariem-100-3
[8] https://www.gulbenesbiblioteka.lv/lv/novads/novada-kolekcijas/stastu-talka
[9] https://www.gulbenesbiblioteka.lv/lv/novads/novada-kolekcijas/my-community-2020-mana-kopiena-2020

4) The local music collection was created by implementing the project "Music Recordings of Gulbene Local People - a Part of the Cultural and Historical Heritage". The collection provides information on the contribution of locals in the field of choir and popular music. The collection is only available locally at the library and is not currently available online. The descriptions of the collection can be viewed in the electronic catalog[10].

5) Collection "Gulbene region in ancient photographs". The collection is the result of the project "Gulbene Region Persons and Places Database". The history of the county is preserved as the photographs supplement historical evidence and documents. The collection includes photographs of the history, people and events of the region between the end of the 19th century and the 1940s.[11].

6) The collection "History of the Gulbene Branch of the Latvian People's Front" was created as a result of the project. Materials - articles, photos about the activities of the Gulbene and its parish branches of the Latvian People's Front during the Awakening and reflections are now available in the Gulbene County Library in the reading room of local history and humanities and have not been digitized[12].

Balvi Central Library has been creating a cultural history database since 2007 - Balvi region cultural history database[13]. The database has several sections: Personalities, Cultural History Objects, Catholic Traditional Music and preservers, Cultural Institutions, Collectives and Events, Tourism Objects, Projects for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Balvi Region Encyclopedia, Vaduguns Newspaper Archive, Unpublished Local History Materials, Brīvības Street stories. Descriptions, photos, memory stories, audio and video are available in the database. For example - materials for documenting the life stories of folk musicians of Medņeva parish.

Latgale Central Library in Daugavpils has created an online database "Singing Latgale"[14]. In 2010, the idea of creating a multimedia resource was born in the Latgale Central Library, in which the historical materials of the Latgale Song Festival would be collected, systematized and digitized. The project "Multimedia resource "Singing Latgale"" was developed with support of the State Culture Capital Fund, JSC "Latvian State Forests" and the Latgale Region Development Agency. The implementation of the project was completed in 2011. Now the extensive resource about the four Latgale Song Festivals in Daugavpils (1940-2010): History, course, participants of the Song Festival (choirs, conductors, songwriters, etc.) is available to the public. The resource os supplemented by memories, photo galleries and other visual information of the festival participants. The resource gained special popularity among teachers, researchers, students and lovers of music traditions. In 2020, the project "Development of the new version of the Multimedia resource "Singing Latgale" was supported. The design of the resource was updated and a new content management system was created, which gives

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[10] https://www.gulbenesbiblioteka.lv/lv/novads/novada-kolekcijas/novadnieka-muzika

[11] https://www.gulbenesbiblioteka.lv/lv/novads/novada-kolekcijas/gulbenes-novads-senajas-fotografijas

[12] https://www.gulbenesbiblioteka.lv/lv/novads/novada-kolekcijas/latvijas-tautas-frontes-gulbenes-nodalas-vesture

[13] http://www.balvurcb.lv/kb/

[14] http://www.lcb.lv/dziesmotalatgale/

the opportunity to regularly update the resource with the latest information, add new sections about the Song Festival snd gives the resource visitors much more opportunities to search for information[15].

There are two online resources available on the *Ogre Central Library* website – "Ogrenians tell and show"[16]. The residents of the region were invited to the six events of the storytelling cycle to share their stories of events in their lives and in the local area that took place in the city and region of Ogre. Until now, the idea that the stories of local people's memories should be recorded in audio and video format with the aim of preserving it and making it available to future generations has not been realized. The collection of audio and video local history material is unique. The collected material is an investment and dedication of the residents of Ogre region to their country on the 100th birthday.

Riga Central Library has created a collection of audio recordings of memories "My story about Riga"[17]. The project was co-financed within the framework of the Society Integration Program of the Education, Culture and Sports Department of the Riga City Council. The resource "My Story about Riga" is basically an opportunity for every of Riga people to share memories and adventure stories about Riga, its streets, courtyards, houses and historical events that have been kept in memories.

The stories on behalf of the library were recorded by volunteers involved in the project. The recorded materials have been compiled to supplement the local history database of the Riga Central Library and our common heritage of live oral narration. Many storytellers have added photos and other documents illustrating the events to their stories. Nine libraries participated in the project (Riga Central Library and 8 branch libraries). The resource includes audio recordings, descriptions and photographic material of 73 memory stories.

Salaspils County Library has created several digital collections of local history and a multimedia website "Knuts Skujenieks" www.knutsskujenieks.lv. According to the information available on the website of Salaspils region, the goal of the multimedia website www.knutsskujenieks.lv is to preserve the poet's literary heritage and living space in the virtual environment and make it accessible to anyone interested. It is designed as a poet-led tour of time and space, where he reads poetry, tells about the creative process, comments on things and objects. The virtual tour is complemented by both short comments and audio recordings, in which the author tells about school years, studies, convictions, war camp imprisonment period, return to Latvia and other important stops in his biography, as well as about important people in his life.

Its uniqueness is authenticity and personal approach, because it was created in cooperation with K. Skujenieks and his family.

The 2nd round of the project has been implemented, in which the content of the website has been supplemented with the most significant translations chosen by the author. The promotion of K. Skujenieks' literary work outside Latvia has been set as a priority, therefore the content of the website is available in English.

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[15] http://www.lcb.lv/dziesmotalatgale/par-projektu/
[16] https://www.ocb.lv/novadpetnieciba/projekts
[17] https://www.rcb.lv/iepazisti-rigu/mans-stasts-par-rigu/

The project was implemented by Salaspils County Library specialists in cooperation with the family of the poet Knut Skujenieks, literary critic Arnis Koroševskis, artist and programmer Tomas Burāns[18]. The project was financially supported by the State Cultural Capital Fund and Salaspils County Council.

The collection "Daugava" , the history of the Riga District Central Library in photographs and the protected large trees of Salaspils in photographs created by the Salaspils County Library should also be noted. Photographs and postcards with images of the Daugava have been digitized within the framework of the project "Daugava Collection in Salaspils County Library".

Valmiera Integrated Library has created an extensive local history database, which includes materials about local people of Valmiera, its area and counties, fraternal congregations in the county, family research, Kocēni county, language, folklore and ethnography, history of Valmiera library[19]. There are 5 memory stories in the Family research section. The full versions of the memories can be found in the digital archive of the Latvian Folklore Repository[20].

The history section of Valmiera Library is important as it provides information not only on the history, directors, articles about the library, reports, stamps, but also presents the stories of librarians telling about their work and events in the library. The stories are made in video format and anyone can watch and listen to them[21].

3   Conclusions

Latvian public libraries, creating local history databases and catalogs, are those of important memory institutions that allow anyone who is interested to get acquainted with the cultural heritage of their region free of charge trough books, newspapers, pictures, films, audio and video recordings, copies of archival documents, etc. materials. The modern digital age has opened up new opportunities for making local history collections accessible. It is no longer necessary for the researcher to visit in person one or another of the Latvian public libraries in order to obtain the much-needed information related to the life and activities of a local personalities. The Covid-19 pandemic has also provided an incentive for libraries to focus even more on working with databases. It can be assumed that public libraries are facing new challenges and the successful work started will be continued.

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[18] https://www.biblioteka.salaspils.lv/lv/multimediala-vietne-knuts-skujenieks

[19] http://www.biblioteka.valmiera.lv/lv/novadpetnieciba

[20] http://garamantas.lv/

[21] http://www.biblioteka.valmiera.lv/lv/novadpetnieciba/stastu-biblioteka/bibliotekas-vesture/bibliotekaru-stasti

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