

Announcement and Call for Papers
WAPOR Thematical Seminar
*"The Early Days of Survey Research
and Their Importance Today"*
Vienna, Austria
July 1 - 3, 2010

Almost a century has passed since the British statistician Arthur Bowley conducted the first survey in the social sciences that was based on a random sample or since pioneers like Max Weber and Adolf Levenstein organized the first scientifically designed mass surveys. 80 years have passed since the first study was conducted among radio listeners and it was more than 70 years ago that the first election forecasts by George Gallup, Elmo Roper and Archibald Crossley led to the breakthrough of the modern survey method. Yet even these events do not represent the very beginnings of our profession. The oldest questionnaire still in existence today, which can be viewed as the first known tool of opinion research—if we use the term a bit loosely—dates back to the year 811.

Despite this longstanding tradition, it sometimes seems as if public opinion research is only concerned with the present. The historical development of the field is hardly ever mentioned, neither at conferences nor in contemporary publications. Public opinion research is neglecting its past.

On the one hand, this is understandable, since a scientific field that deals with ascertaining the opinions of people today naturally tends to look more to the future than the past. At the same time, however, it means that we are failing to make use of a lot of important resources. This is probably why much of the methodological debate today bears a bit of resemblance to the movie "Groundhog Day," in which the main character gets caught in a time loop and keeps on experiencing the same day over and over again. Instead of building on the insights gained by previous generations of researchers, we all too often find the same questions being posed again and again, the same debates being initiated as if from scratch—and often with no knowledge of what was already said or discovered about the issue in question 30, 50 or even 70 years ago.

The purpose of this thematical seminar, therefore, is to help shake our field out of its tendency towards historical amnesia. And what better place to do so than in Vienna, the city in which Paul Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda and Hans Zeisel completed their first trailblazing studies. It was here that they founded the "Wirtschaftspsychologische Forschungsstelle," it was here that they launched the first studies among listeners of the Austrian radio broadcasting company only a few years after it was founded—work that Lazarsfeld would continue with the "Office of Radio Research" after emigrating to America a few years later. And it was here, in the small town of Marienthal located not far from Vienna, that the first empirical study on the consequences of unemployment was conducted.

Together with the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Vienna and the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Charles University in Prague, we want to retrace the roots of our profession and explore the question of what they mean for survey research today.

We would therefore welcome any papers dealing with this issue in a broader sense—i.e. both papers focusing on the historical development of the field of survey research and reports on current studies and advances that incorporate or reflect the traditions established in the early days of public opinion research.

Please submit your proposals—approximately 1-2 pages describing the contents of the proposed paper—by **March 1, 2010** to:

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