

Call for papers

Oral History Symposium at the NIT, 19th and 20th of November

Local and regional oral history

methods and approaches

On the 19th and 20th of November 2012 the NIT organizes a **symposium on oral history** in Istanbul. The NIT (Netherlands Institute in Turkey) is a research institute for the study of (historical and contemporary urban) cultures and societies of Anatolia and Turkey. It conducts historical and archaeological research, supports education and facilitates research carried out in various other fields by students and scholars from Dutch and Turkish universities.

Urban heritage projects by the NIT

The Netherlands Institute in Turkey (NIT) is currently developing an interdisciplinary research project about the tangible and intangible heritage of Istanbul, using one specific neighbourhood (Tophane) as a case-study. The rich and mixed history of the neighbourhood of Tophane -many different social, ethnic and religious groups lived there over time-creates a context for research to urban biographies.

The neighbourhood has known many different pasts, interpreted and dealt with in different and sometimes contradictory ways by different individuals, groups or authorities. Through the use of different disciplines, such as (oral) history, art, anthropology, socio-geography, architecture, the Tophane research project aims to compose a long-term biography of the Tophane neighbourhood: biographies of buildings and physical places, but also of people and their memories, in which oral history could play an important role. Inspired by that and also as a start for the oral history research within the Tophane research project the NIT is organizing a symposium on local and regional oral history (city parts, neighbourhoods, islands, villages).

Oral History symposium organized by the NIT

This Oral History Symposium aims to contribute to a more profound understanding of the role oral history can play in research to neighbourhoods, their biographies and heritage. In this symposium the possibilities and the extent of the use of oral history to study different distant and more recent pasts will be discussed. The symposium will focus on methodologies and approaches, which are illustrated by case-studies from Turkey, the Netherlands and possibly other places in the world.

Speakers

- We are looking for speakers preferably connected to Dutch or Turkish universities, but researchers from other universities or institutes are also invited to apply. PhD students and advanced master students are also encouraged to apply.
- We ask you to apply with an **abstract** of your research (ca. 200 words) by sending it to: **k.schuitema@nit-istanbul.org** before **the 23rd of September**.

Oral History

Oral history implies the collection and study of historical information about individuals, families, important events, or everyday life using unwritten stories and memories of people, mainly through interviews (individuals, groups, families). Oral history both refers to information gathered in this manner, as well as to stories/memories based on such data but written down later (kept in archives or libraries). In such a way different pasts are studied through different perspectives. How can these stories and memories contribute to the composition of a biography of a neighbourhood/city/place over a long term? What is their relation to physical remains from the past?

In an oral history approach memories and perceptions of different pasts are documented, as experienced by interviewed people themselves or passed in to them by earlier generations. Through oral history research not only views on the very recent but also some light on a more distant past can be shed.

Oral history seems to be a very helpful and possibly even a necessary approach in studies to heritage: different layers of pasts, the way they are interpreted and dealt with. Tangible remains of neighbourhoods or of specific buildings also included an important intangible component through time: people, with their own memories and stories. Inhabitants of a neighbourhood or a building, or people passing by, have their own memories of a place. Collecting these memories, which can include memories of individual people and especially social, ethnic, religious communities, memories of streets, memories of a physical past that is not there anymore, contributes to a more complete understanding of different and sometimes contesting views on pasts. Through oral history it is possible as well to find out to which extent tangible and intangible heritage plays a role in/contributes to the construction and maintenance of identity of a community and a 'sense of place' among the inhabitants of a neighbourhood.

Possible questions and issues discussed in the Oral History symposium at the NIT will be:

- How can oral history contribute to a more profound understanding of the different layers and interpretations of the past of a neighbourhood? How does oral history contribute to historical research in general?
- What are the limits of oral history research have, which problems and difficulties are encountered?
- With which other methods and disciplines can oral history best be combined to have the most effective and reliable results of different layers of pasts and the different ways in which they are regarded and interpreted by different people?
- Which methodologies and approaches in oral history can be used for studies of the biographies and heritage of neighbourhoods?