The Stasi Records Archive. From Repression to Revolution to School for Democracy

An overview over three decades of archival use for the German transitional justice process following the Communist dictatorship in East Germany

Dagmar Hovestadt
spokeswoman for the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records
Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (BStU)

- began **October 3, 1990**, the day of German unification
- 40 years of documentation of the secret police work of East Germany’s Stasi (Ministry for State Security) – world-wide first
- opening was a direct result of the **Peaceful Revolution of 1989**
- **January 2, 1992** personal access started on basis of **Stasi Records Act** (StUG)
- has counted **7 million requests for access**, among those 3 million by individuals, additionally by researchers and journalists, plus petitions for vetting of public employees, for rehabilitation and retirement pension issues
Historic context

- Secret police in the service of the one-party rule of the SED
- “Shield and Sword of the Party”
Specific Conditions of the Archive Opening

1. opening of archive was a people’s demand as part of regime change, transitional justice ideas organic to the process (accountability, rehabilitation, education, reconciliation)

2. unification eliminated the old state and added a new fully developed democratic state actor

3. the precedent of the reappraisal process of the Nazi regime and its deficits contributed to the speed and political consensus of the immediate opening
Measuring the Success of the Stasi Records Archive

Criteria - accountability, justice, truth telling, reparations, public trust, reconciliation, education

- **personal access** hugely successful, partly a public and mostly a private process (re-appropriation of your personal biography)

- **vetting** of public sector employees and public office holders, huge numbers, restoration of public trust with one pitfall (focus on unofficial collaborators)

- **criminal prosecution** very minimal despite access to records
Measuring the Success of the Stasi Records Archive
-continued-

**Criteria** - accountability, justice, truth telling, reparations, public trust, reconciliation, education

- the agencies charged with **rehabilitation and reparations** had no trouble with documentary evidence, success however not all encompassing from the victims’ pov (difficult to measure, mostly through public discourse, few studies)

- public discourse through **access for researchers and journalists**, entwined with the public debate

- **education** about the mechanism of the regime through BStU activities and other organisations’ efforts
The Archive as permanent source of human rights discussion

- as long as people are alive who have suffered from Stasi and SED activities the archive serves a concrete and symbolic role in their public treatment and public respect for them
- a continued and reformed dialogue serves to further the path to reconciliation on multiple levels throughout the unified society – developing a guide is the challenge
- archive has a fundamental lessons to offer for the role of human rights in society and the qualities we assign our society
- it is a huge repository to address the issue of data collection by a state and its effects as well as the mechanisms of secrecy
- the archive itself is a monument of surveillance and its site embodies repression – revolution - reappraisal
Campus for Democracy
The Stasi Archives in the digital realm
Stasi Mediathek – an online window into the archive

Friedliche Revolution


Zur Sammlung

Suche


Medientyp auswählen

- 573 Dokumente
- 92 Fotos
- 24 Audios
- 36 Videos
- 23 Geschichten/Sammlungen

748 Treffer anzeigen
Visit us online and in Berlin!

www.bstu.de

www.stasi-mediathek.de

Facebook – Twitter – YouTube – Instagram