

A Guide to European Town Directories

Volume One
Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Scandinavia

Gareth Shaw and Tim Coles

Ashgate

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About the volume:

European Directories is a major resource guide for urban historians and historical geographers. It provides a detailed bibliography of all directories published and available in major libraries throughout Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark and Scandinavia. In addition, the book provides an account of the evolution of town directories, as well as giving an analysis of directory reliability and coverage. Researchers will also find an extensive bibliography for each country of literature that has utilized directory information in historical studies. The second volume includes France and southern Europe. The whole provides the first European-wide resource for those undertaking urban historical studies.

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A Guide to European Town Directories
Volume One

Preface

This book is based on the results of a four-year research project generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The idea of researching European directories grew from the success of similar work on Britain and the recognition that very little was known about the development of such publications in mainland Europe. As the acknowledgements testify, this type of project is strongly dependent on the good wishes and co-operation of large numbers of people. In this respect we have been extremely fortunate in that so many people have taken an interest in our work. At the beginning it was the support of Harold Carter, David Reeder and Alec McAulay that was especially important. We hope that this book and its companion volume will stimulate others to take an interest in the town and trade directory as a source for the study of urban history.

Gareth Shaw and Tim Coles
Exeter, 1996

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PART I
Introduction

Introduction

The universal appeal of directories

Historians and historical geographers in Britain have made considerable use of directory material in their research. Within the British context interest dates back to the 1930s and 1950s when first Goss and then Norton provided guides to English and Welsh directories.¹ These early guides not only ensured that historians had a means of locating directories, but also provided researchers with an insight into their potential uses. More recently, research in a wide range of disciplines within the humanities and social sciences has revealed fresh areas in which directories can play important roles as either primary or back-up data sources.² The combined effect of such interests has been to ascribe a more pivotal role to directory-based information within many areas of historical research.³

One response to the growth of interest in directories shown by British academics has been the publication of two new guides and bibliographies. The first provides a national survey of British directories published up to 1950 and significantly extends Norton's earlier work.⁴ The second publication focuses more detailed attention on London directories published between 1677 and 1977, and as such reworks and extends the original study by Goss.⁵ Whilst these books are a response to the increasing use of directories, they also in themselves have served to stimulate further studies based on directory material as researchers find they have up-to-date, comprehensive guides to the location and contents of a whole range of different directories.

Historians working on Britain have available, therefore, comprehensive bibliographies and guides to directories. Unfortunately, for the growing number of academics interested in undertaking either comparative research or specific work in other countries involving the use of directory information, guides to the contents and availability of overseas directories are extremely variable. For those interested in research using directories in the United States or Canada some national guides do exist. Thus, Spear has compiled an early bibliography of those American directories published before 1860, whilst a more recent and comprehensive listing of Canadian directories for the period 1790–1950 has been produced by Ryder.⁶ However, for those scholars wanting to extend their studies into the European domain, guides and

bibliographies of directories are extremely partial and fragmented. In many countries no national guide to directories exists, or if it does it is very often out of date and has possibly been out of print for some considerable time.⁷ In these situations researchers can expend considerable time and money on simply trying to trace appropriate directories well before the main thrust of their study ever begins. Such problems are greatly increased when comparative research is being undertaken and sources from more than one country are being utilised.

Cross-cultural comparisons are becoming an increasingly important area of research within historical studies, whilst the closer political ties within Europe are stimulating and focusing interest on the European scene. This, according to Rodger, has produced a 'burgeoning interest in urban history throughout continental Europe'.⁸ General source guides are virtually non-existent although Engeli and Matzerath have attempted to provide 'a survey of international urban history', in order to 'enable researchers to profit from the approaches, central themes and methods' used in different countries.⁹ Our contention is that such interests will inevitably be limited as always by available sources as well as by the ability of urban historians to locate and use such material effectively. One commentator, after a review of European urban history, suggests that the 'assembly of a solid statistical base in relation to the social, economic and demographic structure of cities may well function as a broker in the difficult interdisciplinary alliances', as well as prompting new avenues of research.¹⁰ This is not so much to suggest embracing any form of statistical determinism as to advocate an enabling exercise, a first stage or the provision of a common meeting ground. Certainly there is growing interest amongst urban historians in the use of computer database management systems, the growth of which has been enhanced by technological advances.¹¹ To date, most such databases are organised either nationally or more commonly at the city level. Perhaps one of the most impressive of the city-level projects is that under way for Stockholm, where the local archives are computerising the city's population records for the years 1878-1926, encompassing an estimated 9 million entries.¹²

Obviously, any attempt to provide a pan-European guide will depend on the widespread availability of the source. One such data source are town directories, which are universally available throughout Europe. Whilst not receiving the same attention as they have done in Britain, directories have nevertheless been utilised within continental Europe. Unfortunately, much of the detail of such usage within urban history and historical geography often remains hidden away in numerous local publications. Despite such difficulties it is possible to provide a general, if somewhat partial, review of the uses made of directory material. In