

TIMESCAPES: FAMILY LIVES OVER TIME

DISCOVERING FAMILY ARCHIVES AND RECORDING FAMILY HISTORY



Welcome to the Timescapes, ERSC Festival of Social Science Exhibition. This exhibition will illustrate Family lives over time, drawing on the varied accounts of young people, parents, grandparents and the oldest generation from across the Timescapes research projects and the Mass Observations Archive.

Timescapes is the first major qualitative longitudinal study to be funded in the UK. It was funded for five years from February 2007 by the ESRC to discover how personal and family relationships develop and change over time.

The Timescapes focus is relationships with significant others and how these experiences impact on people's well-being and life chances. It also explores what this means for the long term resourcing of families.

In-depth interviews, oral narratives, photographs and visual documents have been collected across our network of projects at the Universities of Leeds, London South Bank, Cardiff, Edinburgh and the Open University. The multi media accounts are being gathered together to form the Timescapes Archive - a rich resource that will be preserved as part of our social history and made accessible to future generations of researchers. The archive offers exciting possibilities for researchers to reach a better understanding of personal lives through time and across the generations.

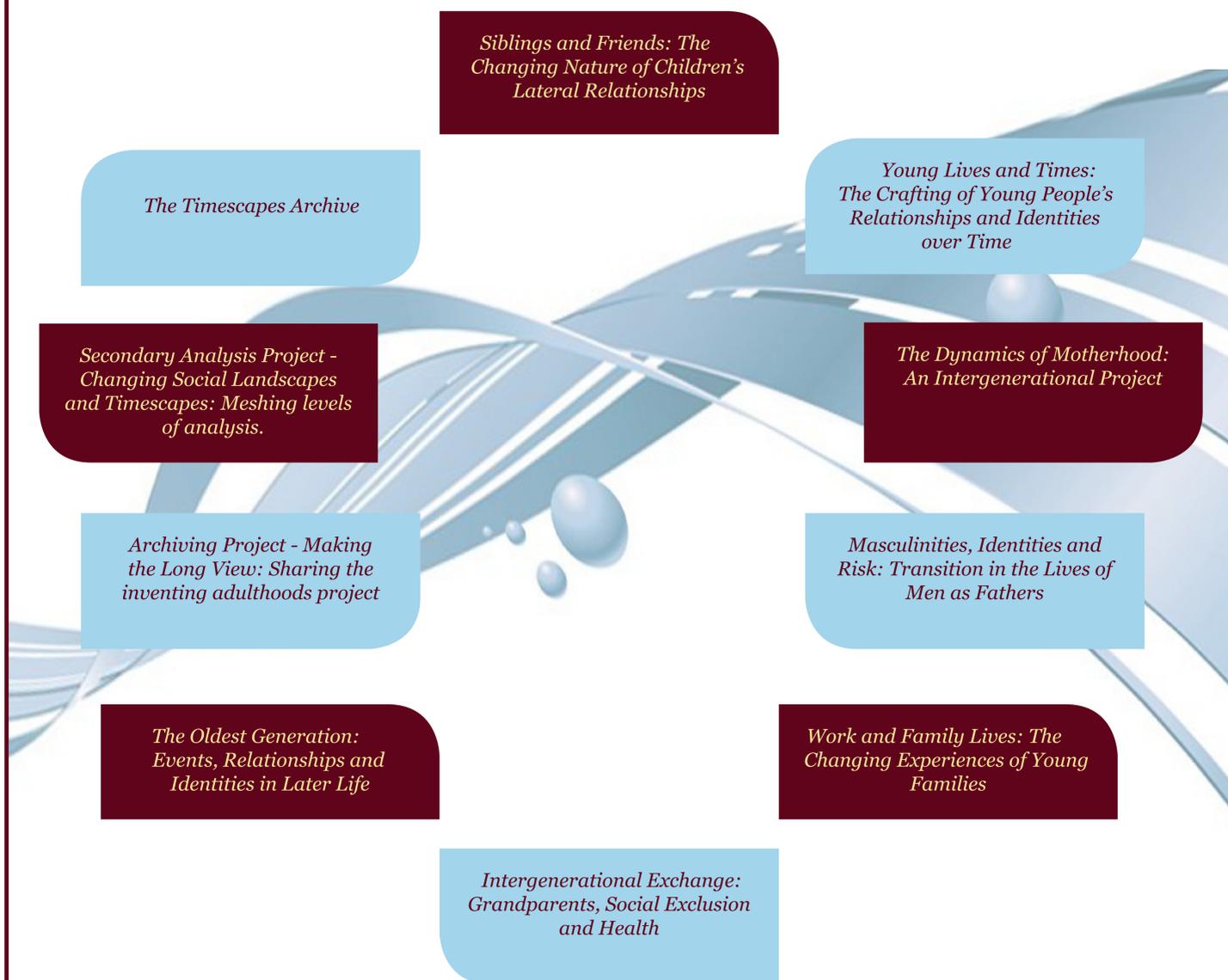
The Mass Observation Archive, based in Sussex, is a rich historical archive that has been documenting the ordinary everyday lives of people across the UK since before the Second World War.

Bringing accounts together from across these two archives will illustrate the changing nature of family life over the generations and give an appreciation of the value of historical and contemporary archives.

We very much hope that you enjoy the event and associated activities. Please let us know what you think of the exhibition.

Bren Neale (Director of Timescapes) and Janet Holland (Co-Director of Timescapes).

THE TIMESCAPES INITIATIVE INCLUDES:



To find out more about the Timescapes initiative and the Mass Observations archive, please visit:
www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk
www.massobs.org.uk

TIMESCAPES RESEARCH METHODS



The methods used by qualitative longitudinal research projects such as Timescapes, try to capture two elements, *Time and Texture*. *Time* refers to following people over a number of years, assessing the changes and continuities that exist. *Texture*, relates to the detail of people's lives, the things that matter to them and make their lives their own. These elements are explored using a variety of means, for example verbal methods, such as interviews, but also other more visual techniques. Within this exhibition you will see examples of a number of different types of data collection, both *researcher generated* (such as interviews or observation) as well as forms of *participant generated data* (for example, timelines or diaries). All of the methods detailed below are part of the 'toolkit' of the Qualitative longitudinal researcher, which help to gain detailed insight into the lives of those participating within the research.

INTERVIEWS:

In-depth interviews, carried out at intervals (known as waves of data generation) are one of the key ways in which people's experiences and views are captured within qualitative longitudinal research. Interviews are a useful method that allow researchers to 'walk alongside' people through their lives, exploring what is important to them. Detailed interviews can explore the same themes at each wave, offering insight into changing ideas within people's lives, or can cover different topics at each interview, aiming to build up a detailed picture of the participant. Interviews may also have added dimensions to them which may help with the investigation of people's lives and to offer prompts to get participants talking. For example object based interviews, in which participants bring objects that represent their past and their present, and the researcher and participant then discuss the significance of these objects. Using objects in this way is a useful 'way in' to explore topics in more detail and get participants thinking about topics. Workbook interviews also use a 'prop' to facilitate discussion. A 'workbook' is created by the researcher, in which images and extracts from previous interviews or observations are organised under different headings. The researcher and the interviewee then look through the workbook together and the resulting discussion is recorded.

FOCUS GROUPS:

Focus groups are group based discussions where a group of participants are brought together to discuss particular themes in their lives and the world around them. The group discussion is particularly important for exploring people's values and ideas about the topic of the research, and they enable people to take part in research without necessarily sharing very personal experiences. They are also a useful means by which key themes can be identified which the researcher can then follow up in more detail and depth with participants in one-to-one interviews.

OBSERVATION:

By observing participants, researchers can gain insight into their lives, their actions and responses. For example in the Dynamics of motherhood study, the researchers followed participants as part of a 'Day in the life' observation to gain a sense of a 'normal' day for their participants. Observation such as this is known as an *ethnographic method*. If researchers conduct group or family interviews, there is also an element of observation often involved, in that they watch the interactions between family members as the family are interviewed, again offering greater insight into interactions and relationships between participants.

TIMELINES:

Timelines are a useful way of understanding the significance attributed to events within the lives of research participants. By using past and future timelines, events that have occurred and possible futures are able to be explored. Timelines offer a useful way of clarifying the personal history of participants, helping the researcher gain better understanding of the narratives of people's lives. Future timelines offer a good entry point into exploring people's ideas and aspirations about the future, and these can then be reviewed within later interviews, which is a useful way of thinking about change over time, seeing how people's plans and ideas remain stable or change.

RELATIONAL MAPS:

Relational maps are a useful means for understanding the relationships and proximities of friends and family within people's lives. Such mapping can help researchers unpack the complexities of family life, explore the significance of friends versus family, as well as being a means by which the theme of closeness can be explored. Relational maps are a useful means for navigating changing relationships, charting family and friendship interactions within people's lives and noting the changing significance people place upon others at various times within their lives.

AUDIO/VISUAL MATERIAL:

Researchers can use a variety of other aspects to gain a more 'visual' perspective on the lives of their subjects. For example, the use of video diaries can offer a 'participant's eye view' on their experiences and what is significant to them. For example participants could video a typical day, or places that are important to them, giving insight that a researcher may not otherwise be able to experience, thus putting them into the participant's shoes. Visual material may also come in the form of photographs. Participants may select pictures that they feel illustrate their lives, such as people, places or activities that are important to them. Participants may also produce collages, detailing things of significance to them, highlighting aspects that constitute their identity.

DIARIES:

Diaries are a useful means for gaining insight into participant's perspectives about their lives. The participant, or one of their family members, keeps a diary of events, showing daily life, giving the researcher the chance to see what is significant to participants. The diary functions in a similar way to a 'day in the life' observation, showing day-to-day activity, but the diary is participant generated, i.e. they write the diary without the input of the researcher, so they have a strong element of control over the content of the diary and what they share with the researcher.

GLOSSARY:

Waves: These are the intervals at which data is collected. They are spaced apart, such as by months or years depending on the length of the study period, to allow the capture of any significant life changes, and to gain a sense of participants' lives across time

Participant generated data: This is data that those taking part in the research produce by themselves, i.e. writing a diary or filling in a relational map

Researcher generated data: This is data instigated by the researcher, such as interview material or observations which are produced by the work of the researcher in engaging with the participants.

Visual methods: These are methods that use images or diagrams to demonstrate aspects of significance within people's lives, for example participants might show the researcher photographs they feel are significant to them, or video places they visit or live.

