

Shared Commons – Shared Memories?

Wikipedia's Function in Remembering Events

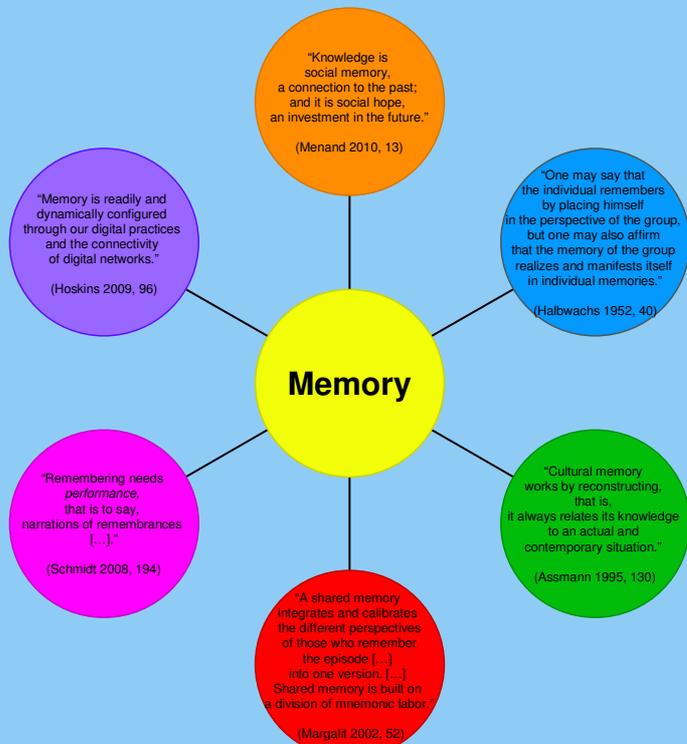
Katja Grashöfer, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Introduction

1. *Contents of collective memory are social relevant knowledge.*
Historically meaningful events like the "American Revolutionary War" are remembered because they are considered to be substantial regarding self-image and identity of a society. Collective memories rise from the past, but they are characterized by their importance for the present.
2. *Encyclopaedias collect and organize social relevant knowledge.*
This includes the category of historic meaningful events. Lemmas like "French Revolution" or "Second World War" are expected to be explained in an encyclopaedia. But what about the "Love Parade stampede"? – Such an event is not necessarily expected to make an own article within an encyclopaedia. And in fact, it does not exist as an own lemma within most of today's encyclopaedias. But it exists as an own lemma within the most popular encyclopaedia of our days: Wikipedia.

Study

- Based on the observation that Wikipedia provides room to articles describing also historically less far-reaching events the study addresses the following questions:
- a) What makes it possible to publish the lemma "Love Parade stampede" in Wikipedia?
 - b) To what extent is the existence of the article an evidence for the social relevance of the event?
 - c) Is this article part of the collective memory due to its publishing in an online encyclopaedia?
- To answer these questions the study analyzes the writing process of the article "Love Parade stampede" by using a set of qualitative research methods.



Results

- The results taken from the study so far can be outlined as the following:
- a) The article can be published because editors and experts are replaced by access to the internet, user skills and special interest in a topic.
 - b) The existence of the article is a proof of relevance regarding a specific social group; the event is meaningful for its members.
 - c) The status as an online-encyclopaedic article is not sufficient to consider the content being part of the collective memory.
- The article "Love Parade stampede" is the result of a shared writing process. Therefore it can be modeled as a form of shared memory in terms of Margalit (2002). By this it is not necessarily part of collective memory regarding society, but it is a shared common regarding a specific group of people. The relevance of shared memories cannot be measured by the quantity of group members, but by the intensity of dismay and the engagement of individuals which build the group.
- The article functions as a witness. By quasi real time writing it becomes a lasting media-eye-witness of the reported event, a document of time in time, throwing light on social memory processes in the web. *The Memory of Media Witnessing* is a new paradigm of modern memory culture in network societies.

Feel free to comment here!

Katja Grashöfer
Institut für Medienwissenschaft
Universitätsstr. 150
44801 Bochum
Email: katja.grashoef@rub.de

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