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Research in Graubünden

“Medicine in the village”

Citizen Science makes regional history visible



Children undergoing the rest cure at the children's clinic Albula in Davos, c. 1915. Photo credit: Medizinemuseum Davos

Today, when we suddenly need medical help, a quick call is usually all it takes: emergency services can be reached at 144 at any time. Just a few decades ago, this was unthinkable. The project “Medicine in the Village” uses the Surselva region as an example to show how much medical care in rural areas has changed over the past decades. A digital collection of podcasts and texts has been created and is available on the website www.medizin-im-dorf.ch.

The Institut für Kulturforschung Graubünden (Institute for Cultural Research Graubünden) commissioned historian Loretta Seglias to lead the project. She explains the unique approach to the topic: “We chose a citizen science approach.

This means that interested individuals can

participate even without formal research training – not only as interviewees, but as co-researchers. It is very important to me that participants can make their own decisions: What topics should be explored? Who should be interviewed? What questions should be asked?”

Since finding interested lay researchers is not always easy, Seglias looked for a cooperation partner with a broad regional network. She found this partner in the Museum Regional Surselva in Ilanz. The museum's director, Ursina Jecklin, was immediately enthusiastic about the topic. In the summer of 2023, the first group of “history detectives” was recruited during an informational event at the museum. Already at this first meeting, initial interview ideas were developed.

Before the history detectives began their – it's worth noting – voluntary work, they attended a workshop to learn interview techniques and how to use recording equipment. They also explored legal issues and how to handle sources. In their conversations, they brought to light many different aspects of medical care. One of these voices is Florentina Camartin: She recounts the working life of her mother, Ludivina Camartin. In 1936, at the age of twenty, Ludivina began working as a midwife in Brigels. She cared for expectant mothers – often traveling to remote villages – first by bicycle, then on a Vespa, and eventually by car in the 1960s. People also frequently came to her home seeking medical advice.

Then there is the story of the Camenisch family, who caught tuberculosis while collecting pinecones in the forest. Clieci Camenisch recalls how, in 1952, he and his siblings and mother were sent to a sanatorium in Davos for two years. Separated from their mother, the children spent most of their days in strict adherence to the rest cure – lying still for hours on end. They were rarely allowed to play or speak their native language, Romansh. Meanwhile, the father and other siblings worked on the family farm in the Lugnez valley on their

own. Other interviews explore the development of health insurance and the rise of outpatient nursing. New contributions will continue to be added to the website through September. These will address topics such as mental health and the question of how to live to be one hundred years old.

Loretta Seglias and Daniela Heinen

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The Institute for Cultural Research Graubünden conducts and supports humanities, social, and cultural research with a general focus on the Alpine region, particularly Graubünden and its neighboring areas: www.kulturforschung.ch. Loretta Seglias: www.geschichtspunkte.ch.



Loretta Seglias

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