



FAQs on dealing with the past history of the estate

In March 2020, the Board of Directors of the Hertie Foundation decided to commission an independent scientific study to investigate the past history of the Foundation's estate. In accordance with this decision, the Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte (GUG) was commissioned on 26 November, 2020, to conduct the relevant research.

Why did the Hertie Foundation only decide to commission a study this year?

The general history of the Hertie department store group is well known. Founded by the Jewish Tietz family in 1882, the majority of the company came into the possession of a banking consortium in 1933, which sold it a few years later to Georg Karg, the later founder of the Non-Profit Hertie Foundation.

However, the exact circumstances of this transfer were never investigated in detail. After the war, restitution proceedings were concluded involving the Tietz and Karg families and there was also an out-of-court settlement, so that at least the legal facts were considered to have been clarified. Later, two preliminary investigations were initiated by the Non-Profit Hertie Foundation as well as the Karg Family Foundation and the Karg Foundation, which aimed to clarify whether the available source materials would make further research into the past possible at all. Both came to the conclusion that there was little chance of success for well-founded, scientific insights for clarification and reappraisal. Accordingly, the path was not pursued further.

In view of the changed significance and perception of the handling of aryanization and restitutions in the public in recent years and growing anti-Semitism in society, the board has reconsidered and has now commissioned the reappraisal – also optimistic that the digitization of archives, among other things, will make new sources accessible.

The Her.Tietz Initiative, an association of students and alumni of the Hertie School, has also contributed to this. The initiative is committed to an open and responsible approach to the history of the Non-Profit Hertie Foundation, as well as to actively commemorating the victims of the Shoah and combating the rise of anti-Semitism today.



Why has the Foundation commissioned the Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte (GUG)?

The GUG is an internationally recognized institution with an outstanding reputation and experience in the field, which is especially necessary in the Hertie case. The commissioned research deals primarily with economic and social history with a focus on the National Socialist period and the aryanization process. GUG and the commissioned team of authors (Apl.-Prof. Johannes Bähr and PD Ingo Köhler) guarantee the greatest possible professionalism. By awarding the contract, the Hertie Foundation has transferred all rights to the results to GUG, does not exert any influence on the course of the research, and thus ensures the scientific neutrality of the study.

What is the procedure?

The study consists of in-depth file research and historical analysis. The results should be available by the end of 2022 and published in a book by a renowned publishing house. If clear interim results are already available in the course of the work, it is left to GUG to decide whether to discuss them with other researchers, for example, at a symposium.

There are two so-called preliminary studies from 2000 and 2008. Why were they not published?

The preliminary study from 2000 was prepared by the Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte on behalf of the Hertie Foundation. It was to clarify whether the source materials were sufficient to write "a portrait of the entrepreneurial personality Georg Karg" in the sense of a biography. The researchers came to the conclusion that the sources were not sufficient for this, which is why the topic was not pursued further. However, GUG pointed out that there was material from the years 1933 to 1938 that could be further investigated. The more recent preliminary study was commissioned by the Karg Family Foundation and the Karg Foundation. The Hertie Foundation has no rights to it.

Both preliminary studies are pure source collections. They do not evaluate them, nor do they establish historical connections. Therefore, these preliminary studies are not suitable for publication. Accordingly, there was no reason for publication when they were written, and 20 and 12 years later, respectively, the results must be considered outdated. Of course, the results of 2000 will be made available to the researchers who have now been commissioned.



The Karg Foundation is now also planning a study on the earlier history. Why will there be two studies?

In the run-up to the study, several discussions took place with the other two foundations that were founded on the Karg estate (Karg Foundation and Karg Family Foundation). Various possibilities for a reappraisal were discussed. There was a desire to clarify the question of "aryanization" in as focused and timely a manner as possible, while at the same time avoiding reducing the history of Hertie to this aspect alone. Of equal interest are the stories of the founding Tietz family, the rapid rise of the company up to the 1920s, the events surrounding the Great Depression and, after the war, the reconstruction by Georg Karg, the period of the German economic miracle, up to the sale of the company to Karstadt. As the best solution between the two extremes, it was decided to commission two studies that will, ideally, complement each other. The commission by the Hertie Foundation is supported by the Karg Family Foundation. In parallel, the Karg Foundation is funding a comprehensive review of the company's history from its founding in 1882 by Oscar and Hermann Tietz to its sale in 1993. The Karg Foundation study will present its findings in 2024.

GUG is preparing both studies. Will the studies collaborate?

Each study has its own independent team of authors. However, the two teams will share sources to avoid duplicate requests to archives.

Will an academic advisory board be involved in the study?

The GUG is supported in its research programme by an advisory board consisting of 15 historians; this also includes GUG projects.

What is the relationship between the Hertie Foundation and the Her.Tietz Initiative?

The Her.Tietz Initiative mentioned above first approached the Foundation informally in 2018 and officially in early 2019. They have been in contact since then. Since in the course of the exchange, the initiative had the impression that the foundation was not acting quickly enough and ensuring transparency, it initiated media coverage, among other things.



Why are the demands of the Her.Tietz Initiative, such as the establishment of an international commission, not being met?

The Hertie Foundation considers itself responsible for ensuring that the first results of the reappraisal are available by the end of 2022 at the latest. In doing so, the Foundation is relying on academic standards that GUG has demonstrated for years in similar research work. GUG will also specifically involve its academic advisory board and other international experts as necessary. Intensive discussions with experts also suggest that establishing an international commission would not be useful.

Will the results of the study also be available in English?

The study will also be made available to an international audience in English.

How openly will the results of the study be dealt with?

GUG and the Hertie Foundation will engage in an open international discussion about the results of the study once it becomes available at the end of 2022. Publication is not subject to any reservations.