

# Entering the Minefields: the Creation of New History Museums in Europe

Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums:  
Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past, and the European Citizen.  
Brussels 25 January 2012

Bodil Axelsson, Christine Dupont & Chantal Kesteloot (eds)  
EuNaMus Report No 9





# Entering the Minefields: The Creation of New History Museums in Europe

Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European  
National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past,  
and the European Citizen,  
Brussels 25 January 2012

Editors

Bodil Axelsson, Christine Dupont & Chantal Kesteloot

EuNaMus Report No. 9

# Copyright

The publishers will keep this document online on the Internet – or its possible replacement – from the date of publication barring exceptional circumstances.

The online availability of the document implies permanent permission for anyone to read, to download, or to print out single copies for his/her own use and to use it unchanged for noncommercial research and educational purposes. Subsequent transfers of copyright cannot revoke this permission. All other uses of the document are conditional upon the consent of the copyright owner. The publisher has taken technical and administrative measures to assure authenticity, security and accessibility. According to intellectual property law, the author has the right to be mentioned when his/her work is accessed as described above and to be protected against infringement.

For additional information about Linköping University Electronic Press and its procedures for publication and for assurance of document integrity, please refer to its www home page: <http://www.ep.liu.se/>.

Linköping University Interdisciplinary Studies, No. 83

Linköping University Electronic Press

Linköping, Sweden, 2012

ISSN: 1650-3686

eISSN: 1650-3740

URL: [http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp\\_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083)

© The Authors, 2012

This report has been published thanks to the support of the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for Research - Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities theme (contract nr 244305 – Project European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen). The information and views set out in this report are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union.



Funded under Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction: Entering Two Minefields: Research for Policy Making and the Creation of New History Museums in Europe</b> <i>Bodil Axelsson, Christine Dupont &amp; Chantal Kesteloot</i> .....	1
<b>Welcome addresses</b> <i>Michel Draguet</i> .....	15
<i>Octavio Quintana-Trias</i> .....	19
<i>Xavier Troussard Xavier</i> .....	21
<b>Entering the Minefields I: National Museums in the European Project</b> <b>Reflections on Policy Relevance and Research in EuNaMus, “European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen”</b> <i>Peter Aronsson</i> .....	25
<b>The Role of National Museums in the European Integration</b> <i>Chryssoula Paliadeli &amp; Marianthi Kopellou</i> .....	33
<b>National Museums – Difficulties and Possibilities. A Museological Approach</b> <i>Martin R. Schärer</i> .....	37
<b>Entering the Minefields II: The Creation of New History Museums in Europe</b> <b>The House of European History</b> <i>Taja Vovk-van Gaal &amp; Christine Dupont</i> .....	43
<b>Deutsches Historisches Museum Rethinking German History against the Background of a Burdened Past and New Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</b> <i>Rosmarie Beier-de Haan</i> .....	55
<b>The Light of History: Through the Lens of a Polish Museum</b> <i>Robert Kostro</i> .....	71
<b>The All-too-brief Existence of the Maison de l'Histoire de France: a Wasted Opportunity</b> <i>Etienne François</i> .....	79
<b>Notes on authors</b> .....	89





## **Entering Two Minefields: Research for Policy-Making and the Creation of New History Museums in Europe**

Bodil Axelsson (Department for the Study of Social Change and Culture,  
Linköping University)

Christine Dupont (House of European History, European Parliament)

Chantal Kesteloot (Centre for Historical Research and Documentation  
on War and Contemporary Society, Brussels)

### **Abstract**

This introduction provides the background for the conference “National Museums: Making Communities and Negotiating Conflicts”, also including the panel which has lent its title to these proceedings: “Entering the Minefields – the Creation of New History Museums in Europe”. It directs the attention to the balancing acts involved not only when new history museums are proposed by governmental bodies, but also when research is asked to feed into policy making. It turns out that new history museums and critical research respond in similar ways to pressures from governments and funders. Among the responses are transnational professional networking, the promotion of dialogues, and the sharing and accepting of a plurality of legitimate standpoints and identities. The emerging of competing memories and the lack of trust in great national narratives is then connected to Pierre Nora’s writings and critical works on the role of the *lieux de mémoire* and national identity.

Concerning the first minefield discussed in these proceedings – research for policy making – the introduction points to the complexities of the contemporary landscape of policy making. Including policy settings at both national and European levels and a variety of professional communities, the interaction of different agendas brings to the fore professional norms and standards. In this context, research can no longer be justified with the self-evident worth in its practices and outcomes. Instead, it aims at ventilating questions identified by political bodies in a way that is understandable to this very particular audience and additional audiences – and at the same time keeping the professional ethics intact.

## **Museum policies for heterogeneous communities**

In January 2012 about one hundred museum professionals, researchers and policy-makers gathered at The Royal Museums of Art and History, Parc du Cinquantenaire in Brussels to discuss the possibilities for national museums/museums to form communities and negotiate conflicts. The words national museum and museum are here separated by a forward slash allowing for a juxtaposition of national museums and museums in general, so as to include initiatives such as the planned House of European History, which was the research project Eunamus' partner in organizing this event. The forward slash may also indicate tension between, on the one hand, national museums and, on the other hand, a museum initiative of European scope. Throughout the day, the intersection between Europe's national communities and their inherent diversity, and the prospect of European integration was highlighted from different angles.

As pointed out in the welcoming speech by the host of the day, Michel Draguet, Director-General of the Royal Museums of Art and History, the venue was certainly well-chosen considering the theme of the conference. The park surrounding the Cinquantenaire Museum, as well as the institution itself, were constructed to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Belgian nation-state in 1880. Today the park and its impressive buildings with glass and steel details are but a stone's throw from the EU quarters, thus making Brussels the capital of Europe. Moreover, multicultural Brussels is the capital of a federal state with a dark colonial heritage that is balancing the interests of three regions and linguistic communities characterized by differences in economic development.

The city of Brussels is thus a telling example of how culturally and politically diverse Europe's nations and capitals currently are. However, as concluded in the Eunamus studies of the making of national museums in Europe 1750-2010, national communities have never been homogeneous. A cultural constitution, that includes national museums, has long been used to create a sense that "we belong together" in diverse political communities.

Evolving gradually over the past 250 years, Europe's national museums have developed into key institutions. They have become part of a 'cultural constitution', providing the political constitution of a state with the connective tissue of a common history that includes a shared material culture. This cultural constitution provides the political constitution with a more stable and plastic counterpart for negotiating conflicts in the cultural sphere. As a tangible stabilizing force, national museums can therefore be regarded as a kind of 'cultural glue'. (Agents of Change: How National Museums Shape European Identity, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy-briefs-EUNAMUS-09-2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy-briefs-EUNAMUS-09-2012_en.pdf))

Belgium is not the only historical example that may be pointed out; the great multicultural states of Germany and Italy during their respective unification processes in the 1800s are also examples (Aronsson & Elgenius 2011).

The conference at the Cinquantenaire Museum aimed at connecting Eunamus research on the historical development of national museums to the current creation of new history museums. As the title of these introductory pages suggests, the conference entered two separate, but related, minefields, both dealing with the intersection of politics, museum making and the writing of history. How is a research project like Eunamus positioned in terms of expectations from its



fundings, sources and audiences? And, correspondingly, how are the new history museums in the making positioned in relation to politicians, historians and their public?

Starting with the welcoming addresses, these proceedings locate the conference in the contemporary European policy landscape and follow the conference's programme. In Part One the intersections between policy and research and between history museums and policy are thereafter addressed by Peter Aronsson, Eunamus coordinator, and by Chrysoula Paliadeli, member of the European Parliament and by Martin R. Schärer, the president of the ICOM (International Council of Museums) Committee of Ethics. The second part of the proceedings brings together representatives from the *House of European History* (launched in 2007 and supported by the European Parliament, to be opened in 2015), the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* (established in 1987, and turning into a model for subsequent initiatives) the *Polish History Museum* (founded by a decree of the Minister of Culture in 2006, to be opened in 2018), and the *Maison de l'Histoire de France* (launched during the 2007 Presidential campaign and closed after the political shift in 2012).

This volume follows the outline of the day with a few exceptions. Firstly, Peter Aronsson's early 2012 presentation of the project has been made redundant by reports on research progress published in a series of Open Access Reports (<http://www.eunamus.eu/outcomes.html>). Instead we publish here his reflections on conducting research relevant to policy. Secondly, Dominique Poulot's speech on museum narratives is not included, but it is possible to refer to other publications (Poulot, Bodenstein & Lanzarote-Guiral 2012; Poulot, Lanzarote-Guiral & Bodenstein 2012). Thirdly, Etienne François replaces Charles Personnaz on the topic of the *Maison de l'Histoire de France*.

This introduction is co-authored by Bodil Axelsson, Linköping University; Christine Dupont, House of European History, and Chantal Kesteloot, Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society, Brussels (who chaired the conference panel on new history museums). Axelsson provides the background to the conference and introduces the welcome addresses and the first part of the conference. Dupont reflects upon the papers from Part Two, dealing with new history museums. Finally, Kesteloot places the initiatives within a broader research context.

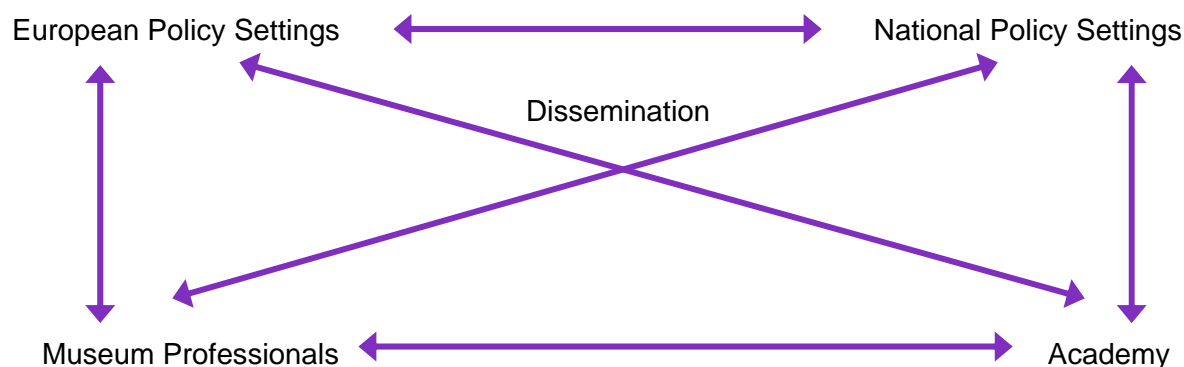
The papers in these proceedings do not reflect neutral standpoints. Rather, all contributors have been invited to enter the minefields from their respective perspectives. The contributions, including this introduction, are all tendentious, representing different professional norms and divergent institutional goals. Taken together they point to the balancing acts involved when history becomes involved in contemporary politics.

## **The background of the conference**

The European Commission funds research that develops competitive knowledge and EU policies and supports collaboration across national borders. Being a project funded under the 7th Framework of the European Commission means that Eunamus has to take on the challenge to communicate across borders and interact with various professions with a shared interest in the societal role of national museums. The project has to move outside the academic comfort zone to initiate on dialogue with unfamiliar audiences. The project therefore has a number of dissemination activities, such as open access publications, a website, a blog and conferences.

Furthermore, the project is carried out in accordance with the funder's quest for policy relevance. (See Octavia Quintana-Trias' contribution to this volume.) In addition to academic goals, the project provides knowledge to support principles or rules that guide future decisions in political bodies or in the management of museums.

Often communication between the fields of research and the fields of policy-making is described as a clash between two incompatible cultures with a great divide separating them. This conception has in recent years been challenged both in literature for policy-minded researchers and by actual projects such as Eunamus. Giving a much more nuanced image than the two-culture divide, Karen Bogenschneider and Thomas J. Corbett (2010) argue that in policy-making processes, various categories of people act according to a spectra of professional norms emerging out of the institutional settings to which they belong. In addition to politicians and researchers, they see policy administrators as a third active part that must be taken into account. They also recognize the values of intermediaries such as journalists and policy-oriented organizations. The experience of an EU-funded project, such as Eunamus, complicates the image even further, as it must work across national policy-making cultures, taking into account a plurality of policy settings. This figure has grown out of the experiences of the disseminating work within Eunamus:



Eunamus' field of policy-making is here depicted as a square figure with dissemination at its heart. The arrows reaching out from the centre refer to both the interactions between stakeholders, and the need for dissemination that reaches out to all four corners to understand their respective agendas. This may be achieved by performing a counterpart to business intelligence in order to find key persons for collaboration and knowledge-broking, for learning about their professional cultures and the values shaping their actions and decisions.

The conference at the Cinquantenaire Museum was one of the public events organized during the course of the Eunamus project not only to disseminate findings, but also to learn more about the project's diverse audiences. There Eunamus made public its first policy brief, a format allowing for the communication of research findings in a structured way in only a few pages. The format has been developed especially for projects funded by the European Commission Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) program.

The collaboration with the House of European History permitted Eunamus to connect its findings to a topical cultural policy issue – the making of new history museums. In retrospect the conference, the process of organization, the lectures, and, not least, the present proceedings, have

all added knowledge to the project about the making of new museums, but even about how to connect research to policy-making.

The conference reached out to all four corners of the model, including journalists and policy-oriented organizations acting as knowledge brokers in their respective spheres. In particular, the event gathered a local crowd of museum professionals, cultural workers and academic researchers. Representatives from national policy settings were far more difficult to attract. One explanation may be the location of the conference. It is not self-evident that politicians or policy administrators in national governments prioritize a journey to Brussels to learn about the history of national museums in Europe and a European initiative. Politicians at the national level are accountable to their voters and their own geographical areas, agendas and ideologies. Hence, for a project like Eunamus it is vital to understand that the national policy locations and the European context are different audiences with possibly contradictory aims due to the different values and expectations that form their actions. The European Parliament and the European Commission act in favour of European interests and strive to counterbalance national pressures, as became clear in some of the speeches at the conference.

As will be developed further below, the intersection between national and European agendas reappeared throughout the conference. The two agendas are not mutually exclusive, as the use of the forward slash in the introduction above is intended to indicate. In the sphere of museum policy they rather represent two complementing, and sometimes competing, utopias. In this respect the conference foreshadowed the findings of the Eunamus report: *Museum Policies in Europe 1990 – 2010: Negotiating Professional and Political Utopia*. This report highlighted three visions articulated by Europe's various policy-makers: EUtopia, Multicultural Utopia, and National Historical Utopia. The editors concluded that there have been significant political actions to fine-tune national museums to such divergent political needs, such as Europeanness, the strengthening of national identities and the promotion of diversity and minority rights within nations (Eilertsen & Amundsen 2012). Two examples of the striving of national museums to evoke Europeanness in their present collections would be the plans in Brussels mentioned in Draguet's paper in these proceedings and the National Museum of Denmark's temporary exhibition *Europe meets the World* (Christensen et al. 2012). At the conference the quest for multicultural approaches figured as a subtheme, or a critical standpoint, to nuance both national and European perspectives.

Throughout the project Eunamus has taken the funder's guidelines on dissemination seriously. The guidelines follow in the footsteps of dialogue minded researchers who have stressed the need to step out of the old dissemination model by which findings are presented at the end of a project. Eunamus experiences bear witness to the idea that it is in interaction with outsiders that a community's values are made visible. Consequently, the conference at the Cinquantenaire Museum brought to the fore professional norms and standards from all four corners of the figure above.

## **The European policy setting and critical research**

The importance of the contributions of knowledge to the cultural integration of Europe was dealt with by both Octavia Quintana-Trias, director of the European Research Area at the Directorate-General for Research & Innovation, and Alexandra Kaligouri, who delivered an

address by Xavier Troussard, Acting Director at the Directorate D Culture & Media, Directorate-General Education and Culture, the European Commission. Both stressed that Eunamus findings are expected to contribute with knowledge on the role of national museums for the citizens of Europe, in terms of differences as well as commonalities. A closer look at the two contributions reveals a difference between them. This difference is due to a change in the values underpinning the European Commission's take on culture. As pointed out by Quintana-Trias, Eunamus was funded in the wake of EU expansion, and there was a perceived need for knowing about the integrating forces of collective representations of the past. However, Eunamus runs parallel to the development of a new framework programme for education and culture: Creative Europe 2014-2020. As reflected in Troussard's text, this programme not only supports "a sense of belonging to a European cultural space"; it also promotes an urge to invest in its cultural and creative sector to enhance capacities for innovation and economic growth.

The two contributions provide evidence to support the view that the values underlying policy development are ambiguous and continuously evolving. The current development may be interpreted as a move toward increased economic instrumentalism. Cultural institutions are asked to earn their public funding by adjusting to social and economic agendas, as opposed to just receiving funds with reference to culture's intrinsic values (cf Bounia 2012; Bunting 2008).

The reception of Creative Europe's economic instrumentalism has been mixed. Museums have long been seen as important for tourism, for local and regional economies, and for the regeneration and branding of cities. In response to an even stronger economic agenda, policy-oriented museum organisations have raised powerful arguments, maintaining that culture and creativity are much more than a means of economic growth. They contribute to society in terms of "education, well-being, communities and inspiration".<sup>1</sup>

In recent years the pressure on academic research to relate to questions from public agendas has increased too. The Eunamus coordinator is among those scholars who are inspired by this move and who take it seriously. Included in these proceedings are Aronsson's reflections on the European Commission's quest for producing research that is "problem oriented with policy relevance". (See Quintana-Trias in these proceedings.) Aronsson suggests that the demands from the European Commission pose challenges similar to those that museums face. Researchers, too, are required to be sensitive to social concerns and economic goals, to balance, on the one hand, political demands of carrying out tasks according to ideological currents, and, on the other hand, scholarly ideals of critique and disinterested autonomy.

As recognized by Aronsson, there are no straightforward responses to these demands. Instead he stresses that they are embedded in a more encompassing challenge for research in the social sciences and humanities to meet a legitimate demand for added value made by and for society. Ideally, according to Bogenschneider and Corbett, research should bring a balanced view to the table and provide factual solutions freed from routine answers to inform decisions or clarify potential consequences of decisions. To know its audiences and communicate on their terms are essential elements. Its role is not to lobby for specific policy options, to act in accordance with common sense public opinion, or in line with recent political development (cf. Bogenschneider & Corbett 2010).

It is worth noting that Aronsson, as well as Bogenschneider and Corbett, take on a policy relevance that circumvents the distinction between instrumentalism and intrinsic value

introduced above with reference to museums. The airing of different options and consequences of policy development, based on social scientific evidence (Bogenschneider & Corbett 2010), or scholarly interpretations of the past (Aronsson), fits neither into the paradigm of justifying public funding by simply adjusting to social and economic agendas, nor does it conform to the view that there is a self-evident worth in its practices and outcomes.

Instead, the aim is dialogues that ventilate questions identified by political bodies in a way that is understandable to this very particular audience – and at the same time keeping the academic values intact. It might also be worthwhile to acknowledge that professionals and citizens, and their respective organizations, are additional legitimate audiences. Aronsson suggests that the appropriate goal does not necessarily have to be the production of consent. Dialogues allow for the sharing and accepting of a plurality of legitimate standpoints while at the same time respectfully debating the validity of those different standpoints. As will be developed below, similar suggestions are present in current approaches to museum narratives.

## **Identity politics and history museums**

Being situated in one of the hotspots for European politics – the European Parliament – Chrysoula Paliadelis and Marianthi Kopellou address the contested issue of European cultural and social integration. They put forward the burning question of whether there are any realistic possibilities for realizing the creation of European identity based on history.

In their paper Paliadelis and Kopellou test the idea that the current tendency to create new national history museums may be part of a reluctant stance in the European Union's member states towards the promotion of an overarching European identity. From their point of view, the strivings of EU policy-makers to create an “imagined community” of Europeans, complementary to the imagined communities of the continent's nation-states, seems to be stumbling on a series of obstacles. The strength and persistence of national identities might be the most salient. Statistical data from the Eurobarometer suggest that national identities generally triumph over European identities. These statistics are supported by the findings of European Commission funded research on European identities. (See Aronsson in this volume.) Similar results are also suggested in the Eunamus visitor studies. In the context of national museums, national identities are prioritized, often in combination with a sense of regional belonging (Bounia et al. 2012). However, identities based on Europe or on religion may be maintained alongside national identities without conflict (Dodd et al. 2012).

Nations are still binding political and cultural settings, but national values that are too strong might lead to the resurgent nationalisms of neo-nationalistic movements. Paliadelis and Kopellou therefore suggest that national histories need to be treated with care: “represented through a critical historical perspective rather than as an essential value that could be used as a vehicle for separatism” so as to be “cherished as vital features of a common European future”.

In his paper Martin Schärer connects the vulnerability of history museums to identity politics through the very nature of history writing. The past is forever lost and even the most rigorous methodology cannot sidestep the fact that history is a construction of the present. The scholarly interpretations museums can offer are therefore only provisional, based on the available material sources.

In order to counteract the vulnerability of museums to influences from politics and state organs, museologist Schärer emphasizes the value of professional norms. As demonstrated in Eunamus research, ideological influences are poignantly salient in one-party states, such as the Soviet Union and its associated states in Eastern Europe, but are still not entirely avoidable even in democratic states (Poulot, Bodenstein & Lanzarote-Guiral 2012; Poulot, Lanzarote-Guiral & Bodenstein 2012).

In Schärer's view, museologists have responsibilities and ethic obligations to destabilize any simple notion of the existence of one true interpretation of a nation's past. Yesterday's ideal of heroic and glorious one-dimensional narratives with an unquestioned origin of the nation is not acceptable today, as testified to by the contributions of Rosmarie Beier-de Haan, Robert Kostro, Etienne François, and Taja Vovk-van Gaal & Christine Dupont in these proceedings. Current ideals for establishing museums also include the exhibiting of dark sides and conflicts, messiness and heterogeneities, as well as the interconnectedness of nation-states. In addition museums ought to convey the relativity of narratives without falling into the pitfalls of "paralyzing and destructive relativism", writes Schärer, ending his paper with a list of suggested actions for the critically-minded and ethical museologist.

## **Europe's new history museums: commonalities and differences**

Despite their locations in different political contexts (a re-united Germany, a Union of nation-states, a post-communist nation, and a strong state in a former empire), the new history museums introduced in these proceedings demonstrate many similarities. Beyond the diverse contexts of their establishment and development, the projects presented here (as other similar projects not presented in the panel, such as the abandoned Dutch National History Museum) are interesting cases to analyse from the point of view of their commonalities and their comparable claims to certain goals and objectives.

The first striking issue is the common reference to a kind of German model for this form of contemporary history museum. The *Deutsches Historisches Museum* of Berlin, presented here by Rosemarie Beier-de Haan, as well as the *Haus der Geschichte* of Bonn, which was not formally part of the panel, are German institutions mentioned by all the authors as reference points, if not as real models. The new projects demonstrate a shared wish to achieve a similar success in terms of reaching broad audiences and becoming indispensable institutions in the field of public discussions of historical issues.

There is also admiration for the way the Germans transformed their museums into successful communication tools and created a forum about the country's difficult past. After the opening of the new institutions presented during the Brussels conference, it would certainly be fascinating to examine the extent to which the new museums follow this supposed "German model". Will it be possible to speak of real "cultural transfers", for instance, in the creation of the narratives of the museums or in the use of similar language in the presentation? Only the future will tell.

Another link between these diverse initiatives is the network of people found in the governing or advising bodies of these institutions. To mention here only some examples, the Academic Committees of the *Haus der Geschichte* and of the *House of European History* have several people in common. This observation goes further than the issue of the German model. Not surprisingly, historians with a European dimension can be found in the committees of several institutions,

such as Krzysztof Pomian and Elie Barnavi, who were, or are, linked to both the *Musée de l'Europe* (other initiative not presented in the panel), and the *Maison de l'Histoire de France*. Krzysztof Pomian is associated with several institutions in Poland as well. Etienne François, who presents the aborted French initiative in this volume, is also the Vice-President of the Academic Committee of the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin.

Relationships like this are sometime organised in formal networks (Kaiser et al. 2012), and they could be expected to be inside the restricted world of history museums. Even so, they create links between institutions and shared ideas and practices. How these networks will influence the circulation and application of some models (German or other) will only be observable when the new institutions (at least the ones not yet abandoned) open to the public and exist as fully developed museums.

At this stage one can only analyse the declared intentions of the different actors. The texts contributed here are quite remarkably convergent. Presenting an institution which can rely on 25 years of existence, Rosemarie Beier-de Haan can allow herself to give advice to those responsible for newer initiatives. She states that these “must ... be truthful, that means meet international scientific criteria and standards of historiography and the representation of history.” They also “should not provide conclusive and precast perceptions of ... history.” Finally, the museums should be places of “reconciliation” and “allow visitors to ask questions”. These principles are indeed part of the wishes expressed by the other authors, who present one abandoned project and two institutions not yet open to the public.

The first statement seems obvious to the people writing the texts, all of whom are historians. Nevertheless discussions could arise as to which standards should be applied, but this volume is not the appropriate place to discuss the issue. In Schärer's paper, there is then an emphasis on the demand to avoid one-directional narratives. This wish seems to be the natural answer to expressed or feared criticisms of the projects. The writing of the national grand narrative has long since been deconstructed in France (François). “No museum ... has the right to formulate a complete and closed vision of the past” (Kostro). Reaching beyond the relativity of a narrative designed at one point in time by one team of people, and which will necessarily evolve with the change of actors as well as of visitors (Vovk-van Gaal & Dupont), there is the declared intention to construct a multi-perspective narrative that allows different viewpoints and interpretations of history.

The stress in all papers on multi-dimensional narratives is, of course, the classical answer to the main concern of critical commentators who fear “official” narratives inspired by political (often right-wing) agendas. The “other side” is invited to take part in the debate, be it the Left, which traditionally has been opposed to this kind of project, as was the case in Germany and more recently in France (Beier-de Haan, François), or “those suspicious about the very concept of a national tradition”, as in Poland (Kostro). In the European case it is the plurality of the European Parliament itself which is presented as a guarantee of the pluralist approach (Vovk-van Gaal & Dupont).

The debate, however, is much more than a historical discussion on the diverse interpretations of the past. It reflects even more the vision of the museum as a forum. The interaction with the visitors is centrally placed (especially by Vovk-van Gaal & Dupont), although not readily visible in the paper of an academic history teacher serving here as member of an Academic Committee

(François). The high expectations placed on museums to turn into meeting points (François) or into places for dialogue (Kostro, Vovk-van Gaal & Dupont) can even go as far as converting the museum into a place of reconciliation between citizens (Beier-de Haan). The forum format may also be an explanation for the choice of naming some of these institutions 'House' instead of 'Museum' (François, Vovk-van Gaal & Dupont).

The context of the conference at the Cinquantenaire Museum made it somehow unavoidable for the contributors to present the new projects in which they are involved within the framework of the complex notion of (national or European) identities. The answer to this issue has again had different parallel solutions. The accent is placed on multidimensional identity. In the Polish case, where identity is one of the declared pillars of the project, the claim is made for "multinational and multi-ethnic heritages as a source of identity" (Kostro). The team of the House of European History has decided to use the notion of collective memory, instead of identity, which was judged to be both too restricted and too problematic (Vovk-van Gaal & Dupont). Speaking about the territory which is taken into account, the moving of national borders throughout the centuries is often presented as an example of this multifaceted aspect of what is considered German, French, Polish or European.

Finally, the necessary multinational framework of the projects, in their contents as well as in their ways of working, appears as one of the main requirements of the initiators and the actors daily involved in development of these projects. This claim was present from the very beginning of the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* and is still one of the main axes of the work and programme of the institution (Beier-de Haan). The transnational approach becomes a natural part of the way of thinking of the museums that deal with the whole of Europe. The *Musée de l'Europe* and the *House of European History* have been eager to specify that the content of their museums will not be based on a mere addition of national narratives (Cadot 2010; Committee of Experts 2008). The degree of integration in the European Union of the countries represented here may also explain the varying intensity of their commitment with this European idea, as reflected by the Polish presentation.

## **National history museums: a key to the future of the past?**

The contributions from the historians responsible for new history museums show that it is far from obvious what we seek to achieve through a museum of national history today. What is national history when enhancing the great events of the nation, great men, great facts and established certainties is no longer an option? Is it to answer the question of what it means to be a Frenchman, a German, a Pole or a European? Beyond the fact that there is no single answer to those questions, we must also remain particularly attentive to the fact that tomorrow the answers that have been presented in these papers as in the future museums will probably be questioned, or even revised. Is it perhaps more fruitful to consider museums as "brainstorming spots" that lead visitors to another vision of their own history. In this sense, museums are asking more questions, rather than presenting definitive answers. Many "cold cases" might be re-opened. They no longer seem to be places for idealistic stories that never existed. Today, national museums also have to deal with difficult and controversial elements of the past, and they must deal with what citizenship means.



The following paragraphs take us back to the possible scholarly influences for the historians struggling with the intersection between history and politics. Almost thirty years ago Pierre Nora provoked a kind of academic revolution with the publication of *Lieux de mémoire* (Realm of memory) (Nora, 1984-1992; Nora, 2011). According to Nora, there was a crisis in the so-called “national memory”. Old evidence was questioned when an emerging modern society swept away old traditions and balances.

Translations were quickly made, and the spread of the concept provoked numerous debates. Could Nora’s project, focused on France, be exported to other national contexts considering the link between state and nation in France, which might be considered unique? Nevertheless, other national versions, more or less close to the original concept, were published. The issue also went far beyond the national level, and several historians have discussed the existence of the European realm of memory (Bossuat, 1999; François & Serrier, 2012). Furthermore, Nora’s concept created opportunities for other discussions and debates among historians (Majerus et al. 2009). This success proved the real interest in the concept of memory and its importance in a society in crisis regarding its relationship to the past.

With the emergence of competing memories, forgotten aspects of the past came to the fore and suddenly had to be taken into consideration. These changes introduced doubts in the belief in the greatness of the nation's history. Other actors, other facts forgotten, overlooked or suppressed, began to claim their place in national history. The past was no longer unique. Other groups invested their own identity and made claims for recognition, provoking disorientation. The national past was in crisis, but, in addition, two other dimensions gained increasing importance: the challenge of strong local elements (national vs. local) and the international perspective (national vs. international). What was the place of national history between these two orientations?

Parallel to the emergence of the debate regarding the role of memory in the construction of national/European identity, a series of works on nationalism and national identity were published at the end of the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> They asked questions such as: what were the roots of national sentiment? Was it an inclusive or exclusive nationalism or a combination of both? What were the roles of language, religion, histories, past and myths? Briefly, the main part of the research has focused on nationalism and national identities. Theoretical models have been constructed and deconstructed. Similar debates emerged on the regional level (regionalism vs. nationalism) but they may also be extended to the European level when focusing on questions regarding memory and the history of Europe (Rousso, 2004).

All these studies have undoubtedly had a large impact on the mission of old and new national history museums. These institutions are at the crossroads of questions of history, memory, identity within Europe, all of which are moving so quickly. As also pointed out by Peter Aronsson in these proceedings, the growing scholarly interest in nationalism and collective memory and uses of the past sparked Eunamus research into the realm of museum identities, and people working in museums are addressing these issues as well. Today national museums are institutions for the general public, funded by the government, but they are also objects of research, debate and reflection.

Throughout Europe historians are engaged in museum initiatives, and they are participating in the discussions. The approach of a public history is imminent. The papers in these proceedings

testify to the difficulties of acting in the intersection between a museological approach, funding policy and the historian's way of thinking. It is particularly challenging to reflect on the parallel to projects in progress, as the authors in this volume do. At this point, one of them, *Maison de l'Histoire de France*, has been abandoned, which implies a failure of the French initiative. This is not unique. It could also refer to the Dutch case, even though this is not highlighted in the papers presented here, due to the fact that it was not possible for a representative of the Dutch case to take part in the conference.

The fact that the reflection was initiated by responsible museum managers is extremely positive. What is also significant is the exchange between the different initiatives. The relationship between the position and status of each national history is not the same. The manner in which countries such as France, Poland and Germany are dealing with their pasts is very specific. This is the result of very different experiences. The way they deal with democracy and national identity differs in terms of space, as well as the relationships between state and nation. In some cases the treatment may appear obvious, but in other cases they turn into subjects of extensive public debate. The relationship between historians and the civil society and/or the political world is not necessarily the same. In some cases, it became even more complicated when historians emerged as politically responsible.

If a national approach is complex, what about the European approach? It seems as if the terminology and the associated semantic problems, all the issues and or questions that are emerging from the national angle are multiplied by at least 27 or more at a European level. Composed of states whose boundaries have changed over and over again means Europe today has a complex history. Considering the vocabularies in different languages and the richness of embedded specific words, the national histories and different approaches of miscellaneous concepts can be perceived differently from time to time. Again, it is a real challenge to turn the planned House of the History of Europe into an open project, maintaining differences but also showing why and how Europe sometimes makes sense and sometimes not.

Nevertheless, beyond all the difficulties and challenges, there are many reasons to rejoice. All these debates show that history is important for civil society as well as policy makers. It can certainly be reserved, even vigilant, but it does not hide the fact that, if there is no interest from political bodies, there is little hope of significant public funding. Projects such as national history museums (or houses) are ambitious. They therefore require significant resources. Even if some politicians are very concerned about the contents of the history museum, it is clear - and this is positive - that they generally appeal to historians and debates can take place. The failure of the French museum is probably more associated with too much, rather than too little, debate.

The debates that took place in Brussels demonstrated how those responsible for the forthcoming museums are both aware of the difficulties and pitfalls, and willing to discuss them. There is no question of imposing a closed vision of history. The content of the papers and the discussions that took place, have led us to be optimistic. Future museums are presented here as open spaces offering a plural history. This history invites citizens to ask questions, gives him the tools for reflection on the concept of national history. The museum visitor is considered as a responsible citizen on which no vision has been imposed. The museum will also be an open space for "the others". Most speakers stressed the definition of the museum as a place for

openness, dialogue and discovery. National history should not operate as a closed space, but rather as a gateway to the world.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Network of European Museums (NEMO). “Creative Museums”. Response to European Commission’s proposal for Creative Europe.  
[http://www.encatc.org/pages/fileadmin/user\\_upload/2012/NEMO\\_Creative\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.encatc.org/pages/fileadmin/user_upload/2012/NEMO_Creative_Europe.pdf). Last visited 2012.12.19. See also: Museum Association. Creative Europe. Response to Consultation. March 2012. Available at  
[http://www.encatc.org/pages/fileadmin/user\\_upload/2012/Museums\\_Association\\_Creative\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.encatc.org/pages/fileadmin/user_upload/2012/Museums_Association_Creative_Europe.pdf). Last visited 2012.12.19.
- <sup>2</sup> It is impossible to give a global overview of all the works published on this topic. To mention a few, the publications of Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Anthony D. Smith or Benedict Anderson, for example, and the issues of the journal *Nation and Nationalism* which was first published in 1995.

## Bibliography

- Agents of Change: How National Museums Shape European Identity March 2012. EUNAMUS Policy Brief.* Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy-briefs-EUNAMUS-09-2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy-briefs-EUNAMUS-09-2012_en.pdf). Last visited 2012.12.18.
- Aronsson P. & Elgenius, G. (eds) (2011) *Building National Museums in Europe 1750–2010. Conference proceedings from EUNAMUS Bologna 28-30 April 2011*, EUNAMUS Report No. 1, Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press. Available at [http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp\\_home/index.en.aspx?issue=064](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=064)
- Bogenschnieder K. & Corbett T. J., (2010) *Evidence-Based Policymaking: Insights from Policy-Minded Researchers and Research-Minded Policymakers*, New York: Routledge.
- Bounia, A. (2012) ‘Cultural Policy in Greece, the Case of the National Museums (1990–2010): an Overview’, in Eilertsen, L. & Amundsen, A. B., (eds) (2012) *Museum Policies in Europe 1990 – 2010: Negotiating Professional and Political Utopia*. EUNAMUS Report No. 3, Linköping University Interdisciplinary Studies, No. 15, Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, pp. 127–154. Available at <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:557284>
- Bounia, A. et al (2012) *Voices from the Museum: Survey Research in Europe’s National Museums*. EUNAMUS Report No. 5, Linköping University Interdisciplinary Studies, No. 16. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press. Available at <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:563949>
- Bossuat G., (1999) ‘Des lieux de mémoire pour l’Europe unie’, *Vingtième siècle*, vol 61, pp. 56–69.
- Bunting, C. (2008), “What’s instrumentalism? A public perception of value” in *Cultural Trends*, 17(4), pp. 323–328.
- Cadot, C. (2010) ‘Can museums help build a European memory? The example of the Musée de l’Europe in Brussels in the light of “New World” museums’ experience’, *International Journal for Politics, Culture and Society* 23: 127–136.
- Christensen, L. K. et al (2012) *Europe meets the World*, Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark.
- Committee of Experts (2008) *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History*, Brussels: European Parliament. HTTP:

- [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf) . Last visited 2012.12.15.
- Dodd, J et al, (2012) *Voices from the Museum: Qualitative Research Conducted in Europe's National Museums*. EUNAMUS Report No. 6. Linköping University Interdisciplinary Studies, No. 17, Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012. Available at <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?searchId=1&pid=diva2:572100>
- Eilertsen, L. & Amundsen, A. B. (eds) (2012) *Museum Policies in Europe 1990 – 2010: Negotiating Professional and Political Utopia*. EUNAMUS Report No. 3. Linköping University Interdisciplinary Studies, No. 15, Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press. Available at <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:557284>
- François E. & Serrier T., (2012) *Lieux de mémoire européens*, Paris: La Documentation française.
- Kaiser, W., Krankenhagen, S., Poehls, K. (2012) *Europa ausstellen. Das Museum als Praxisfeld der Europäisierung*, Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag.
- Majerus B, Kmec S. (et al ed.) (2009) *Dépasser le cadre national des "lieux de mémoire": innovations méthodologiques, approches comparatives, lectures transversales/Nationale Erinnerungsorte hinterfragt: methodologische Innovationen, vergleichende Annäherungen, transnationale Lektüren*, Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin: PIE.
- Museum Association. *Creative Europe. Response to Consultation*. March 2012. Available at [http://www.encatc.org/pages/fileadmin/user\\_upload/2012/Museums\\_Association\\_Creative\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.encatc.org/pages/fileadmin/user_upload/2012/Museums_Association_Creative_Europe.pdf). Last visited 2012.12.19.
- Network of European Museums (NEMO). *"Creative Museums". Response to European Commission's proposal for Creative Europe*. [http://www.encatc.org/pages/fileadmin/user\\_upload/2012/NEMO\\_Creative\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.encatc.org/pages/fileadmin/user_upload/2012/NEMO_Creative_Europe.pdf). Last visited 2012.12.19.
- Nora P. (ed.) (1984-1992) *Les lieux de mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Nora P. (2011) *Présent, nation, mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Poulot, D., Bodenstein, F. & Lanzarote, Guiral J. M, (eds) (2012) *Great Narratives of the Past: Traditions and Revisions in National Museums. Conference Proceedings from EUNAMUS Paris 28 June-1 July & 25–26 November 2011*. EUNAMUS Report No. 4, Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012. Available at [http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp\\_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078)
- Poulot, D., Lanzarote Guiral, J. M. & Bodenstein, F. (eds) (2012) *National Museums and the Negotiation of Difficult Pasts. Conference Proceedings from EUNAMUS Brussels 26-27 January 2012*. EUNAMUS Report No. 8, Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012. Available at [http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp\\_home/index.en.aspx?issue=082](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=082)
- Rouso, H., (2004) 'Das Dilemma eines europäischen Gedächtnisses', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Online-Ausgabe, 1, H. 3. <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Rouso-3-2004>.



## Welcome Address

Michel Draguet (Director-General of the Royal Museum  
of Art and History, Belgium)

I am delighted to be here today with the pleasant task of welcoming you to Brussels. Brussels is a city with a dense and complex past which it would be too “politically correct” to describe as merely “rich”; proclaimed the national capital in 1830, it subsequently became a regional, federal and European capital. Brussels offers those with an interest in national museums in Europe an opportunity not only to question the past, but also to rethink the future. Brussels today is a laboratory, and like any laboratory in times of crisis, it presents conflicting faces, sometimes tense and anxious, sometimes joyful and enthusiastic.

The focus on a cultural heritage shaped by the forces of history which brings you here today is reflected in this building; it is an echo chamber to which you should know how to listen. The Cinquantaire site was born of the need for celebration of a young country which, in 1880, wished to present to the world not only the legitimacy, culturally and historically speaking, of its existence, but also an economic and political power solidly rooted in an enduring past. The building was thus a combination of the monumental and the modern, in its novel use, for the time, of steel and glass.

Almost a century and a half on, the site reflects the difficulty of belonging to that same nation, a nation that has been in search of itself since swallowing its pride, a nation that has made the questioning of its very identity – this mischievous Belgitude, which some trace back to Magritte – the expression of an identity that is what it is not, in which constant doubt mingles with “creolisation” in what the Caribbean poet Edouard Glissant termed “le tout-monde”.

In a Belgium in which contemporary regionalisms, now a matter of national debate, promise “evaporation”, the presentation of heritage assets poses a number of questions. First of all, it is incorrect to state that this heritage is threatened by the general, populist upsurge in nationalism. We are no longer living in an age of iconoclasm. The crux of the debate is not the survival of the heritage – which is at greater risk from economic vicissitudes than from ideologies – but the way in which it is put together. That is inevitable. Placing a particular object in a display case is in itself an act of composition, in both the modalities of the act of displaying and, by association, the elaboration of a discourse foreign to the temporality of the object displayed. To display is to write. And thus, unavoidably, almost to betray the act in its silent presence.

Although in our western societies the actual existence of our heritage is not under threat, it is nevertheless used in a manner that should be subjected to close critical scrutiny. Here you will perhaps be thinking of “new” projects involving the history of Europe and its constituent nations. May I for a moment touch upon other older projects, undertaken sometimes centuries ago, whose conditions of existence must be acknowledged by us today.

Whether one considers the Royal Museums of the Fine Arts created by Napoleon, or the Royal Museums of Art and History, founded in the wake of the 50th anniversary celebrations, these two institutions constitute a heritage which, before being brought together in a national building, existed independently of the project that found fulfilment in 1830. Without going back into prehistory, as was done in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and as André Chastel's "l'Art français" was still attempting to demonstrate under twenty years ago, it is clear that from the Dukes of Burgundy to Archduke Albert and Isabella, a feeling of national identity was formed in a specific social context reflecting a way of life – nowadays insufficiently appreciated, in my opinion - which was itself decisive for the entire creative outcome, ranging from the most popular practices to the most elite of artistic forms. Craftsmanship, creation, everyday practices thus defined a form of "living together" to which the major national myths - which it should be remembered are not the product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century alone – conferred a legitimacy that led to the need to found a nation. This idea of history linking a "place of memory" and cultural identity is understood. The question for me – and one which I must confess has been preoccupying me daily in recent months – may be stated thus: how do we transform this heritage, assembled, conserved and thus far valued, in order to respond to a narrative which now runs counter to the nationalist doxa of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century? In fact the equation is simple: how do we create a new narrative without changing either language or words?

In the vast operation of reconstruction that was to be triggered by post-modernism, it was thought that simply by changing our viewpoint we could move to another key. To show that there was neither author nor major narrative. Neither reference culture nor predetermined identity. The debate was conducted mainly in the university world, which perhaps helped to insulate it further from a daily reality in which mass communication and mass culture were fuelling patriotic phantoms and "mythographical" discourse. We must ensure today that in broadening the scope of post-modern thought we do not produce a similar break with the public, who would not feel concerned by similar issues or who would relate only sketchily to a debate on memory, intertextuality or the many facets of heritage.

As a salutary warning, this nonetheless led to a reductionism which, given the extent and the diversity of our western societies, divorced the intellectual debate from the everyday reality of millions of Europeans. Abstract ideas, used to escape from the traps of modernity that was blamed for all the ills of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, generated a litany of concepts that it was believed would be the bearers of change, without them having any real place in a society in the throes of an identity crisis now intensified by financial and economic collapse and, tomorrow maybe, social collapse as well.

Against this background, some people thought that Europe would supplant the old lethal nationalisms of the past century and that to be "European" would be something to be proud of in addition to an essentially more human regional identity. That was the view taken at the end of the '80s. Hence the need to endow that European citizenship with the tools that had been used to constitute national identity, but without those myths which the 20<sup>th</sup> century had shown to have such monstrous consequences. Without being confined by established borders – impossible in the age of globalisation; without being able to refer to those grand founding narratives, also discredited. The Museum of Europe, the Parlamentarium, the House of European History are all artificial projects that speak to a political agenda or to a project of obsolete propaganda with no

resonance in the expectations of the public who, it must be said, associate Europe mainly with directives far-removed from their daily concerns or with an inability to speak with one and the same voice.

It is therefore clear that once the possibilities for writing the political history of Europe were exhausted, the limitations of the exercise quickly appeared: is there a European cultural identity? Is there even a feeling of identity beyond our assembled nationalisms that reconstitute the moment a crisis erupts? Judging by recent events, it would seem unlikely.

In a seminal work, the Belgian historian Jean Stengers linked the emergence of a national sentiment and the existence of a state structure incarnating that national community regardless of linguistic or religious differences. Recent experience shows that a project or debate is unlikely to fuel that sentiment. Nowadays Europe is of interest to only a few in Europe. Outside the circles of eurocrats or urbanites who, in Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg translated the European dynamic into a local development policy, those who speak up for a European identity or who outline a supposed “national” European sentiment are rare. Europe no longer inspires.

I believe it is our duty – and in Brussels more than elsewhere – to mobilise a heritage that arose from a nationalist dynamic in order to transform it into a vector for a European consciousness. This will be meaningless if Europe – like the Burgundian states in the case of the future Netherlands, and thus Belgium - fails to become a state. If it fails to generate its own myths, if it fails to draw on our shared past for its terms of identity. If it fails to transmute them into grand narratives and then, without being afraid of words, into myths that will generate a feeling of shared identity. In this context heritage has a role to play: the heritage of the painters attached to the court of Burgundy is not a Flemish heritage in the modern sense of the word, or Belgian in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sense. It is European. As is the heritage of antiquity with concepts as different as the market economy, love or democracy. As is OUR colonial, post-colonial or neo-colonial past. Europe’s outlook on the world is the result of a history that is our history. And while we no longer need to impose it on the world, we can draw on it to see more clearly what united us and what will unite us in the future.

It is in this perspective that the federal science policy that administers this Belgian heritage now due for reinvention has drawn up an extensive programme for redeployment of the collections which, here in this site emblematic of the nation’s history, will place the emphasis on Europe in order to illustrate, with the Museum of the Armed Forces, the history of the conflicts that decimated us but that also helped to define our borders and determine our desire to live together; with the Museum of Antiquities, the cultural hub centred on the Mediterranean, which spread slowly towards the north; with the Museum of non-European Civilisations whose vocation will not be solely to demonstrate the diversity of “other” cultures – I emphasise “other” – but through their discovery and their composition to illustrate the construction of a western identity that can be defined as European. A vast programme of redeployment which, I am sure, will have relevance only if, in parallel, Europe exists as a nation. That is the price we must pay unless we want the scepticism about the way the Community operates to become euroscepticism.







## Welcome Address

Octavi Quintana-Trias (Director, European Research Area  
Directorate-General for Research & Innovation, European Commission)

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking you for your invitation. It is a pleasure to be here to talk to you about what the European Commission expects from your project EuNaMus.

Your project is funded by the 7<sup>th</sup> Research Framework programme, via the Social Sciences and Humanities 2009 call for proposals.

Please allow me to remind you the **broader policy context** in which **EuNaMus** has been selected:

The research area concerned is that of **“diversities and commonalities in Europe”**.

- In the recent years of EU enlargements, research was needed to address how collective representations and uses of history in Europe shaped and continue to shape the image of Europe for its citizens.
- In other words, research should explore the role of different collective memories as they have been shaped by the past and its interpretation as well as the perception of Europe by its citizens.
- We need contributions from research to develop new ideas on how the dialogue between European citizens can be strengthened in the light of different memories and how **a shared view of the past, present and future of Europe can emerge**.

### **Great interest of the European Union for EuNaMus research: “National Museums in Europe: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European citizen”**

All over Europe, national museums are “temoins vivants” (live witnesses, if you wish) of the richness and diversity of our cultural heritage. They outline the historical cultural dimension of our countries in terms of national belongings and identities.

This is precisely why your research on mapping and framing national museums as well as the comprehensive overview and comparative analysis of the development of these museums in Europe is very important for European citizens.

Understanding what national museums are, how they are defined, exposing their content in a didactical and modern way, classifying them by clusters following historical criteria... all of these elements provide strong tools for people to understand their past, their origins.

Some of the main questions put forward by EuNaMus include:

- How did national museums contribute to the emergence of contemporary Europe?
- Which are their differences and commonalities?
- What roles have they played in the re-drawing of the European map of nations-states?
- How do national museums interact with historical and contemporary globalizing forces?

These are all vital questions for European societies

### **EU expectations from EuNaMus research**

As you know all research projects supported by Socio-economic sciences and the Humanities should be **"Problem oriented with policy relevance"**.

Research projects should generate **"scientific evidence"** or new knowledge for policymakers at all levels: regional, national and of course European. A project such as yours can help policymakers to better invest public culture funding. You tackle questions that are key for the process of renewal of our museums. Your research will offer new data which should provide a reliable and strong basis for policy decisions.

I am convinced that your research will succeed in describing and measuring the evolution of museums users and in analysing the role of museums in developing social cohesion.

I wish you a fruitful continuation and a lot of success in your work.



## Welcome Address

Xavier Troussard (Acting Director Directorate D Culture & Media Directorate-  
General Education & Culture European Commission)

Museums play a central role in showcasing the different cultures and traditions forming the impressive diversity of European heritage. They not only delight and educate the public of all ages, but also open windows in the heritage, culture and life of others. As cultural institutions safeguarding and promoting diversity, museums contribute in the shaping of cultural values, ideas and attitudes.

The European Commission, since the adoption of the European Agenda for Culture in 2007, is developing policies to encourage cooperation between the Member States of the European Union in the field of culture. The role of the Union is to support and complement the actions that its Member States undertake in areas such as cultural heritage, intercultural dialogue and the mobility of artists and collections, to name a few. Using the Open Method of Coordination as a framework of cooperation, groups of national experts exchange best practice, learn from each other and make recommendations on key priority areas for culture.

Cooperation in the field of culture at the European Union level produces concrete and useable results with added value: from a toolkit on reducing the cost of lending and borrowing of cultural objects between Member States, to ways public culture and arts institutions may give better access to and broaden their audiences; from the digitisation of cultural heritage to the prevention of and fight against illicit trafficking of cultural goods. This work may not exclusively concern museums, but museums will certainly benefit from it.

Museums around Europe are already building capacities for creativity, innovation, and transnational cooperation. These are powerful drivers for growth. Moreover, the impact of the digital shift and the existence of globalised networks present museums with unprecedented opportunities to seek new and innovative approaches, allowing them to reach wider audiences in Europe and beyond and make their resources accessible globally.

On 26 September 2012 the European Commission adopted a Communication on "Promoting cultural and creative sectors for growth and jobs in the EU". This communication proposes a multi-layered strategy to unlock the full growth potential of the cultural and creative sectors, of which museums are part, so as to maximise their spill-over benefits in other sectors. The Commission has also proposed "Creative Europe", a new framework programme for 2014-2020, to promote and safeguard cultural and linguistic diversity and provide a much-needed boost for Europe's cultural and creative sectors.

Today Europe needs a new direction based on the core values of the European Union. The European National Museums (EuNaMus) project, funded by the European Commission, explores those core values under the prism of identity politics, the uses of the past and European citizenship. As European integration is more than ever necessary, the opportunity may be now

for museums, and more so for national museums, to redefine their missions, goals and strategies. A more inclusive, extrovert and forward-looking vision for European national museums would empower their diverse audiences by catering to their expectations and would also create a sense of belonging to a European cultural space of common ideals and values. This is a great challenge for all that remains at the heart of the European project.

# Entering the Minefields I: National Museums in the European Project





## **Reflections on Policy Relevance and Research in EuNaMus, “European National Museums: Identity politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen”**

Peter Aronsson (Professor in History, Linnaeus University)

### **Abstract**

There is general increase on demand for research to be useful. This is more pronounced in the European funding than in traditional academic research. This paper problematizes and discusses the ways critical research can respond to these demands. The tendency is towards both specific calls driven by policy goals, and more diverse demands to formulate and communicate relevant knowledge to various stakeholders. There is a tension between unfettered critical research and the urgent contemporary quest for instrumental knowledge that needs to be respected, *but also* bridged. The positive dimension of EU:s call for research to be useful is accepting the need to share arguments, to stimulate dialogue, but the goal is not to produce consent but rather to trigger further investigation and disclosure of hitherto unknown or unobserved realms of culture.

## Introduction

Museums rank high on the policy agenda today. Great hopes are being expressed for their ability to create cohesion and community, creativity and tolerance. At the same time they are to serve as market places, presenting regions and metropolises for various audiences: citizens, tourists, entrepreneurs and investors. They are simultaneously supposed to provide a secure sanctuary for historic relics, scientific truths, shared values and a guide to the future.

These contradictory goals and high hopes have a long European trajectory. As early as 16<sup>th</sup> century grandeur of the Uffizi in Florence created an early and powerful urban trademark with the help of art, negotiating raw power and republican tradition through the conspicuous use of art.

The British Museum opened in 1759 and announced its intentions to serve both the Enlightenment and reason, but it became political in its selection of the parliamentary past and the Magna Charta as the most prominent representation of bygone eras. Later, to meet post-colonial claims for retribution, the spoils from the empire were declared treasures for all mankind.

All European nation-states learned lessons from the Napoleonic Wars, not only gleaned contributions to their political constitutions and adopting the use of national mobilization through war and taxation, but also from the transformation of the Louvre from a royal to a national institution with international ambitions. Art, seized and later reclaimed, gained higher value as part of the national heritage, reinforced with archaeology and cultural history, and placed in a context of ethnographic collections from around the world. Europe moulded itself through museums, and nations benchmarked their achievements there.

Today, some of the many tasks and hopes remain, but new challenges have been added to the agenda of museums. They are regarded as places for re-enacting communities and values in contemporary society. While the European Union adds to the transnational dimension as part of a standing legacy, globalization contributes not only new regional tensions and migration, but also a multi-cultural reality to be negotiated and transformed. Economic vitality is ever more dependent upon cultural dimensions of beauty, design, experience and creativity and is entrusted with transforming challenges into advantages.

National museums have a crucial role to play. To better understand the possibilities, knowledge of how they work needs to be extracted from existing monographs that highlight the excellence of individual directors and the unique qualities of each nation. There are many similarities among nations, both in their desires and hopes, but also in their trajectories. However, there is also room for politics, since the making of museums and nations does not exactly follow the same path. Nations with different kinds of constitutions choose different modes of understanding their heritage – with repercussions on their future actions.

The research project *European National Museums: Identity politics, the uses of the past and the European citizen* (EuNaMus, [www.eunamus.eu](http://www.eunamus.eu)) has been designed to explore the societal role of national museums and the power of the heritages they create and present. The project defines and explores national museums as processes of institutionalized negotiations where material collections and displays make claims and are recognized as articulating and representing national values and realities.



This project is one of the few humanistic projects supported by the Seventh Framework Programme run by the European Commission. The research is pursued through multi-disciplinary collaboration among eight leading institutions. It includes a series of sub-projects studying institutional path dependencies, the handling of conflicts, modes of representation, cultural policy and visitors' experiences in national museums. Understanding the cultural force of national museums will provide citizens, professionals and policy makers with reflective tools to better communicate and create an understanding of diversity and community in developing cultural underpinnings for democratic governance.

## **The quest for policy relevance**

Our project defines museums as arenas for negotiating a variety of contradictory logics, including the logic governing the relationship between political demands and the scientific ideals of critique and dis-interested autonomy. In practice they also react more or less consciously to social conflicts, and, increasingly, as a means of reaching economic goals. Museums define themes, create frameworks and unite differences based on territories, gender, class, affluence, taste and knowledge. Hence, if they work out the balance well, they are able to tread the thin line between becoming outright propaganda tools or entertainment parks, on the one hand, and rather uninteresting repositories of old things with only archival value for a distant future, on the other.

The demands made on us by the EU pose a similar challenge; we must articulate the relevance of our research for various stakeholders and situations at the risk of becoming simple tools for a political project or producing results of little value outside a limited academic context.

In fact, I think this challenge is a general one faced by cultural research and is very real. The dominant discourses and research policies marginalize research that seeks to define ideal types that can present themselves as solutions to the challenges facing contemporary society. This is obviously the case with the current work in Horizon 2020, but is equally relevant in a series of European countries. The economic crises induce even more desperate measures aimed at culture and cultural research, which is perceived as a luxury. Simultaneously there are strong calls for *more* cultural context in research as a necessity in effectively addressing issues of war and peace, climate change and sustainability, and innovation and well-being.

The clue to the seemingly contradictory stands in contemporary politics is that cultural research needs both to argue and act better in performing several societal roles. I will now address the question of how work with the Eunamus project has challenged the traditional academic role and moved us a bit outside the comfort zone, but also how great the need is to use a wider view on the impact to both develop and assess progress in this dimension.

## **Calls for policy relevant research**

Within the long term Framework Programme distinct calls are made to meet specific challenges. Only in the most recent programmes have cultural research and the humanities been explicitly addressed, which is, of course, a step forward. I will take the short and specific call that our team answered as a starting-point for some reflections:

### **SSH-2009 - 5.2.2. Interrelation between collective representations and uses of history and cultural evolution in an enlarged Europe**

Research should address how the collective representations and uses of history in Europe shaped and continue to shape the image of Europe for its citizens. Themes to be addressed include the role of different collective memories as they have been shaped by the past and its interpretation, for example by historians, writers and artists, in the perception of Europe by its citizens. Research must develop ideas on how the dialogue between European citizens can be strengthened in the light of the different memories and how a shared view on the past, present and future of Europe can emerge. (Work programme 2009, Cooperation, theme 8, Socio-economic sciences and humanities, (European Commission C(2008)4598 of 28 August 2008) ([ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/wp/cooperation/ssh/h\\_wp\\_200901\\_en.pdf](ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/docs/wp/cooperation/ssh/h_wp_200901_en.pdf), p. 20.)

The first passage frames a growing scholarly interest in collective memory and uses of the past in constant growth inspired by Maurice Halbwachs, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Raphael Samuel and later Jörn Rüsen and Reinhart Koselleck. The need to re-assess and reflect on the role of heritage and museums becomes central. It was not difficult to mobilize researchers to take on this challenge.

The concluding part of this statement needs more negotiation with the academic ethos because it demands a specific type of outcome: “Research must develop ideas on how the dialogue between European citizens can be strengthened in the light of the different memories and how a shared view on the past, present and future of Europe can emerge”.

The nodes needed in the project work to frame these intentions are several:

- The general context contributes to the ambition to build a European research arena with collaboration, excellence and added European value to meet challenges.
- Answering a call within the Framework Programme establishes the mind-set and interaction with colleagues in certain defined directions.
- After a positive evaluation, negotiating the contract means promoting policy relevant issues, planning organization and interaction in more detail with objectives, tasks, milestones and deliverables well-defined for each Work Package with an appropriate budget for each post.
- The on-going interaction with Brussels during the project period includes regular contact with the project officer (for deliverables, Policy Briefs, cross-project participation and conferences).
- A well-defined communication strategy is part of the contract: identifying stakeholders and adopting relevant means of communication.
- Finalising the deliverables includes organizing and holding conferences, creating and updating the home-page, producing newsletters, writing Policy Briefs, organizing public events and developing open access publications and dissemination activities.

The impact and the tools created by the demands for policy relevance thus interact with the academic formulation of the research task in several ways, posing new questions for consideration. In the context of the specific theme of Eunamus these questions can be specified:

1. What are the means by which a research project may strengthen dialogues?
2. What constitutes legitimacy and which routes are open for academic actors to promote a shared view of the history of Europe?
3. Is the establishment of shared views on history consistent with strengthened dialogues? Are they related as means to an end; are they correlated or do they have separate goals?
4. Is it at all acceptable for university research to approve the moulding of political goals out of its research?

Answers to these questions have evolved during the work. They need to be deliberated further in order to professionalize the urgent need for cultural research to maintain its quality, while at the same time meeting legitimate demands for added value by and for society.

To enhance the capacity for dialogue we provided the project with an ambitious communication plan. Identifying different groups of stakeholders was a first step, and pinpointing channels for communicating the next. Multi-disciplinary academic communities need to be addressed and are so by means of conferences and a set of open access publications. Both these are also open to museum professionals as a second set of stakeholders, but they are also connected through communication and involvement with reference groups, organisations such as NEMO and ICOM, and through newsletters. Even policy makers are part of this, but they are directly focused through the specific instrument of Policy Briefs as defined by the EC and constructed with the help of experienced journalistic competence. The most difficult group to reach systematically is “the public”. Press coverage, web and radio broadcasting will to some extent share findings with a very broad national audience, but there are language issues.

Cultural research might be prone to share certain theoretical inspiration broadly. Constructivism, discourse analyses and actor-network-theory are examples of this. But generally research is driven by the need to demonstrate originality and progress in relation to a more narrow disciplinary logic and is steered rather by polemic arguments, by the urge to demonstrate methodological and theoretical proliferation and by the ability to communicate successfully only with academic peers.

The positive dimension of this ethos is accepting the need to share arguments, to stimulate dialogue, but the goal is not to produce consent but rather to trigger further investigation and disclosure of hitherto unknown or unobserved realms of culture. To share this view with cultural institutions would thus mean accepting a plurality of legitimate standpoints and observations, but it would also imply the need to debate the validity of these standpoints while retaining a respect for others based on the knowledge of the complexity of cultural dynamics. Confronting the realm of museums with this would mean opening the communicative tropes of their activities from sites representing final truths about the world to become arenas of enquiry. This is in fact true to the origins of many museums developed around collections at universities and academies. It only means updating and complementing the natural scientific ethos with a humanistic cultural studies approach.

The implications are that a shared view of history is not necessarily the best way to formulate a means to reach the goals of strengthened dialogue. A closed statement on the history of Europe leaves little room for discussion, while a more diverse presentation of several perspectives both

on the darker and the more progressive sides of European experiences might provide more inspiration for contemporary dialogue and future collaborative actions.

It is stimulating to be asked to contribute to policy relevant processes. For cultural research in complex matters like identity politics this means providing better knowledge for various political programmes. We know that political projects demanding simple answers from research will discredit both partners in this collaboration, but I do not think this danger is imminent in the Framework Programme. There is a clear division of responsibility. The extra challenge is to formulate policy-relevant conclusions from the findings. There is a need for a professional approach that is not a natural part of academic training and ethos.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS**

We concluded the first Policy Brief with these general recommendations:

- Recognize that national museums can serve as agents of social change. Carefully managed, they can perform many parallel functions and should not be regarded only as sanctuaries for historical relics.
- Recognize that national museums provide citizens with a connective tissue. This cultural glue is vital for social cohesion. It can also help solidify support for state actions and foster confidence in representative democracy at national and European levels.
- Invest in re-interpretations of existing collections and the development of temporary exhibitions.
- To prevent aggressive nationalism, to stimulate national museums to activate transnational connections in their collections and increase the awareness of European and global values and processes.
- Be aware that national museums may not be automatically sensitive to societal change due to their complex heritage of buildings, collections and professional knowledge.
- Activate citizen interest in museums and stimulate interactions between citizens and museum professionals.
- Balance the need for reflecting political ideology in museum spaces with respect for the institution's professional competence.

The arguments for these are based on massive and complex research but ends in very general observations which might be difficult or impossible to act upon. There is a need for more involvement to appreciate the demand of the context for wise policy action. Hence the setting up of a task force to utilize our experience of these actions in more limited settings might have greater impact.

I was personally involved with an UNESCO project led by Anthony Krause both in giving advice on the setting up of a collaborative exhibition in the Balkan Area in 2011-12, and in educating museum professionals in Belgrade National Museum together with the civic organization Heritage without Borders in how to re-assess the exhibition for the new opening. I would say that both drew on comparative knowledge from our project on how conflict resolution can work in national museums and on the comparative overview of how museums and policy-making may interact. Another successful example of dissemination has been to share Eunamus contacts and knowledge with public service radio. During the years the project has been in

operation millions of Swedish listeners have gained knowledge from partners and museums around Europe. This contributes to the establishment of an understanding of culture and cultural policy as a platform for European action among the wider public.

Researchers in the project have similarly interacted with policy processes in various ways that are more concrete and tangible than the rather abstract formulations we were able to make in framing the general results, at least after the first half of the project. Focusing less on the Policy Briefs and more on the formats for the development of interaction that suit the topic may lead participants and stakeholders to have more profound impact. Documenting and sharing these experiences are essential to the professionalization of the task of policy-relevant research.

## Conclusions

Directed calls from the Framework Programme evoke themes and suggest perspectives, but cannot command positive results. Indeed, most research on construction of European identity ends up on the negative side of the balance sheet, at least in relation to the high ambitions of conjuring a shared European identity (*The Development of a European Identity/European Identities*, [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/development-of-european-identity-identities\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/development-of-european-identity-identities_en.pdf)). The results demonstrate the power of everyday interaction and the need for a long-term perspective on cultural investment to supplement EU strategies, as has been done in nation-states.

The tension between unfettered critical research and the urgent contemporary quest for instrumental knowledge and direction needs to be respected, *but also* bridged. Detailed supervision and communication of “deliverables” enhance the pressure of formulating instrumental conclusions, which are often easy to express on a general level, but are difficult to make succinct enough to achieve a direct impact as policy instruments. More local instruments of influence also need to be acknowledged and appreciated. Providing academics with professional skills to be able to deal with wider communicative and impact plans is an area that needs to be developed along with supporting incitement within the university system and as a part of professional identity.

Cultural research is a small and marginal part of the system that defines the role of research. We need to speak louder, more forcefully and more convincingly to demonstrate and communicate the multi-dimensional values of our work. Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI) on Heritage is trying to achieve this goal (<http://www.jpi-culturalheritage.eu>). Other initiatives to bring national research in touch with the world need to be added and connected. (See initiatives such as <http://heritageresearch.se> that regroups a fragmented field of heritage research.)

Developing tools to refine findings from culture research for the benefit of individuals and organisations throughout Europe is of vital importance and needs to be addressed systematically by first mapping the ways this can be done, assessing the quality of these diverse ways, testing the validity of their research, and then developing a system of incentive and appreciation that makes the academic community willing to work towards these ends as part of realizing their professional ethos.





## **The Role of National Museums in the European Integration**

Chrysoula Paliadelis (Professor of Classical Archaeology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) Member of European Parliament)

Marianthi Kopellou (Archaeologist, M.A Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) Accredited assistant by Member of European Parliament  
Prof. Dr. Chrysoula Paliadelis)

### **Abstract**

National museums are institutionalized spaces where the past is being used through collections and objects in order to display, narrate, and negotiate ideas of values, of belonging, and most of all of identity. Today a big discussion is being held about their capacity to create and reinforce concepts such as social cohesion, unity, mutual understanding and tolerance among the nations and cultures of Europe. Reformulating in a sense this scholarly question, this paper focus on the crucial role that European National Museums may play in the struggle for European integration, in European completion.

In terms of cultural policy, EU policy makers and officials have developed the notion of European integration – the creation of a closer Union among people of Europe – by promoting the communality of Europe's past, by establishing a common European history and cultural heritage, on which a *European identity* will be based on. However, this challenge seems to be facing serious obstacles. Among them, the strength of the belief in a specific national identity and in a specific national heritage, seems to be the most vital. According to the annual Eurobarometer, most of people of Europe consider themselves primarily nationals of the countries of their origin and only secondly Europeans, if not at all. If this is the case, is there any possibility to transform the traditionally ethnic people of Europe into Europeans?

How difficult that it could be, testifies an increasing tendency for creating new national museums in the beginning of the 21th century. It is true that anyone hardly could doubt the demand of the European nations to represent their past, especially when this is done as an in-look process that leads to self-consciousness. However, it is equal important to consider that this kind of tendencies can easily be used as a perfect excuse for the rising of an already existing eurosceptism, especially in the turmoil of the economic crisis, but also for the strengthening of neonationalistic movements, as a result of poverty and unemployment.

In these difficult times for the people of Europe, when the feeling of uncertainty and insecurity can rekindle well-hidden extreme nationalistic feelings, it is crucial that the sense of national identity is represented through a critical historical perspective rather as an essential value that could be used as a vehicle of separatism. Perhaps now, more than ever national histories, national memories and national idiosyncrasies are conceived as small but significant parts of a common European multifaceted tradition, and be accordingly cherished as vital features of a common European future.

## Introduction

This paper addresses the crucial role that European national museums may play in the struggle for European cohesion and integration. It is a topic that actually derives from the central idea of the Eunamus project itself, "the understanding of the conditions for using the past in negotiations that recreate citizenship, as well as the layers of territorial belonging beyond the actual nation-state" (Aronsson 2011): a statement which indicates the necessity to explore in depth the new role that the national museums of Europe need to take in times when the idea of belonging to a territory expanding "beyond the nation-state", coincides with the idea of belonging to a union of nation-states which is still under construction.

Defining European national museums as institutionalized spaces where the past of a certain state is being reflected through collections and objects which are selected in order to display, to narrate, to create, to interpret and to negotiate ideas of values, of belonging, and most of all of identity, connects Eunamus to an ongoing discussion on national museum's capacity to create and reinforce concepts such as social cohesion, unity, mutual understanding and tolerance among nations and cultures of Europe. It is in fact a part of a broader discussion on whether we can reach higher levels of integration, meaning "creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe" either by emphasizing their cultural diversities and differences or by fostering the idea of a common cultural base, a common European civilization.

Towards this social dilemma, that Europe in general is facing today, the role of its national museums, as the main displayers and promoters of the diversity of European heritage, seems to become much more difficult or even controversial to the role they used to play when they first appeared in Europe. Although generalizations about the process of the construction of national museums cannot be made, the concept underlying their creation was never irrelevant to the need for the formation of a national feeling, based on common origin and propagating common achievements. Especially in periods when historical procedures, such as the ethno-genesis, the search for cultural roots, via history and archaeology, and the shaping of historical scenarios, would legitimate the political formation of a newly born-nation-state or state-to-be. After all, the interpretation of the past for the creation of a nation is a point of view that has been largely developed by most of the theorists of nationalism (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1990).

On exactly the same idea, that of the "imagined community", to quote Benedict Anderson (1983), is the creation of a feeling of belonging to the post-national community of EU based on. Since the introduction of the so-called Culture Article in the Maastricht Treaty, which set out to "bring Europe's common cultural heritage to the fore" (CEC 1992), EU policy makers and officials, with the support of EU-friendly scholarship on European culture and heritage, have tried to promote the communality of Europe's past, or in other words to establish a European identity. However, this attempt has faced, and is still facing so many obstacles, that their transcendence seems really difficult to achieve.

In the present paper we will continue to discuss only one of the obstacles, which may be proved to be the most significant and the most relevant to the issue that we are dealing with, the contemporary role of national museums in European integration. We will deal with the strength of the belief in a specific national identity, in a specific national heritage. It is a concept that not only has been constantly expressed by the historical scholarship, but it is also a common



conclusion that someone can easily get to empirically, just by reading the results of today's Eurobarometer that come up every year. According to it, it is true that most Europeans consider themselves primarily as nationals of the country of their origin and only secondly as Europeans, if not at all. To these current results, conclusions as those of Antony Smith (1992), and before him of Ernest Gellner (1983), seem to have found an absolute correspondence:

Of course one can forge supranational institutions and create political and economic unions, as Bismarck did for the German states. But this frequently cited parallel contains an obvious flaw. Languages and historical memories, as well as myths of ethnic descent, united the population of the German states; the same factors divided the people of Europe (Smith 1992).

A man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears. All this seems obvious, though, alas, it is not true. But that it should have come to seem so very obvious is indeed an aspect, perhaps the very core, of the problem of nationalism. Having a nation is not an inherent attribute of humanity but it has now come to appear as such (Gellner 1983).

Despite the differences between the two scholars, they present quite clearly the challenge that EU is facing today. Is it possible to transform the traditionally ethnic people of Europe into Europeans? And if this is possible, how can someone achieve it?

In terms of contemporary musealization processes, this challenging question seems to be facing multiple and contradictory answers. On one hand, the European Union and its officials are working on a significant unique museum project, the House of the European History, an initiative which according to its initiator and former President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering “will bring Europe’s history alive for everyone, but especially young people, and will thereby help to promote an awareness of European Identity” (EP Bureau 2008). On the other hand, the beginning of the 21st century demonstrates an increasing tendency of the creation of new national museums. This last tendency testifies to a reluctant reaction of the Member States towards the creation of an overarching European identity.

Indeed, the creation of national – mostly history – museums as an initiative for the construction of cultural unity in relation to the nation continues to be a part of the political agendas for a lot of European states. In countries like France, Poland, Netherlands plans have been recently developed for the creation of new national history museums. It was in 2009 for instance, the former President of France Nicolas Sarkozy expressed his proposal to create a national history museum as a tool of reinforcing national identity (Sarkozy 2009). Three years earlier, the German History Museum (Deutsches Historisches Museum) in Berlin had opened its doors to the public in order to present, through its permanent collection, “from where the Germans have come, who they are in the European context”(DHM 2012).

Taking into consideration these tendencies, it is true that one could hardly doubt the demand of the European nations to represent their past and their special features either as an in-look process that leads to self-consciousness or even as a compensation for post-national and post-modern insecurities (Krankenhagen 2011). However, it is really important to consider the possibility that, especially nowadays, this kind of tendencies may be dangerously misconceived by the European people themselves. They may be a perfect excuse not only for the rising of an already existed euro-skepticism among the people of Europe, especially in the turmoil of the economic crisis, but also for the strengthening of neo-nationalistic movements, as a result of

poverty and unemployment, especially among the young generations, and the inability of their leaders to decisively overcome their state-focused, short-termed interests, and work for a peaceful and prosperous European United States

In these times, when confidence has been replaced by uncertainty, it is constantly fomented by territorial conflicts and economic threat, extreme nationalistic feelings have not been forgotten, but are easily rekindled. Taking into serious account their presence, and if national museums are to exist, then museum professionals, history researchers and cultural policy makers should reconsider and re-examine the ways in which *state-historical* – a more accurate term perhaps to refer to national – museums should be conceived and realized. It is crucial that the sense of national identity is represented through a critical historical perspective rather than an essential value that could be used as a vehicle of separatism. Perhaps now, more than ever national histories, national memories and national idiosyncrasies are conceived as small but significant parts of a common European multifaceted tradition, and accordingly may be cherished as vital features of a common European future.

## Bibliography

- Anderson B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.
- Aronsson P and Elgenius G (eds) (2011) Foreword: A European Project. Building National Museums in Europe 1750-2010. EuNaMus I, Bologna 28-30 April 2011: conference proceedings, Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press.
- CEC (1992) Treaty on European Union Signed at Maastricht on 7 February, Luxembourg: OPEC.
- Deutsches Historisches Museum (2012) 'Die Ständige Ausstellung des DHM im Zeughaus - Drei Millionen Besucher in der Ständigen Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums', Deutsches Historisches Museum. Online, available HTTP: [http://www.dhm.de/ausstellungen/staendige-ausstellung/drei\\_millionen.html](http://www.dhm.de/ausstellungen/staendige-ausstellung/drei_millionen.html) (accessed 17 October 2012).
- European Parliament (2008) 'EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"', European Parliament. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=en&type=IM-PRESS&reference=20081216IPR44855> (accessed 20 September 2012)
- Gellner E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Hobsbawm E. (1990) *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Krankenhagen S. (2011) 'Exhibiting Europe: The Development of European Narratives in Museums, Collections, and Exhibitions' *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 3:269-78
- Sarkozy N. (2009) 'Discours de M. le Président de la République : Vœux aux acteurs de la Culture', Nîmes. Online, available at HTTP : [http://www.pointsactu.org/article.php3?id\\_article=1295](http://www.pointsactu.org/article.php3?id_article=1295) (accessed 17 October 2012).



## **National Museums – Difficulties and Possibilities: A Museological Approach**

Martin R. Schärer (Dr. President of the Ethics Committee of ICOM)

### **Abstract**

It is very difficult to create and to run a national history museum. Why? Because stakeholders from outside, much more than for other types of museums, intervene and try to make their mark on the content of the museum. We have to consider also the fact that the past is lost forever. Nobody knows what really happened.

What can we offer then in a history museum? An exhibition based on historical research as a kind of temporary interpretation and provisional narrative. We have to evaluate and to weigh research results according to the best of our knowledge and to ethical standard. Every generation has to do it anew. One of the biggest pitfalls of narratives in historical exhibitions is a linear, one-dimensional presentation *ex post*.

Many of these statements are evident, but do our visitors really know it, too? They interpret our exhibitions simply as THE truth. They are less critical than with respect to other media (TV for instance). Why? Museums show original objects, hence the story they tell must be true, too. Several possibilities to convey the relativity of the narratives in our museums are presented.

## A museological approach

It is very difficult to create and to run a national history museum. This is an important lesson I learnt from the findings of the EuNaMus project. Why is it so difficult? Because stakeholders from outside, much more than for other types of museums, intervene and try to make their mark on the content of the museum. According to the political system of a country such an influence could be very heavy but I think it's never totally absent.

State organs define the role of a national museum, directly or indirectly. For instance: The museum has to celebrate the nation or has to convey security and identity to the citizens, even pride. In general a national museum must allow an easy acceptance of the past and a positive view of the glorious forefathers. Dark sides of the nation's history are concealed since they may accuse the behaviour of past politicians and rulers. Very often there is few or even no space at all for other views, but again this varies according to the independence of culture and the freedom of opinion.

Another difficulty lies in the fact that the past is lost forever. Nobody knows what really happened. Fortunately, of course, we profit from a very developed historical science, but – as critical it may be – we can only approach a possible truth and we are never sure to know THE truth. Our findings are never provable in all details; they can only be falsified. Hence “history” is a mental construction of the present and that's why objectivity is never possible. Any historical narrative is a kind of backwards prophecy *ex nunc*.

What can we offer then in a history museum? An exhibition based on historical research as a kind of temporary interpretation and provisional narrative. We have to evaluate and to weigh research results according to the best of our knowledge and to ethical standard. Every generation has to do it anew.

I said that every historical exhibition visualises a present day idea of the past. Let's just look at an example: An exhibition doesn't show how Charlemagne created the Franconian Empire. But: How the exhibition curator imagines that crucial period of European history some 1'200 years ago. In each historical exhibition we always have to define what image of the past has to be conveyed. It is an illusion to believe that there is an exhibition without message – declared or underpinned.

At a first glance the global message of a national history museum seems to be clear: Show the history of the nation. If we look closer at the rationale of a national museum we discover that is extremely difficult to define it. What should we show? How should we weight the different elements and epochs? Should we show the national history in a wider geographical context to overcome nationalism?

We certainly all agree with the following statements: No heroic and glorious narrative. No narrative making things seem better! Present also dark sides, conflicts and the like. But we all know: It is very difficult to open a museum also for other views than the generally accepted and more or less official ones.

One of the biggest pitfalls of narratives in historical exhibitions is a linear, one-dimensional presentation *ex post*, as if our forefathers hundreds of years ago intended to create the actual State. It happened as it happened – and not as it should have happened according to our imagined finality. In this context I can mention the Swiss example. On August 1<sup>st</sup> the nation celebrates the so called foundation of the Swiss Confederation in 1291. It is said that from there a

direct line leads to modern Switzerland. Hence in 1991 we celebrated our 700<sup>th</sup> birthday with pomp. Critical historians call such stories into question. What we could have celebrated in 1991 is 100 years of celebration of 1291... It seems that nations need such festive events to confirm national identity.

Such considerations are very crucial for the planned House of European History. It should avoid showing the 20<sup>th</sup> century “unification” of Europe plus some “forerunners” (that very dangerous term!), for instance Charlemagne! It would be very naive and dangerous to construct a direct line from the Roman Empire through the Carolingian Empire directly to European Union! Certainly the project leaders are aware of the enormous opportunity on one side and responsibilities on the other side they have!

I think that that the bulk of my reflections concerning the relativity of historical narratives seems evident! We all know this – or should at least know it!

But do our visitors really know it, too? They interpret our exhibitions simply as THE truth. They are less critical than with respect to other media (TV for instance). Why? Museums show original objects, hence the story they tell must be true, too. I think we have a big responsibility when we create historical exhibitions. Do we really assume it and understand it also as a real chance?

We have to take appropriate steps and measures to counterbalance such simplistic ideas. Without falling into a paralyzing and destructive relativism, we should communicate such facts to our visitors. This is also an ethic obligation.

As museologist I see many possibilities to convey the relativity of the narratives in our museums. It is crucial to be very lucid in this matter. Many of these aspects can be more easily dealt with in temporary exhibitions.

- Occasionally, in relation with an object or document of uncertain origin and context we can deliver different even contradictory interpretations.
- Parallel exhibitions on the same topic can “destabilize” visitors since the present different views and interpretations in. In 1991 I created an exhibition containing seven pavilions each showing an exhibition on 700 years of food (it was in a Food Museum). Each of these small exhibitions interpreted the objects differently and claimed to tell THE truth.
- Another possibility is to include historiographical elements by showing the view of former generations.
- I plead for author exhibitions. Nearly all historical exhibitions are created by “the museum” as an institution, declaring history ex cathedra in an anonymous and authoritative way (another reason for the museums’ credibility). I suggest mentioning the name of the responsible curator from the very beginning of the exhibition. Why do we assume our authorship and hence our responsibility only in books and rarely in exhibitions?
- Very close to the author is the global message of the exhibition. Again, I think we should declare it frankly. This is especially important for controversial themes like wars, social conflicts and the like.

A further possibility is the inclusion of the museum’s own history. The narrative could include also a critical view of the museum’s own past and of the way national history was presented in former permanent exhibitions explaining why this museum at a specific time in a political and

cultural context interpreted the past differently. And also why some contemporary museums are given a specific name like “House of History” and no more “History Museum”.

In applying one or the other possibility we certainly assume more credibility. Don’t think that such approaches are purely intellectual exercises that don’t attract visitors. I am convinced that every topic can be brought to an exhibition – if it is shown in an attractive manner. Modern expography offers so many exciting possibilities!

I am very pleased to collaborate on the fascinating project EuNaMus as a member of the Scientific Advisory Board. The research work on the creation and the history of national museums provides a wealth of insights into nation building processes. It allows a critical revision of existing historical museums and exhibitions. How is the past used and misused? What are the hidden or the purely political messages? Or even worse: Is there intentional incorrect information to brighten up the past? How are dark periods, conflicts etc. shown? Such critical remarks don’t exclude an appreciation of many positive aspects. It’s also legitimate to be proud of specific national achievements!

EuNaMus provides also the base for the discussions concerning the creation of new national museums, especially also the House of European History. Our project allows a well thought-out approach and helps avoiding pitfalls. It would be a pleasure for us to help and to collaborate.

I’d like to close with a dream of mine: Create a comparative exhibition (a kind of meta-exhibition) on narratives of exhibitions in different European national history museums. Such an exhibition – attractively designed for a general public – could be a wonderful start for the House of European History, couldn’t it?

# Entering the Minefields II: The Creation of New History Museums in Europe







## **The House of European History**

Taja Vovk van Gaal (Director of the Academic Project Team)

Christine Dupont (Historian to the Academic Project Team)\*

### **Abstract**

At the end of 2015, the House of European History (HEH) will open its doors in Brussels. The paper describes the genesis and the development of this museum initiative launched and supported by the European Parliament. It discusses the challenges the project has to meet. How to combine sometimes diverging political, historical and museological agendas? How to face legitimate questions about the budget, the contents, the concerns about political intervention? How to involve the visitor? How to deal with complicated issues in 24 languages? How to develop a balanced and critical narrative about the history of Europe? These are the challenges the HEH has to face in order to become a place of meeting, discussion and debate around the complex but fascinating history of Europe.

\* The HEH was presented at the conference by Taja Vovk van Gaal. Her speech has been reviewed by Christine Dupont but the present text mainly reflects the rich team work accomplished since two years by the Academic Project Team helped by the Academic Committee.

## **Introduction**

The project of the European Parliament to establish a House of European History (HEH) in Brussels is now often referred to in the debates, discussions and academic writing about history museums or the current thinking about memory around Europe (Kaiser et al. 2012; Vovk-van Gaal & Itzel 2012). Among all this research, EuNaMus is probably one of the most interesting and most deeply developed initiatives to focus on the museum as an important actor in the relationship between public authorities and the citizens in Europe. The reflections and conclusions of EuNaMus apply to national museums but could perfectly been taken as starting point for a transnational project such as the HEH. How to ensure the autonomy of the museum from political intervention? How to develop transparency towards the citizens in the context of broader audiences? How to overcome conflicts and tensions in order to become a place of debate founded on mutual understanding? How to establish 'bridge-building narratives' and act as 'forums for contested issues'? These questions (EuNaMus 2012) are part of the daily reflection of those who want to develop a history museum project in today's context of crisis.

It was therefore quite natural for the HEH team to co-organize the part of the EuNaMus conference of January 2012 dealing with the creation of new history museums in Europe. The HEH project was also one of the examples selected for the discussion. The present text is an attempt to answer the questions of the organisers. It is constructed in two parts. Firstly there is a description of the origins, the development and the current state of play in establishing a House of European History in Brussels. The second part will be dedicated to some of the main challenges of the project, according to the outlines that were proposed for the panel debate 'Entering the minefields'.

## **Brief history and presentation of the project**

### **Brief history**

The HEH project is not the first attempt to create a museum dedicated to the history of Europe. Already at the end of the 1970s, the European Commission had expressed a wish to install 'European rooms' in museums (Charl  ty 2004). Moreover and as the project is based in Brussels, the HEH has been often confused with another venture, that of the Museum of Europe or *Mus  e de l'Europe*, a private initiative launched in 1997, which was never achieved in terms of a permanent exhibition although it regularly organises exhibitions on European history which are broadly commented upon by specialists in social, political or museological studies (Maz   2009; Exhibiting Europe). The HEH is one of the latest attempts in this series of initiatives.

The birth date of the HEH can be traced back to the inaugural speech of Hans-Gert P  ttering as President of the European Parliament, in February 2007. He presented then his intention of creating "a locus for history and for the future where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow, (...) a "House of European History"" (House of European History 2012).

From then, the process slowly developed, as an internal project of the European Parliament, led by its Bureau<sup>1</sup>. In December 2007, the Bureau constituted a Committee of Experts (9 historians and museum experts from different European countries), to create a concept for the future HEH. In September 2008, these experts presented a document called "a Conceptual Basis for a House of European History" which laid the foundations for the future work (Committee of

Experts 2008). In November 2008, the *Conceptual Basis* document received the approval of the Bureau, who at the same time proposed a governing structure for the HEH (Board of Trustees, Academic Committee, Bureau liaison committee (contact group) and a Building Committee).

The year 2009 was a time during which the Parliament approved a number of operational procedures relating to the project. At the same time, an international architectural competition was launched, to transform the chosen site (the former dental hospital George Eastman in Brussels) into a museum.

From January 2011 onwards, an Academic Project Team was recruited. This team, brought together from across Europe, then progressively developed the project and worked on different fields such as a visitors' policy, exhibition and collecting policies, a communication plan, and on the historical contents and narrative for the permanent exhibition.

In March 2011, the French architecture bureau Chaix & Morel and their international partners were designated as the winners of the competition for the transformation of the building (House of European History 2012). The building works started at the end of 2012. The opening of the HEH is foreseen for the last quarter of 2015.

### **Actors, figures and challenges**

The first definition of the project was set out by the Committee of Experts in 2008. The aim was to develop a "modern exhibition, documentation and information centre" on European history. The permanent exhibition was seen as the central part of the activities but was to be developed alongside a programme of temporary exhibitions, on the spot and travelling, as well as events, publications and a broad online offer (Committee of Experts 2008). This reflects the traditional missions of a modern museum which uses a broad range of tools to interact with its audience.

The stakes are high. In 1997 already, the well-known museologist Kenneth Hudson declared: "A single museum to include and represent European civilisation is to be seen. It would need to be shaped by a genius, not by a committee. Large size would be the enemy. Any attempt to produce an encyclopaedia would be disastrous (...)" (quoted by Vovk-van Gaal & Itzel 2012). Even if European history is more limited than European civilisation, one can only agree with Kenneth Hudson on the enormity of the task of developing a museum about such a complex and huge topic as the history of the continent. The complexity may be more problematic than the broad scope of the history itself, because the visitor is central to the project. This visitor, as very often in new museum projects, is very broadly targeted in terms of geographical, generational and socio-cultural provenance. Furthermore we have to assume that the average visitor has no comprehensive knowledge of the topics that will be presented. She/he also has a limited amount of visiting-time available in which to grasp the main ideas and messages of the exhibitions. The choice has been made from the very beginning of the project to develop all exhibitions and programmes in the 24 official languages of the European Union (including Croatian). With this in mind, the question of how to present a complex and broad topic in an easily understandable way takes on a new level of complexity. That is one of the main challenges of the project which, in consequence, needs to be based on the broadest possible range of modern museological tools and methods, using for instance a layered presentation of contents which would allow visits on different levels and at different rhythms.

Another challenge is to start from scratch without a collection. That means that a narrative should be built up first and secondly, appropriate assets from across Europe should be found. Here questions of time as well as the availability of information on museum objects on the internet (especially those which have been kept in storage depots) are also challenging factors.

The difficulty of the task did not escape Kenneth Hudson when he referred to a 'genius' instead of a committee, in order to be equal to the task. This genius does not exist and the European Parliament could only ensure a certain level of interdisciplinarity and cultural diversity in establishing interacting groups of people to develop the project. The Academic Committee (advisory board on the contents) brings together at the same time historians working in Academia and museum professionals. Today (at the end of 2012), the Academic Project Team (executive team developing the contents and programmes of the HEH) is made of 22 persons including 15 different European nationalities widely spread from North to South and from East to West, speaking about 20 different languages and coming from very diverse disciplines from history, archaeology, art history, museology, sociology, etc. and developing skills in all the professional fields needed in museums, such as curatorship, education, collection management, communication, administration, finances, legislation, etc.

This variety of cultures, viewpoints and perspectives does not always make the task easier but certainly richer. It diverts the project from the pitfalls of a too Western (or too Northern or other) view on history. It forces the team to search for less easy solutions, to develop creative responses to challenges and is also an advantage in addressing a wide spectrum of visitors. With the best will to develop the HEH with all the requested academic accuracy and the highest standards of the museum profession, the final result will only reflect the choices made by a team, with the help of several advisory bodies, and the particular times and circumstances of its development. The museum is always a 'negotiated reality' (Cannizzo 1991) and the visitor should be aware of the relativity of the choices. Confrontation with different interpretations of history is also one of the tools that will be used to convey this multifaceted view of European history.

The third challenge is more visible. Launched in 2007 'in tempore non suspecto' the HEH is developing today in the context of an economic crisis that affects Europe in a particular way, with a fall of confidence in the Euro and in the European project in general. The cost of the project is not negligible in these times of overall cuts in cultural projects. It has also been strongly disputed within the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets. It is the responsibility of the political initiators to justify these costs towards the citizens and tax payers who raise legitimate questions about the relevance of the projects. That is what Hans Gert Pöttering did during the press conference held in Brussels on the 25th January 2012 (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2012).

But it is also the conviction of the Academic Project Team that the museum can be a place of debate and understanding about the current situation, including the crisis itself, from the perspective of its historical roots. The widespread use of the past in all political and media discourse about the present situation, means that such places of reflection become interesting tools to analyse our current world, our current Europe, in the light of history.

The HEH will cost money. 4 000 m<sup>2</sup> of permanent exhibition, 800 m<sup>2</sup> of temporary exhibitions, educational programmes, events, publications, online projects, etc., all this can not be developed without a minimal financial investment. Nevertheless, compared with some similar

projects, the costs of the HEH are quite moderate. For the extension and the renovation of the building the foreseen budget amounts to 31 millions €. The permanent exhibition's costs have been agreed at 2 200 € per m<sup>2</sup> which is rather average for current museum standards. The launch costs for the exhibitions taken together are estimated at 21,4 millions €, including a high budget for multilingualism. Further 3,75 millions € are foreseen for the collection (for the acquisition of objects but even more for insurance cover, travel, restoration and costs of short and long-term loans). These 56,15 millions € are the sum necessary to launch the project. This building and preparatory phase is financed by the European Parliament alone, but after the opening, it is expected that the running costs will be supported by other institutions and sponsors as well.

Spending public money in times of crisis is never easily accepted. The debate about the aptness and timing of such a financial outlay is democratically legitimate. Inside the European Parliament, the debate on the project actually began in the Budgets Committee when the costs of the HEH were on the discussion table. This is only natural. However, the debate goes well beyond the financial issue.

## **Entering the minefields?**

### **A political initiative**

As with many museums – and furthermore as with all of the more or less recent (national) history museum projects – the HEH is a political initiative. The political 'colour' of the initiators has been discussed elsewhere (Kaiser et al. 2012) but the fact that the idea was launched inside the European Parliament gives a certain plurality to it. In fact the HEH is supported by the main political groups of the Parliament. The largest of these groups are represented at the head of the HEH in the person of Hans Gert Pöttering (European People's Party) and Miguel Angel Martinez Martinez (Socialists and Democrats), respectively presidents of the Board of Trustees and of the Bureau Contact Group, both acting as political 'godfathers' to the project.

In connection with this first observation, it is even more important to stress that the contents of the project are developing independently from the political authorities. This independence has been underlined from the beginning of the venture (Committee of Experts 2008). It was emphasised again by the new president of the European Parliament (Martin Schulz, Socialists and Democrats) when he met the Academic Committee on the 24th September 2012. Beyond these statements of principle it can be said that the autonomy of the Academic Project Team in its daily work is effective. Historians and museologists have a different logic to that of politicians. This is not the place here to discuss the controversial meeting-point between history and politics. But, as Peter Aronsson has pointed out in his concluding speech at the Brussels conference, if historians step back from the public debate about the past, politicians will occupy the terrain. The solution lies not so much in a complete (and utopian) autonomy of both fields but rather in mutual respect.

The necessary debate surrounding such a project begins inside the project itself. The constant discussion among the members of the Academic Project Team provides a first layer of fruitful exchanges on the contents of the HEH, enriched by the different backgrounds and experiences but sometimes also by conflicting ideas. The debate is further progressed in the Academic Committee meetings, which offer a useful ground for further deepening of the contents. The

outcome of such discussion about the permanent exhibition is not a mere compromise - which could only lead to an impoverished narrative. On the contrary it reflects the wish to express different interpretations of historical processes.

The question of public debate with the citizens is perhaps the most important issue. There is no ideal recipe for how to deal with public concerns when such a large-scale project is launched. Insofar as the appropriateness and timing of this initiative is concerned, recent failures (Dutch National History Museum, Maison de l'Histoire de France) invite caution. In each of these latter cases the initiative was abandoned after endless public debates about the political nature of the project and the legitimacy of spending public funds for that purpose (as reflected elsewhere in this publication). But in other instances, it was shown that the discussions ceased as soon as the museum was opened - as in the case of German institutions that experienced then a huge public success (see the article of R. Beier-de Haan in this publication).

But there is another debate to be had, and that is about the contents of the museum. This one is as legitimate as the first but much more complex. How and with whom could a discussion be launched about what should be presented in a museum of European history? How to avoid endless and contradictory discussions? It is impossible to please everybody. A politically correct vision of European history would not only be difficult to develop but it would be even more inclined to create a depleted narrative - and a very boring museum. Some issues can be added here to the debate.

### **Which European history?**

A large part of the debates surrounding new museums of national history arose because of the presumed or asserted purpose of instrumentalising these institutions in order to promote national identity. The main criticisms against the Maison de l'Histoire de France were related to the controversy around the 'identité nationale' (Babelon et al. 2011). The idea of supporting something such as a European identity is not totally absent in the political justifications expressed at the launch of the HEH<sup>2</sup>. Such claims are not illogical in the framework of the European Union and it is interesting to note that, over time, the discourse of the Belgian private initiative of the Musée de l'Europe imperceptibly slipped from an explicit claim to create a European identity towards less engaged justifications (Mazé 2009).

The notion of identity is one of the most debated in the field of cultural studies. In association with the activities of museums, it has given rise to a vast ensemble of literature and reflections (Korff & Roth 1990). Confronting this issue was to a certain extent unavoidable at the beginning of the process to develop the fundamentals of the HEH. Starting from the observation that there is no commonly agreed definition of what a European identity could be, the reflections of the Academic Project Team arrived at the conclusion that the notion of identity is too reductionist and too static to be used as a basis for the HEH. If the HEH were to propose its own definition of a European identity, in a top-down movement towards the museum's visitors, this could only block any discussion instead of creating debate - which has to be central in a museum.

That is the reason for the choice of the more fluid notion of collective memory as a tool to support the narrative of the permanent exhibition and the various programmes. Memory is at the same time what divides and what unites Europe. This notion has a strong critical potential, which can be used to promote a dynamic dialogue with the visitors. The choice of focusing on the 20th

century is of course the perfect terrain for this kind of debate, even if memory-conflicts about this century are among the hottest topics in history as well as in politics. Building the HEH as a reservoir of European memory offers the possibility to reflect on different perceptions of the past and different interpretations of history (Mork 2012). The Academic Project Team is aware of the difficulty of this mission. But the HEH is neither the first nor the latest museum meant as a 'forum for contested issues'.

The dual objectives of developing a coherent and layered narrative understandable by the visitor on one hand, and the promotion of a multi-perspective view on history on the other could appear contradictory. It should be said, however, that this dichotomy is at the basis of many museums and also creates an opportunity to avoid the dangers of being static, so as to develop instead a moving and evolving approach to the history of Europe.

Europe, in the understanding of the HEH, is not restricted to the European Union. The whole continent is taken into consideration with its changing geographical borders and evolving definition through time. In the concept of the HEH, such evolutions are more important than the fixed realities.

The choice of a European perspective is of course restrictive. As it appeared in the first internal discussions on the contents of the House, it would have been interesting to see Europe from other (non European) perspectives, which is always possible and will certainly be explored in temporary exhibitions. But inside a political project founded and funded by the European Parliament, and firstly "aimed at Europeans" (Committee of Experts 2008), it made little sense to digress from this restriction. This choice means a focus on historical processes and events which have originated in Europe, which expanded across Europe, and which are relevant up to nowadays. These criteria allow the HEH to take into account large periods of history without losing a more analytical focus.

This European perspective is reinforced by the choice taken to underline with greater emphasis the European Integration process. This can be seen here as an example which underlines the way of developing the content work.

According to the first outline, confirmed by the further developments of the project, the permanent exhibition focuses on the European history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a particular attention to the process of European Integration from 1945.

In itself, this does not determine the way of developing this story within a museum narrative. Is the European Integration process the result of a longer history? It was certainly the idea of the Musée de l'Europe when they launched their project in 1997, stating that "the Union is the culmination of a millenary process" (quoted by Cadot 2010). Reading the *Conceptual Basis* of the HEH, a teleological vision is not so clearly expressed, even if expressions like "the commonality of roots" (Committee of Experts 2008) could allow it to be thought that the Union had roots in the past.

The Academic Project Team tries to reject any teleological view. At the same time, how to avoid the danger of a narrative presenting the European Integration as a success story? Presenting the European process as an achievement that begins when the chaos of WWII ends is a classical approach (Kaiser et al. 2012). History is often seen, especially in its political use, as a one-directional success process, as stressed for instance by one of the 'godfathers' of the HEH: "the HEH should reveal (...) the process that (...) has transformed a continent that was for

centuries characterized by war, authoritarianism and intolerance, so that it has become a universal reference for integration, democracy, freedom, respect for human rights, social progress, prosperity and peace" (Martinez 2011). These words are almost the same as those expressed by the Nobel Committee recently, in awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union (Press Release Nobel 2012). This 'peace narrative' can only be strengthened by the recent decision to donate the medal and the certificate of the Nobel Peace Prize to the HEH as the first items of its permanent collection (Press Release E.U. 2012). This will of course be part of what will be on display for the visitor but, precisely in order to avoid a one-directional perspective, it will be presented in the broader context of the debate and the challenging and opposing voices that arose in relation to the choice of awarding the Prize to the European Union. Travelling to Oslo with the official delegation in December 2012, two colleagues of the Academic Project Team were able also to collect material about the counter-demonstrations as well as eurosceptic items. This is an example of how the European project can be situated in the light of a debate - instead of being presented as an untouchable positive achievement.

It is not easy however to find a way, torn between political aspirations and professional will, to engage the visitor in a debate on the achievements but also on the failures of the European process. The orientation points chosen by the Academic Project Team do not tell a success story but rather, try to make understandable the difficulties of a continent in surviving the loss of its hegemony. The European Integration process is a child of the Cold War, it is not a smooth easy path to success but rather a succession of steps forward and backwards. It has produced as many losers as winners, it has completely transformed European capital cities such as Brussels for the better and for the worse. And the list of examples could go on.

This contrasting look at history is a tool for the other parts of the permanent exhibition as well and will remain the method used throughout all the programmes of the HEH.

### **Between the house and the museum**

The historical content of the HEH is, furthermore, dictated by its form. History is here communicated through a museum and this has important implications.

The term 'house' used instead of 'museum' has often been discussed. Some have stressed that the name 'Maison' was chosen to express the intention that the 'Maison de l'Histoire de France' was to be a place of collective history rather than official history (see the text of E. François in this publication). In the case of the HEH the reference point was the House of German History (Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) in Bonn (Kaiser et al. 2012). In this case the name 'house' was preferred to the term museum in order to avoid any misunderstandings about an institution supported by federal institutions that have no authority on museums in the German organisation of cultural policy.

Beyond the issue of the model, it is clear that political initiators had developed a fear of the term 'museum'. This derived mainly from a lack of awareness of what a modern museum is. The definition of the museum is still a matter of numerous debates among specialists (Davis et al. 2010). Without adding a new definition here, it is timely to stress two aspects of what makes the specificity of the museum medium.

The exhibition is one of the main tools of communication for the HEH. The exhibition narrative is central to this process of communicating history. But a historical narrative is of



course not specific to a museum. What makes the originality of the museum is that this narrative is conveyed through objects and atmospheres with which the visitor is deeply involved.

The first aspect is the collection. In Kenneth Hudson's above-quoted speech "a Museum of Europe (...) must be centred on objects, not on photographs and texts". A museum has to use all possible mediators to convey messages, ideas and feelings about the past. For the HEH objects are taken to mean real three-dimensional objects as well as documents, and archival materials as tangible heritage, to be completed by records of intangible heritage. The collection management policy foresees collecting in two phases: until the opening of the House, end 2015, and on the long-term after the opening. Collections will be on loan basically for the permanent exhibition. The first purchase offers are currently being considered, thus starting the specific documentation process of the history of European unification. As already mentioned, a special collecting project was undertaken in relation the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2012.

Nevertheless, the museum experience can not be restricted to a narrative supported by a collection. The experience is, in the first instance, an experience for the visitor. In this respect the main statement of purpose of the HEH is certainly to make the visitor central in the project.

If this visitor's centrality is obvious in the process of developing a museum, to achieve this wish through daily work is not necessarily an easy task. Firstly, because of the huge diversity of potential visitors<sup>3</sup> with a wide range of expectations. The first surveys conducted with focus groups have shown that visitor wishes could indeed be quite diverse according to the geographical provenance of the visitors or to their generation, to mention just two variables (House of European History, Aggregate report 2012). How to connect visitors with European history? The personal (or family, school, etc.) relationship with the past varies largely according to these differences. The choice of focusing on the 20th century means that for many events and processes, "the circle of active memory is about to be closed", as Jorge Semprun pointed out in 2005<sup>4</sup>. But for others the memory is still active with different levels of sensitivity, according to the generations to which they belong. The necessary distance taken by historians in the academic field has to be understood differently in a museum environment. In the modern way to consider a museum, the visitor is not the passive recipient of a message, she/he interacts with the contents.

There are different ways of fostering the necessary dialogue with the visitor. Practical tools can be used in the exhibitions to engage this participation, such as connecting concepts. In the HEH recurring motives create relationships between different parts of the narrative. One example is the idea of centre and periphery. This enduring topic in European history remains central, even today, to the debate about the development of the European Union. Over time, different areas of Europe have occupied the role of the centre or of the periphery, spatially and psychologically. It could be said that Europe has developed mainly through these processes of shifting borders, centres and powers. For every European individual, the sense of belonging or of marginalisation is important, for instance in relation to the development of the European Union. This idea can act as an interesting conceptual tool to stimulate reflection by the visitor about a sense of belonging or, on the contrary, of exclusion.

Another tool, widely used in museums dealing with contemporary issues, is the participation of the visitor in the collecting process of stories, memories and even objects (some examples in Svanberg 2010). Beyond practical difficulties in developing this kind of action on some well

framed topics (for instance the fall of the Iron Curtain), at the European level this can be an action with high potential and fill this 'reservoir of collective memory' that the HEH is expected to become.

Once again it is important to make very clear to the visitor that the contents of the museum are only the product of the choices made by a team at a certain moment. The interaction with the visitor can and has to make the contents evolutionary. At the same time modesty is a key attitude in the difficult mission of building the HEH. This institution does not possess a truth on European history. There are as many histories as historians and the options taken in the HEH will only be new ones, inspired by and added to others. They will evolve with time and with the participation of the visitors. Despite all efforts to remain as open as possible the HEH will be received by some as a kind of truth on European history imposed top-down on the public. The project is already presented in this way, even in academic research (Kaiser et al. 2012). Although the team is aware of the complexity of doing so, it remains hopeful that it will be able to break this authoritative role of the museum. As recalled by the EuNaMus researchers, the latter role does not correspond any more to the missions of a museum of the 21st century.

For this reason this presentation could not be much more than the expression of wishes and ideas and certainly not the definitive portrayal of what the HEH will be. The answer to that question will only be possible when the House will be open, with the visitors as the main actors of its development.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Composed by the president and 14 vice-presidents, "the Bureau is the body that lays down rules for Parliament. It draws up Parliament's preliminary draft budget and decides all administrative, staff and organisational matters". HTTP: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00766d87cc/Political-bodies.html>
- <sup>2</sup> In his inaugural speech of February 2007, Hans Gert Pöttering had spoken of "a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union" (Committee of Experts 2008).
- <sup>3</sup> By visitor we mean here the people who will visit the museum in Brussels as well as all the participants in the HEH programmes disseminated across Europe mainly via Internet.
- <sup>4</sup> On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Buchenwald camp's liberation.

## Bibliography

- Babelon, J.-P., Backouche, I., Duclert, V., James-Sarazin A. eds. (2011) *Quel musée d'histoire pour la France?*, Paris: Armand Colin.
- Cadot, C. (2010) 'Can museums help build a European memory? The example of the Musée de l'Europe in Brussels in the light of "New World" museums' experience', *International Journal for Politics, Culture and Society* 23: 127-136.
- Cannizzo, J. (1991). 'Negotiated Realities: Toward an Ethnography of Museums', Pocius, G.L. (ed.), *Living in a Material World. Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture*, St. John's, Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- Charléty, V. (2004) 'L'invention du Musée de l'Europe. Contribution à l'analyse des politiques symboliques européennes', *Regards Sociologiques* 27-28: 154.
- Committee of Experts (2008) *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History*, Brussels: European Parliament. HTTP: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf)

- Davis, A., Desvallées, A. and Mairesse, F. (eds) (2010) *What is a Museum?*, München: Dr. C. Müller-Straten.
- EuNaMus Report n°7 (2012) *National Museums Making Histories in a Diverse Europe*, Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press. HTTP: <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-85590>
- Exhibiting Europe. The development of European narratives in museums, collections and exhibitions* HTTP: <http://www.ntnu.edu/ifs/research/exhibiting>
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28.01.2012. HTTP: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/europaeische-union/eu-museum-stolz-und-scham-11623924.html>
- House of European History. Aggregate report* (2012) survey conducted by TNS Qual+ at the request of the European Parliament (Eurobarometer Qualitative Studies).
- House of European History. International architectural competition. Exhibition 24.4.2012-12.5.2012*, Brussels.
- Kaiser, W., Krankenhagen, S., Poehls, K. (2012) *Europa ausstellen. Das Museum als Praxisfeld der Europäisierung*, Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag.
- Korff, G., Roth, M. (1990) *Das historische Museum. Labor, Schaubühne, Identitätsfabrik*, Frankfurt a.M., New York: Peter Lang.
- Martinez Martinez, M.A. (2011), quotation reproduced on the flyer *House of European History* printed for the Open Days of the European Parliament, May 2011.
- Mazé, C. (2009) 'Les musées de l'Europe, outil de production d'un ordre symbolique européen', *Regards Sociologiques* 37-38: 60-80.
- Mork, A. (2012) 'The House of European History', presentation at the first 1<sup>st</sup> Symposium of European Institutions dealing with 20<sup>th</sup> century History, Gdansk, 13-15 September 2012 (to be published on line).
- Press release (December 2012) of the Nobel Committee HTTP: [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2012/press.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2012/press.html)
- Press release (December 2012) of the European Union. HTTP: [http://europa.eu/newsroom/highlights/eunobel/pdf/12\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu/newsroom/highlights/eunobel/pdf/12_en.pdf)
- Svanberg, F. (ed.) (2010) *The museum as forum and actor*, Stockholm : Statens historiska museum.
- Vovk van Gaal, T., Itzel, C. (2012) 'The House of European History project in Brussels', Borodziej, W., Von Puttkamer, J. (eds) *Europa und sein Osten. Geschichtskulturelle Herausforderungen*, München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 75-80.





## **Deutsches Historisches Museum**

### **Rethinking German History Against the Background of a Burdened Past and New Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Rosmarie Beier-de Haan (Director of collections and exhibition curator at the German Historical Museum, Berlin, and Honorary Professor of Modern History at the Freie Universität Berlin and at the Technische Universität Berlin)

#### **Abstract**

This article reflects on the historical context of the foundation of the German Historical Museum in 1987 and analyses the museum's general approach and its functions against the background of a changing national discussion over the last 25 years. In doing so, the article focuses on the museum's multiple activities, its Permanent Exhibition and on specific examples of thematic exhibitions, chosen from the wide range of more than two hundred exhibitions that the German Historical Museum has presented since its foundation. In the final part, 'Conclusion and Outlook', the German Historical Museum is analyzed as an international point of interest, a reference model for new projects of national museums of history and a study in feasibility. Four principles are defined as constitutive for national museums of history in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: to meet international scientific criteria and standards of historiography and the representation of history; to open perspectives, by demanding the respect to human rights; to contribute to the conciliation of nations and – finally – to allow visitors to ask questions and to encourage them to rethink their own views and judgements.

## The foundation of a German national museum of history in the context of a divided Germany and a burdened past

November 9th, 1989 – more than twenty years have passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Memorial services annually commemorate this event throughout Berlin and other German cities. When walking through Berlin – a city that was once divided in two – the Wall is (except for a number of site memorials) noticeable by its absence. Its former course is merely hinted at by a “discreet” metal strip lining the road surface. Of course visitors to Berlin still associate the city’s image with the Wall, a no-man’s land, the presence of guardsmen and the death strip. The few remaining authentic sites such as the crosses (at the Brandenburg Gate) featuring the names and ages of the fugitives killed at the Wall constitute the urban symbols of the history of a separated world. The authenticity of these sites plays a significant role in public perception.

The fact that the Wall has long since been atomised, its fragments scattered all over the world, is certainly consistent with the dynamic of historical processes. The wall fragments detached from the site are historical material witnesses and as such both the starting point and the object of new cultural appropriations. Take, for instance, Oscar winner Tilda Swinton cycling around the (few) remains of the Wall in Berlin, as documented in her 2009 film “Cycling the Invisible Frame”. The museum conservation of fragments is also part of the cultural practice of new acquisitions. Fragments of the Wall can be found at the Los Angeles “Wende-Museum”, just as they feature in the museum that forms the core of this presentation: the Deutsches Historisches Museum<sup>1</sup> (German Historical Museum) right in the heart of Berlin.



**Fig. 1:** Fragments of the Wall. German Historical Museum, Permanent Exhibition, area “1949-1994. Divided Germany and Reunification”, Berlin 2012 (© German Historical Museum 2012)

The establishment of the German Historical Museum took place in 1987. Two years prior to the fall of the Wall, the latter seemed unthinkable. The world division into East and West appeared cast in stone, Germany's partition cemented. During this time, the western part of Germany – the Federal Republic – witnessed an increased interest in its own history, in particular the era of National Socialism and the Holocaust. This was the period during which National Socialist memorials were being inaugurated, the period during which history workshops “dug on the spot” and the period during which National Socialist research gained scientific momentum. In addition, there was political interest in a national museum of history being founded (cf. Stölzl 1988). It was not enough to be but an “economic giant” or a “country of export”. The governmental policy of the Federal Republic of Germany (under Chancellor Helmut Kohl) wanted it to be more – it wanted to prove that it was tackling its difficult and burdened past. In this way the founding of the German Historical Museum – as well as the founding of the Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (House of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany) in Bonn at the very same time – was the Federal German Government's political response to the German nation's rapidly growing interest in its own history and its need to examine this history.

Nevertheless, the decision to found a central history museum in (West-) Berlin was undoubtedly the beginning of one of the most challenging cultural projects in West Germany. According to the Basis Law (*Grundgesetz*) of the Federal Republic of Germany (1949) the German *Länder* were granted autonomy in cultural and educational affairs. As a result, the foundation of a museum had become a decentralised phenomenon, in the responsibility of the *Länder* or municipalities. Moreover, a view of history that had been initiated and promoted by the Federal Government had been severely compromised by the “fundamental crisis of fascism” (in the words of historian Wolfgang Schieder; cf. Schieder 1988) and the Holocaust; broad segments of the critical public raised serious doubts about the justification of a central German museum of history. These controversies came to a head in what has gone down in the annals of the Federal Republic as the “Historikerstreit”, or “Historians' dispute” (cf. Habermas 1987, 1988; Diner 1987; Kronenberg 2008): namely, the debates about the classification and interpretation of the Nazi extermination of the Jews and the question of whether – with a view to the centuries *before* the 20th century – the significance of the “Third Reich” needed to be historically and politically relativised and should thus in the end be levelled out in an identity-building understanding of the history of Federal Republic of Germany.

The choice of location for the German Historical Museum reflected the situation of a Germany divided: the new history museum was to be given a home in the Western sector of the divided Berlin, right near the Wall. This was also a statement towards the German Democratic Republic, which – with its (state-owned) Museum of German History – first claimed its own history museum back in the 1950s. And particularly since the 1970s, this museum had committed itself to tackling Germany's so-called “civil heritage” (“bürgerliches Erbe”). German history subjects such as Martin Luther and the Reformation, the Peasant Wars and the 1848 Civil Revolution had been broached by East Germany rather than West Germany. Albeit – it has to be pointed out – always bearing the ideological signature of the official Marxist historiography.

Talk of national museums was barely feasible in Germany against the background of its 20<sup>th</sup> century history, in particular that of National Socialism. This may seem foreign to everyone

hailing from countries that have a relatively intact national tradition. Until recently, the word “national” – against the backdrop of the National Socialist breakdown of civilisation and the political identification crisis of the young Federal Republic – was considered a misnomer, guilty of ideological overtones (*cf.* Maier 1997; Reichel 2012). Only recently have questions such as “Is there a German national literature?” or “What are in fact Germany’s national symbols?” been possible without triggering immediate suspicion of harbouring ideological beliefs and feelings of revanchism.

This is still a very loaded subject, as could be seen for instance a few years ago in summer 2009, when the Berlin “Tagesspiegel”, a moderate middle-class newspaper, claimed on its feature page: “Black – Red – Gold. The Federal Republic of Germany has had difficulties with national symbols ever since 1949. All the better!” (Fetscher 2009). This reticence to use a term that was “burnt” by National Socialism was also witnessed in 1987 when it came to giving a name to the newly founded museum. Significantly, when the names were chosen for the two key history museums founded during the late 1980s – the German Historical Museum in Berlin and the House of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn – the term “national” was deliberately avoided.

Nevertheless, the two newly established museums in Berlin and Bonn were *national* museums from their very beginning. However, the term “national” was not meant to provoke or cause a new nationalism, regardless of the aim. The objective, the challenge even, of both these establishments was to tackle German history in its similarities and differences, its failures, its divisive and unifying aspects – in brief, issues relating to the German nation – and to place German history in its European and international relationships at the centre of its exhibitions. So, both museums are national in so far as, when the Federal Republic created these museum spaces, it wanted them to reflect its national history in supranational and, in particular, European terms: The aim being to examine the relationship between the people and the states, and to answer German questions within a European and global context.

A broad network of historians (from universities and scientific institutes) played a fundamental role – a role which cannot be overestimated and which they still carry out today. A very first memorandum was issued in 1982 (*cf.* Denkschrift 1982), i.e. five years before the founding of the museum. This paper as well as the subsequent conceptions for the museum were written by renowned academics, all pointing out that the museum would have to depict German history in all its ambiguities, including “greatness as well as liability, Weimar but also Auschwitz” (Denkschrift 1982: 61-2). Jürgen Kocka, internationally renowned social historian and one of the founders of the “Bielefelder Schule” (*cf.* Hitzer/Welskopp 2010), emphasized that the new national museum was to be nothing like an armoury of national consciousness (*cf.* Kocka 1986). All statements and memorandums, leading to the final conception from 1987, pointed beyond the boundaries of national history. By placing Germany in the context of Europe, the final conception was implicitly transnational in outlook (something which today may seem self-evident, but at that time was radically new). Neither a “shrine” nor an “identification factory”, the German Historical Museum was to “serve the purpose of enlightenment and understanding in dealing with joint history”, as the mission statement says, pointing out: “The Museum is supposed to be a place of (inward) contemplation and self-recognition through historical memory” (Konzeption 1987: 611).

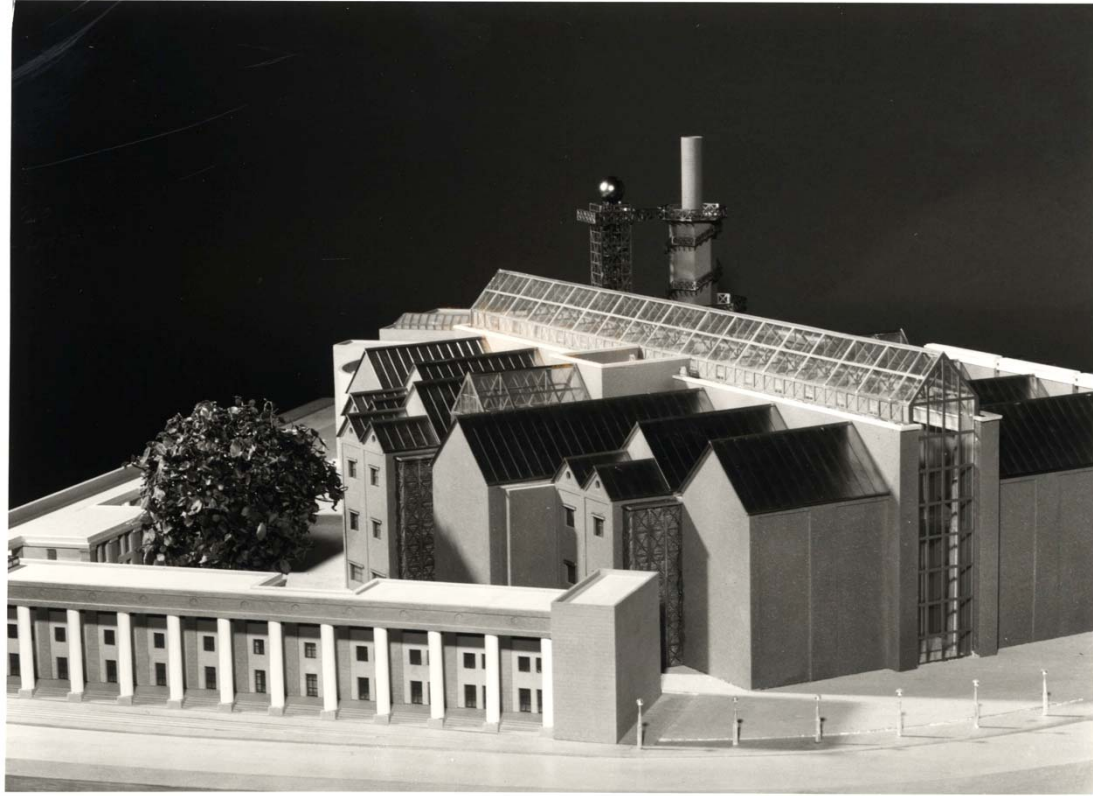


Accordingly, the museum aims to depict diverse perspectives, broach controversial themes and question underlying or lost alternatives. This reflects an emerging development which can be described as “the history of culture” – it deals with the “cultural practice” of “coping with the world” (*Weltbewältigung*, as the German philosophy puts it) and “making ourselves understood” (*Selbstverständigung*) – a cultural practice described by sociologists as a “reflexive modernization” (cf. Beck/Giddens/Lash 1994; Beier-de Haan 2005). From this cultural practice a future perspective and ultimately a German identity can be attained within a European context – a development which should be speeded up in the ensuing years.

In this context, specific challenges had to be addressed. Following years of silence concerning Germany’s recent past, i.e. National Socialism and the extermination of the Jews, “dealing with the past” later became a theme in Federal German society. Therefore, in questioning our identity as Germans, this also meant posing questions specifically related to Germany’s twentieth century history: questions concerning the Holocaust, responsibility and guilt. Questions about a nation which was to be split into two separate German states. A museum, which asks itself these questions, is therefore – as the journalist Jürgen Engert put it already in 1973 – “a symbol of a community which is prepared to deal with this problem more than ever before” (Engert 1973). This in effect means investigating the community’s identity.

### **The end of East-West separation: “German–German” history as a challenge**

The German Historical Museum was – in possibly an ironic twist of history – overrun by its own object, history itself and unforeseeable developments. A mere one and a half years after its establishment and the acquisition of a few office rooms in West Berlin, the Wall fell. The project moved from West to East Berlin, into the Zeughaus, the former armoury, which had up until then been the home of the Museum für Deutsche Geschichte (Museum of German History), which was dissolved following a final resolution of the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The reasoning behind this being that if there was to be no more GDR, there was also little purpose in having a GDR history museum. So from one day to the next, the small project group from the West was transformed into a large structure with over one hundred and fifty employees and a collection amounting to almost half a million items.



**Fig. 2:** Aldo Rossi, Milan. Model of the new building for the German Historical Museum, Berlin (West) 1988 (not realized) (© German Historical Museum 2012)



**Fig. 3:** German Historical Museum. Zeughaus Unter den Linden, Berlin (East). Photo: Ulrich Schwarz/DHM Berlin (© German Historical Museum 2012)

Most important, though, were the exhibitions. A concerted series of temporary exhibitions saw the curators' team launch the museum's activities into the comparison of "German-German", i.e. East-West, history. Specific questions had to be asked: What increasingly separated the Germans in the East and in the West for decades and what continued to connect them despite this separation? Could the German Democratic Republic be characterised as a "state of injustice" and, if so, what did this mean for the retrospective estimation of the "lived life"?

These exhibitions investigated what associated the Germans in the East with those in the West, and what separated them from one another. They focused on the following: State-commissioned art in the GDR ("Auftrag: Kunst. Bildende Künstler in der DDR zwischen Ästhetik und Politik 1949–1990", 1995), State symbols and propaganda means ("Party Order: A New Germany. Toward the Iconography of the GDR", 1997), different social ranks and classes, the pioneering spirit, a sense of new awakenings and beginnings as well as different chapters of life ("Chapters of Life in Germany 1900–1993", 1993). An example is the exhibition "aufbau west – aufbau ost" ("Shaping a new Town. West and East", 1997), which presented archetypes of the embodiment of urban architecture, lifestyle and culture in the divergent, highly competitive ideologies of the West and of the East (using the example of two planned towns, Wolfsburg in the West and Stalinstadt / Eisenhüttenstadt in the East). Certainly, at this time there was no other German museum that dealt so intensively with the interpretation of "German-German" history. The German Historical Museum thus, through the unforeseeable aspects of history, found its very own mission.



**Fig. 4:** German Historical Museum. Exhibition "Chapters of Life in Germany 1900-1993", view of the area "Germany-East and Germany-West", Berlin 1993 (© German Historical Museum 2012)

Most attentively attended by both, the audience and the media, these exhibitions became Germany's testing ground and – as the Arts Editor of the “Frankfurter Allgemeine” newspaper, Ulrich Raulff, summed it up in 1997 – were “the most remarkable contributions which were made in order to make the two halves of a population stop and think about what it was that had increasingly separated them for decades – and what had continued to connect them beyond this separation” (Raulff 1997). The lively, and occasionally violent, reactions from the visitors mirrored their uncertainty and self-ascertainment. Upon closely looking at and viewing the exhibits, visitors encountered both familiarity and strangeness, thus leading them to contemplate not only what was familiar but also what was unfamiliar or strange to them. The intensity of the visitor reactions, their spontaneous conversations with each other in the exhibitions, as well as their dissent, were probably never so impulsive, so emotional, as during the years that followed reunification.

The significance of the encounter of East and West for the museum curators personally and professionally is a subject in its own right that could take up another entire presentation. The museum became a forum, a forum of encounter, of oral – often breathless – and emotional exchange. It became a place in which strangers spontaneously engaged in conversation – and that right in Berlin on the boulevard Unter den Linden, at the interface between East and West.

Meanwhile, the perspective on the history of the German Democratic Republic has changed in manifold ways – as much in the scientific approach as in its public perception (*cf.* Sabrow et al. 2007; Bender 2009). That was clearly exemplified in the 2007 exhibition: “Party Dictatorship and Everyday Life in the GDR”. As in previous exhibitions, this exhibition questioned the relationship between individual lives, daily lives and the overriding structures of Party, State and State Security. It questioned the framework of everyday life, thus justice and injustice in a State, which had been characterised by one-party rule and a lack of independent justice. It also raised the question of the “Second German Dictatorship”, a controversial subject of contemporary research. Controversial because it begs the question: To what extent is the first German dictatorship, namely National Socialism, placed under a different light through the addition of a second? Are the scales of the two systems not too different, after all, to simply put them on a par?

It was noticeable that for the majority of former GDR citizens visiting the exhibition, this issue was difficult to bear. To have lived in a dictatorship is an unwelcome acknowledgement, it is something that is lost sight of – or was possibly never seen in the first place. And for the majority of West Germans, such a question was after all always an external one, one that remained abstract, one that hardly touched upon their own living environment. An important function of this exhibition was to launch a question perspective.

Twenty years is a long time in an individual life. For the first time since 1989 Germany is now home to a young generation that no longer sees itself as East or West Germans, but as “Germans”. Only one in ten young people defines him- or herself according to East or West. Nevertheless (or maybe on account of this), knowledge on the GDR is mostly frighteningly sparse and superficial (this, incidentally, also applies to many students). This knowledge has strong individual characteristics and is coloured by the memories and emotions of parents or grandparents. They perceive their own biography according to the past, either as a gain or a loss, as a rupture or even with nostalgia. In this respect, the exhibition also fulfilled an important

educational function. As it does for almost all exhibitions, the museum's educational department provided a comprehensive service for group-specific and age-specific guided tours and workshops. This service receives widespread response. It is an almost fixed curriculum component for teachers in Berlin and the surrounding regions.

### **Beyond the national borders: German history in a European and international context**

From the very beginning, the German Historical Museum – as mentioned above – copes with German History in a European, an international context. But what does Europe mean to us today? Where do we stand with European history acting as the connecting link between the nations (*cf.* Assmann 2012)? On one hand, this is the history of enlightenment, the French revolution, human rights and democracy. On the other hand, however, especially in this century, European history means the history of separation between Western and Eastern Europe; the history of the iron curtain, during which time both sides showed hostility towards one another and stood in opposition; they had two different political systems, as well as two different cultures and lifestyles (although, at the same time, both of them called for enlightenment). Additionally, due to the separate world wars and before them the religious wars and various larger and smaller civil conflicts between the ruling or regency houses and economical-dynasties; different mentalities and variations in the German language developed and emerged. It was these differences which prevented thoughts of European unity.

Many of the German Historical museum's exhibitions have presented examples of the connections and the separations in Europe. Just a few examples in brief: "The Elbe – A life", which was organised in co-operation with the National Museum of Prague amongst others (1992); "A Bitter Truth. The Avant-Garde and the Great War", in co-operation with the Imperial War Museum and the Barbican Art Gallery, London (1994); "Art and Power. Europe under the dictators 1930-45"; a further expanded version of the exhibition on the Council of Europe (1996); "Victoria and Albert. Vicky and the Kaiser Bill. German – English Dynastic Relations" (1997); "Chosen Affinities. Scandinavia and Germany 1880 –1914", in association with the National Museum Stockholm and the Norsk Folk Museum (1998); "Myths of the Nations. A European Panorama (1998); "1648. War and Peace in Europe" an exhibition on the thirty year war (1999), as well as the project "Europe's Centre at 1000" , which included participating museums from Poland, Slovakia, The Czech Republic and Hungary.

It follows from the previous remarks that- at the same time - tackling the subjects of National Socialism and the Holocaust has for many years (and until today) played a significant role in themed exhibitions. In 2002, the German Historical Museum presented an exhibition on the Holocaust, entitled: "Holocaust. The Nazi Genocide and the Motifs of its Remembrance".





**Fig. 5:** German Historical Museum. Exhibition “Holocaust. The Nazi Genocide and the Motifs of its Remembrance”, part of the area “Remembrance”, Berlin 2002 (© German Historical Museum 2012)

The exhibition, product of German and international cooperation, traced everyday Jewish life in the late Weimar Republic as well as the process of social exclusion, which was being initiated at the time, right up until the Holocaust (*cf.* Holocaust 2002). Whenever possible, the exhibition used individual testimonies. This included not only personal documents within the exhibition, but also involved contemporary witness conversations with young people and conversations with survivors. The second part of the exhibition primarily tackled the issue surrounding the origin of the Holocaust and the motives underlying its remembrance to the present day. Parallel to the German development, the creation and significance of key Holocaust memorials was illustrated, in close collaboration with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, the Yad Vashem Memorial as well as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. Further themes included the long-standing discussion surrounding the creation of a central holocaust memorial in Berlin. Today the Field of Stelae created by Peter Eisenman is a key component of the memory landscape of Berlin and Germany.

In 2009 the German Historical Museum presented (among others) an exhibition on Germany and Poland: “Germans and Poles. 1.9.39. Despair and Hope”. The exhibition was created to mark the occasion of the seventieth year of the German invasion of Poland. It showed “the war and period of occupation as the all-time nadir in relations between Germans and Poles. Even before the War, there had been only a few hopeful signs of reconciliation in the conflict-ridden relationship between the two countries. But the German invasion saw the beginning of a cruel war of extermination against the neighbouring country and its inhabitants. With this exhibition, the German Historical Museum wants to recall the memory of the suffering caused by the war

and throw light on the often thorny path to rapprochement between Germans and Poles after 1945” (Germans and Poles 2012).



**Fig. 6:** German Historical Museum. Exhibition “Germans and Poles. 1.9.39. Despair and Hope”, view of the area “War and Occupation” (© German Historical Museum 2012)

The exhibition also broached the subject of the “expulsion of the German population from areas east of the Oder and Neisse Rivers as well as that of the Polish population from the former eastern Polish regions as the war came to a close in 1945” (Germans and Poles 2012).

The final part of the exhibition showed how the two German States approached the former enemy Poland in different ways: “In the Federal Republic, the loss of the former German eastern regions was not accepted for a long time. The Treaty of Warsaw from 1970 recognizing the existing border along the Oder-Neisse line first created the basis for normal relations. The “friendship” to Poland propagated by the GDR remained largely a façade on the official level. (...) Since 1989, new perspectives have evolved for German-Polish relations. Despite occasional irritations and conflicts of interest the contacts between Germans and Poles has never been more intensive and sustainable than today” (Germans and Poles 2012; for further information cf. Łuczewski/Wiedmann 2011).

Initially, the work carried out by the joint commission of historians was characterised by an intense process of communication and argumentative exchange, which was not always easy from an emotional point of view. The end of the path saw the exhibition ‘Germans and Poles’ being opened by the cultural political representatives of both countries: Bogdan Zdrojewski, Minister of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland, and Bernd Neumann, Federal Government Representative for Culture and the Media.

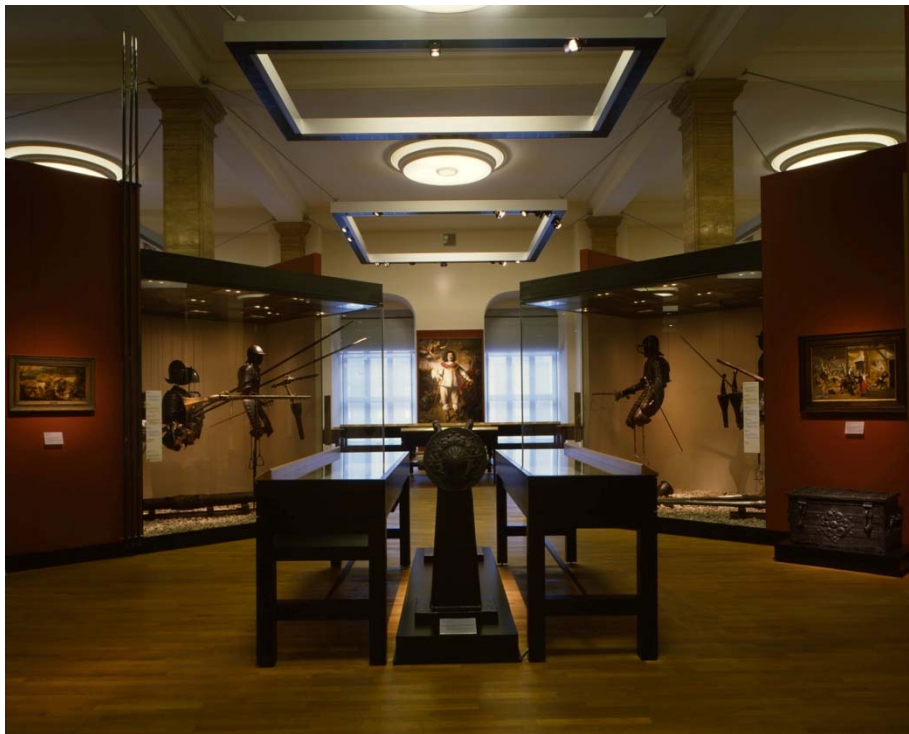
It is the author’s sincere persuasion that the challenge of such an exhibition project is the opportunity for a forward-looking interpretation of history. A transnational view not only allows

for different viewpoints, it in actual fact requires them in order to achieve a profound understanding of history. A sustainable transnational dialogue can hardly be gained from the emphasis of similarities alone: rather, conflicts, disputes and enmities should be “put to use” – (ideally) with a view to reconciliation.

### **Permanent Exhibition, temporary exhibitions: Does a historical museum need objects?**

From the beginning the museum concept strongly emphasised the need for temporary exhibitions that would complement and enlarge upon the Permanent Exhibition. Since then the German Historical Museum has organised around 200 temporary exhibitions, which were enriched by supplementary programmes and events offered to the general public, including extensive catalogues, lectures and symposiums as well as tours aimed at different age groups, workshops, etc. The coupling of the Permanent Exhibition with temporary exhibitions is one of the fundamental characteristics of the German Historical Museum.

Since 2006, the former armoury has been home to the comprehensive Permanent Exhibition on German history (*cf.* Asmuss 2007). In the first three years after its opening, it welcomed more than two million visitors. The Permanent exhibition takes up some ten thousand square meters of exhibition space on the two floors of the Zeughaus, displaying about 4000 artefacts and documents of German history that can be seen in as varied a reference frame as possible. The basic principle underlying the permanent display is to exhibit in two different types of rooms, in which German history is presented within its European context and its regional diversity. The real core of these display spaces are the *period rooms*, in which visitors walk through the periods spanning the beginnings of German history to the present day.



**Fig. 7:** German Historical Museum. Permanent Exhibition, part of the area “1500-1650. Reformation and the Thirty Years’ War”, Berlin 2012 (© German Historical Museum 2012)



If visitors wish to explore the chronologically arranged events in more depth and learn more about the history of their causes and effects, they can enter *intensive information rooms* for a more thorough review and reflection of the topics. The sweeping historical survey concentrates on focal points of German history, which correspond to the crucial developmental periods of European history.

The entire ground floor, consisting of approximately five thousand square metres, has deliberately been reserved for the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. This design decision is validated on a daily basis by the requirements and questions voiced by the museum's visitors. Germans – as well as international visitors, adults and school classes – dedicate most of their attention to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The makeup of the Permanent Exhibition as well as the numerous temporary exhibitions would hardly be possible without the museum's own collections. The German Historical Museum meanwhile has nearly a million objects at its disposal, including the extensive collections of the former East German Museum für Deutsche Geschichte, whose properties and stocks were transferred to the German Historical Museum after German reunification. In times when politicians are often only interested in attractive architecture when founding a new museum, the German Historical Museum is an example not only for the necessity of a museum to have its own collections, but also for their quality and relevance: Many of the museum's objects have enriched and “brushed up” the canon of historical pictures on the feature pages of the newspapers, on television and in schoolbooks. At the same time, a museum's collections improve its position towards other houses, as it forms the basis for the “give and take” in participating in the (inter)national exchange of loans.

In the 25th year of its existence in 2012, the German Historical Museum is well positioned. It has gained international attention and recognition and is a valued partner for conferences as well as exhibition projects. The house cooperates with academic institutions and specialists as well as with associations of museums and other establishments. With around 800,000 visitors a year (including many foreign guests and young people), the German Historical Museum is among the most popular museums in Berlin and Germany. A recent article in the feuilleton of the perhaps most renowned German newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the German Historical Museum characterized it as “a house which – if the Greens, large parts of the Social Democratic Party and many West German historians had had their way, never would have existed – and which today no one wants to do without” (Kilb 2012).

New topics for temporary exhibitions reflect new conditions in society: these range from ecological aspects such as the forest (not to forget that “*Waldsterben*” has become an international word) to migration and encounters with “the other” as well as contemporary art as an expression of individual sensitivities (as can be seen in the exhibition of the Council of Europe, “*Verführung Freiheit*” – “The Desire for Freedom”, which opened in October 2012). It remains to be seen how the German Historical Museum – working with other international museums – can and must react to current socio-political processes in Europe: catchwords in this respect include “re-nationalisation” and national stereotyping in the face of the “Euro crisis”.

## Conclusion and Outlook

After the international museums boom of the 1970s and 1980s, a renewed boom of new national museums seems to be announcing itself in Europe and worldwide (*cf.* Hinz/Beier-de Haan 2011). Plans for new establishments are in any case underway in the Netherlands, Austria, Spain, Poland and most recently also France (the project was cancelled by the French government in 2012 at an early stage). To them the German Historical Museum has become a point of interest, a reference model and a study in feasibility – one in continuous operation. They welcome the Permanent exhibition of the German Historical Museum as a place in which visitors' fragmented, often atomised, knowledge on the history of the nation is presented in a systematic manner and placed in a greater, transnational context. They welcome the diversity of the themed exhibitions with their flexible reference to current issues and their close cooperation with scientific experts.

In the author's opinion, the conceivable new creations should be used to respect four principles, and that significantly more strongly than before. Firstly, national museums must, in their design and presentation, be truthful, that means meet international scientific criteria and standards of historiography and the representation of history. Secondly, national museums should not provide conclusive and precast perceptions of the nation's history. A statement of "this is what it was like" misses the point that there cannot be any prefabricated answers. Exhibitions must open up perspectives – and these include transnational perspectives –, which also focus on the divisiveness, the persisting "hurt" of a society or between societies. I formulate this second principle while contemplating the renationalisation processes in Middle and Eastern Europe, such as Russia or the Baltic States, where the imposed perception is often that of a national narrowing of history.

The third principle is that of "reconciliation". In an ever-shrinking world, in a world of "us", in a world demanding the respect of human rights, national museums can and must contribute to the conciliation of nations. Certainly, "conciliation" is still a long way off. The path leading there is a long one and must be characterised by historical veracity and scientific methods, by the presentation of openness and multiple perspectives. A national museum must – and this is the fourth principle – allow visitors to ask questions. Exhibitions must encourage visitors to rethink their own views and judgements regarding their own history and that of others. They must encourage dialogue. Provided these four principles are respected, it is the author's belief that national museums are ready to tackle the future.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Annotation of the author: The perspective from which I am writing is inextricably linked to this establishment, its foundation and its activities. During the late 1980s, I witnessed the beginnings of the establishment – back then in the West – as a member of its first scientific development team. As a head of collections and the exhibition curator of many social and cultural history exhibitions, I have been involved in a wide variety of the museum's activities. At the same time, I have lectured as a professor of history at the Free University of Berlin and at the Technische Universität Berlin for a number of years now and, as such, am one of those people who continuously and repeatedly reflect upon their own practice in a theoretical manner (RBdH).

## Bibliography

- Asmuss, B. (2007) ‚Die Dauerausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums: Vorgeschichte, Kritik und Gegenkritik‘, *Zwanzig Jahre Deutsches Historisches Museum 1987–2007*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 87-100.
- Assmann, A. (2012) *Auf dem Weg zu einer europäischen Gedächtniskultur?*, Wien: Picus.
- Beck, U. & Giddens, A. & Lash, S. (1994) *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beier-de Haan, R. (2005) *Erinnerte Geschichte – Inszenierte Geschichte. Museen und Ausstellungen in der Zweiten Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Beier-de Haan, R. (2006) ‘Re-Staging Histories and Identities’, S. MacDonald (ed.) *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Oxford: Blackwell, 431-441.
- Bender, P. (2009), *Zweimal Deutschland: Eine ungeteilte Nachkriegsgeschichte 1945-1990*, München, Pantheon.
- Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur (2012), Mission Statement, *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur*. Online. Available HTTP: <**Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**> (accessed 31 October 2012).
- ‘Denkschrift für ein Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin‘ (1982), C. Stölzl (ed.) (1988) *Deutsches Historisches Museum: Ideen – Kontroversen – Perspektiven*, Berlin: Propyläen, 61-66.
- Diner, D. (ed.) (1987) *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- Deutsches Historisches Museum (2012) ‚Temporary Exhibitions‘, *Deutsches Historisches Museum*. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.dhm.de> (accessed 31 October 2012).
- Engert, J. (1973) ‚Geschichte der Deutschen nur jenseits der Mauer‘, *Deutsche Zeitung*, 26 October 1973.
- Fetscher, C. (2009) ‚Von Trizonesien nach Europa‘, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 17 May 2009.
- ‚Germans and Poles. 1.9.39. Despair and Hope‘, *Deutsches Historisches Museum*. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.dhm.de> (accessed 31 October 2012).
- Habermas, J. (1987) *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, J. (1998) *Die postnationale Konstellation*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Hinz, H.-M. & Beier-de Haan, R. (eds) (2011) *Nationalmuseen : Gedächtnis der Nationen. National Museums : The Memory of Nations*, Berlin : Deutsches Historisches Museum.
- Hitzer, B. & Welskopp, T. (eds) (2010) *Die Bielefelder Sozialgeschichte*, Bielefeld: transcript.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1990) *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ‚Holocaust. Der nationalsozialistische Völkermord und die Motive seiner Erinnerung‘, *Deutsches Historisches Museum*. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.dhm.de> (accessed 31 October 2012).
- Kermani, N. (2009) *Wer ist Wir? Deutschland und seine Muslime*, München: Beck.

- Kilb, A. ‚Geschichtsstunde mit europäischem Akzent‘, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 25 October 2012.
- Kocka, J. (1986) ‚Statements‘, Protokoll der Anhörung zum Deutschen Historischen Museum (...) am 2. Juli 1986, C. Stölzl (ed.) *Deutsches Historisches Museum: Ideen – Kontroversen – Perspektiven*, Berlin: Propyläen, 333-385.
- Konzeption für ein Deutsches Historisches Museum: Überarbeitete Fassung (1987), C. Stölzl (ed.) *Deutsches Historisches Museum: Ideen – Kontroversen – Perspektiven*, Berlin: Propyläen, 609-636.
- Kretzschmann, C. (2012) *Zwischen Spaltung und Gemeinsamkeit. Kultur im geteilten Deutschland*, Berlin: be.bra Verlag.
- Kronenberg, V. (ed.) (2008) *Zeitgeschichte, Wissenschaft und Politik : Der “Historikerstreit” – 20 Jahre danach*, Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Łuczewski, M. & Wiedmann, J. (eds.) (2011) *Erinnerungskultur des 20. Jahrhunderts: Analysen deutscher und polnischer Erinnerungsorte*, Berlin: Peter Lang.
- Maier, C. S. (1997) *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity*, Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press.
- Ostow, R. (ed.) (2008) *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the new Millennium*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Raulff, U. (1997). Sorgenregal. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 28.10.1997.
- Reichel, P. (2012) *Glanz und Elend deutscher Selbstdarstellung: Nationalsymbole in Reich und Republik*, Göttingen: Wallstein.
- Sabrow, M. (2003) *Abschied von der Nation? Deutsche Geschichte und europäische Zukunft*, Leipzig: Akademische Verlags-Anstalt.
- Sabrow, M. et al. (eds) (2007) *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung?*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Schieder, W. (2008) *Faschistische Diktaturen: Studien zu Italien und Deutschland*, Göttingen: Wallstein.
- Sznaider, N. & Lévy, D. (2006) *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Stölzl, C. (ed.) (1988) *Deutsches Historisches Museum. Ideen – Kontroversen – Perspektiven*, Berlin: Propyläen.
- Wehler, H.-U. Wehler (1988) *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum “Historikerstreit”*, München: Beck.



## **The Light of History: Through the Lens of a Polish Museum**

Robert Kostro (Director, Polish History Museum)

### **Abstract**

Together with literature, history has played a defining role in shaping the consciousness of the Poles. This reflected in the history of Polish museums where we can trace the indissoluble nexus between history and politics.

With the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 and the restoration of democracy the role the historical narrative should play in public debate needed to be redefined. These challenges would include: Polish identity and multicultural traditions. Reckoning with the communist past. A debate on “Historical politics” (i.e. what role history should play in the politics of the government). International debates on the Holocaust, German discussions on national socialism and the “victimization” of German social memory. New museology and international trends. As a result of all these processes and debates, around the year 2000 a series of new museum projects was launched in Poland including The Polish History Museum. The Museum’s narrative is buttressed by three pillars: 1) Democracy and freedom. 2) Identity issues including role of other ethnic and national group of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth in shaping common heritage. 3. Everyday life and development of the civilization.

## History as a Source of National Identity

Together with literature, history has played a defining role in shaping the consciousness of the Polish people. For Poles, arguably more so than for many other people, “the past is never past,” as the American Nobel laureate William Faulkner once remarked. It lies anchored in memory, and mingles forcibly with the present – never more vividly than does the memory of the nineteenth century, a haunted time of Poland’s partition among Russia, Austria and Prussia, later to become Germany. Ever present, the awareness of the abiding significance of history has always pervaded education in Poland. One of the most important books in the home education of Polish children in the first half of the nineteenth century was “Historical Songs” by Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, an iconic work of poetic historical imagery.

History ranked foremost among the sources of inspiration for the great romantic poetry of Juliusz Slowacki and Adam Mickiewicz in the 1830’s and ’40s. Later, for Polish novelists Jozef Ignacy Kraszewski and – near the end of the century –for Henryk Sienkiewicz, history formed the lens through which the aspirations, triumphs and defeats of the human enterprise could best be understood. In like manner, history has often comprised the palette of inspiration for Polish painters, never more so than with Jan Matejko, the nineteenth century artist whose outsized canvasses depict the most glorious events of Polish history, including the battle of Grunwald, with its victory over the Teutonic order in 1410; the union of Lublin with Lithuania in 1569; and the establishment of the Polish Constitution on May the third, 1791.

No less than in literature and art, this razor’s edge of historical consciousness has long enlivened public debate in Poland, installing history and the interpretation of history at the center of the public sphere. One of the most passionate discussions has centered on why Poland was partitioned in the eighteenth century. Conflating history and politics, historians like Joachim Lelewel, Jozef Szujski and Michal Bobrzynski were also influential politicians. At times, history has been used as a kind of guise or metaphor to avoid censorship. It has also provided a weapon against Germanization or Russification of Polish youth. To legitimize the partitions, Russian and German schools made standard practice of presenting Polish history as though it had no foundational significance. To counter this theft of cultural identity, patriotic historians – and not without difficulty – looked back with pride to the achievements and grandeur of the past, and wrote unflinchingly about the iniquities of occupying powers.

Following the devastation of World War II, in which survival from one moment to the next eclipsed all other realities and priorities, the powerful undercurrent of the Polish historical consciousness in time reasserted itself under the yoke of communist dictatorship. One catalyst for this resurgence was the so-called “Katyn lie,” among the most egregious fictions in an indigestible diet of historical fictions fed from the top down to the Polish people. The principal narrative to legitimize communist dictatorship and the subjugation of Poland to the Soviet Union was that of the common fight during World War II against Nazi Germany. It was a mask of truth, disguising yet not disguising the fictions that lay beneath. The Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939; the mass deportations of Polish nationals into Soviet-occupied territories in 1940 and ’41; the Katyn massacre itself committed by the NKVD on Polish prisoners of war in 1940; and, finally, the passivity of the Red Army in the face of the merciless German suppression of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, unveiled the true nature of Soviet imperial policies and of totalitarian terror. Not surprisingly, public writing and speaking about factual realities was strictly forbidden, lest

such discourse undermine the pose of official Polish-Soviet friendship. As in previous centuries, Poles like water flowing toward a sea of truth found ways over, through, and around the prevarications of spoon-fed history.

Forbidden history emerged as the favorite topic in the books and periodicals smuggled from the West after 1956, or printed in the underground in the late 1970s and '80s.

### **Museums and History, Museums Make History**

It may come as no surprise, then, that in the history of Polish museums we can trace the indissoluble nexus between history and politics. The first Polish collection that merits the name “museum” – and perhaps the first museum of history in the world – was created by Izabela Czartoryska, one of the wealthiest and most educated Polish women of the eighteenth century. Confronted with the partition of Poland, by the end of the eighteenth century Czartoryska began to collect memorabilia and objects of art testifying to the grandeur of the once and future Poland. This collection was made accessible to a wider audience in Pulawy in 1801.

A second notable collection emerged as the Polish Museum, founded in Rapperswil, Switzerland in 1870 by Count Wladyslaw Plater. Devoted to the collection of artifacts, documents and books, the Polish Museum also functioned as a home away from home for Polish exile intellectuals determined to restore the country's unity and independence. After Poland regained its independence in 1918, memorabilia and other objects of significance to the history of the Republic were collected by the National Museum in Warsaw. During this same period, the National Museum in Krakow established an important art collection, and, in 1920, the Polish Army Museum was opened in Warsaw. However, national museums in Warsaw and Krakow were, and are today, focused principally on objects of art. No exhibition presenting nearly 1,000 years of national history was created.

Without question, the most significant historical museum project launched under the communist regime after 1945 was the reconstruction of the Royal Castle Museum in Warsaw in the 1970s. The capstone of the Warsaw Old Town reconstruction after the war, the Royal Castle Museum, also evidenced a key element of the political strategy by the new First Secretary of the communist party, Edward Gierek. Perhaps second to none, the Royal Castle had resonance as a symbol of Polish independence, and its reconstruction demonstrated a more positive assessment, under communist rule, of the significance of history in Polish life. By appealing to strong national sentiments, Gierek was trying to fortify the communist party's status within a society attenuated by political crisis dating to 1970.

### **History in a New Role**

With the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 and the restoration of democracy, a seeming paradox emerged in the Polish consciousness about history: yes, the abolition of censorship created the opportunity to speak freely about the past; but, at the same time, the interest in, the passion for, Polish history diminished. Confronting this new reality, politicians and historians needed to redefine the role the historical narrative should play in public debate. Understandably, the traditional narrative focused on the struggle for independence was now less immediate and compelling. At the same time, new challenges presented themselves. These challenges would include:

- *Polish identity and multicultural traditions.* Poland's boundaries and ethnically homogeneous society are a result of the World War II that created them. The First Republic (Commonwealth) of Poland and Lithuania (including today's territories of Belarus and a large part of Ukraine) was populated by several national, ethnic and confessional groups. The collapse of communism engendered an interest in and need to discuss issues related to Poles and Polish neighbors. These discussions concerned the heritage of the First Republic and the relationship between Poles and (ex)compatriots of different ethnic origins: Jews; Ukrainians; Belarusians; Lithuanians. A separate issue has been the historical relations with both the Germans and the Russians.
- *Reckoning with the communist past.* Though Poland was the first country to overthrow the communist system, no in-depth reckoning with the past occurred. Many political iniquities and crimes of the past remained unpunished. No major action against the ex-communist party leaders was implemented. Efforts to vet security officers and shed light on the activities of agents were ineffectual. Meanwhile, the establishment of the National Remembrance Institute in 1999 in order to illuminate the dark corners of communism served to escalate the debate on the communist past.
- *"Historical politics."* Around the year 2000, a debate broke out about what role history should play in the politics of the government. In particular, a new generation of conservative intellectuals stressed the need to increase the role of government in the commemoration of the past. These views of the conservative intellectuals coincided with the approaching anniversaries of the founding of Solidarity and of the Warsaw Uprising, along with a growing feeling among Poles that the nation's struggle in World War II as well as Solidarity's role in defeating communism was being neglected in national and international memory.
- *International debates.* This last debate was also linked to international debates about how World War II is, and should be, remembered. For example, the view was expressed that the World War II discussion tended to focus on the Holocaust, often at the expense of preserving memory and commemoration of Polish non-Jewish victims. Also, new tendencies in Germany stressed the suffering of the civilian population, whether as refugees or as victims of the Allies' bombardment. In the soil of this thinking, the idea was planted to create Zentrum Gegen Vertreibungen in Berlin, still developing in modified form.
- *New museology and international trends.* The 1990s were also a period of emerging new historical museum projects: to wit, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum; House of Terror in Budapest, Deutsches Historisches Museum; and Haus der Geschichte are a few of hundreds of new museums that became a new and significant phenomenon of the memory debates.

As a result of all these processes and debates, around the year 2000 a series of new museum projects was launched in Poland. These projects included, among others: the Warsaw Rising Museum; the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw; The European Solidarity Center in Gdansk; and The Polish History Museum, also in Warsaw.



## **Concept of the Polish History Museum**

The Polish History Museum as a legal entity was founded by a decree of the Minister of Culture in 2006. The museum has successfully completed two competitions: for the architectural design, and for the design of the exhibition. Work continues on its permanent exhibition. Plans are set to open the exhibition in 2018.

The structure of the museum narrative is buttressed by three pillars:

1. Democracy and freedom;
2. Identity;
3. Man and civilization.

## **Polish political freedom and the nation's republican and democratic experiences**

The rules and limits of freedom. Poland – or, more precisely, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – has a long republican tradition dating back to the fifteenth century. At the end of the fifteenth century, a national parliament was formed, dominated by the Polish gentry, which, as early as 1505, assumed supreme power in Poland. By 1573, we see the remarkable phenomenon in Poland of free elections of kings by the gentry.

This republican tradition, however, is not without a darker narrative as well. The system was effective until the first half of the seventeenth century. It was then confronted with, and undermined by, the rising strength of neighboring absolutist countries, as well as by the class egoism then prevalent in the gentry (*liberum veto*).

Fortunately, the eighteenth century witnessed new reforms, culminating in the grand triumph of May 3rd, 1791, when the new Constitution came into being. Widely regarded as the first modern constitution in Europe, this crown jewel of Polish democracy did not prevent the tragic partitions of the nation at the end of the eighteenth century.

Broadly speaking, the quest for the direct experience of freedom in Poland has spanned many eras, many dilemmas, many landscapes of Polish history: the struggle against the partition powers; the dilemma of whether to take up arms in insurrection, or pursue legal channels of opposition; the potent, courageous, underground movement during World War II, also known as the Secret State; the civic and anti-communist Solidarity movement. Nor, as we look at recent Polish history, can the critical role played by Pope John Paul II in this movement, and in the democracy-building process in Poland and Central Europe, go unacknowledged.

## **Multinational and multiethnic heritage as a source of identity**

As far in the distant past as the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Poland has been a country welcoming significant immigration. People of Jewish and German origins arrived to comprise large portions of the populations of cities. Marriages of family members in the Piast dynasty and unions with Lithuania spanning large territories of Eastern Europe led to a Polish Commonwealth populated not only by Poles but by Ruthenians (today Belarusians and Ukrainians), Lithuanians and many smaller ethnic groups (Armenians, Tartars, Dutch). Ethnic diversity also accompanied confessional differences – Orthodox, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and Catholics of Eastern liturgy (Greek, Armenian) – all became significant contributors to the population. Until the seventeenth century, it is important to note that the Commonwealth,

undeniably, stood proudly as one of the most tolerant nations of Europe, where people of disparate ethnic origins and religious faiths could find not only a home but a safe haven.

Prominent in this safe haven was the largest Jewish community in the world, one accorded – and cherishing – the privilege of what was largely self-governance. A magnificent monument from this era was the Warsaw Confederation of 1573, in which religious freedom among the gentry of diverse Christian confessions was guaranteed.

Sadly, the unprecedented religious tolerance of this high order was undermined in the second half of the seventeenth century, when political turbulence and destabilizing wars ushered in ethnic and religious tensions not previously seen. Still, a remarkably high level of ethnic and religious tolerance helped to preserve the social order in the territories of the old Commonwealth until World War II.

But there were rents in the Polish social fabric. As the tide of nationalistic fervor rose in Poland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so did tensions between Poles and other nations and ethnic groups. In the Second Republic (1918-1939), ethnic tensions precipitated strong frictions, particularly in the intersections with Jews and Ukrainians as the Polish Republic confronted the looming shadows to either side of it of Joseph Stalin and Adolph Hitler.

With World War II and the “cleansings” perpetrated by German Nazis, Soviets, and the Ukrainian nationalist resistance (UPA), the stage was set for tragedy and overflowed with blood. We will not conceal the fact that a large part of the Polish Christian population remained indifferent vis-a-vis Holocaust and some even collaborated with the Nazis in criminal work. We intend also to pay tribute to those who had the courage to resist. War and the deaths of millions of Polish citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish in equal measure, brought a tragic end, as well, not only to simmering ethnic conflicts but to political and social opportunities to settle differences peacefully between Poles and their compatriots or neighbors.

## **Man and Civilization**

The third line of the museum focuses on the impact of progress on society. By progress we mean advances and innovations in civilization, accomplished in part through the application of science in technology. How, we want to know, have technology and science impacted social change? And how have the lives of ordinary people changed, as a result, throughout the ages? By examining such advances as the revolutionary discoveries of Copernicus, the printing press, the steam engine, the television, the computer – all milestones of human history – we can begin to fathom the power of the embodied idea, the conceptual made actual, in civilization as it has evolved. At the same time, we link the history of Poland with the history of the world itself.

## **Representation of History in a Contemporary Museum**

Make no mistake: To create a museum devoted to history in a democratic society is no small undertaking. Sensitivities abound, to which a museum must be highly attuned, and which it must accord a full measure of respect and attention. In a democratic society, history – or, more specifically – the collective social memory of history – teems inevitably with conflict, with widely divergent points of view, and of necessity requires negotiation among disparate political groups and lobbies. Therefore it is crucial for a museum as an institution with its doors wide open to all

aspects of our Polish heritage, to abide by rules that welcome a broad spectrum of viewpoints – even those suspicious about the very concept of a national tradition.

1. In the very beginning, the museum confronted a range of questions and doubts, some from the media, others from academic circles. Concerns of this sort are understandable. In response, the museum prepared its program in an open way, consulting with leading scholars and welcoming to its supervisory body people from diverse academic, social and political circles.
2. An important element of the museum's strategy was to create exhibitions, as well as educational and scientific projects, that foreshadowed future realizations of the permanent exhibition, together with the museum's activities. As time passed, virtually all influential media, of diverse political orientation, came to respect, and willingly embraced, the main ideas and directions set out by the museum.
3. The historian is not a judge. The mission of a museum of history is to deepen the level of debate, to invite people to conduct broad dialogue. Many debates on the meaning and truth, of history cannot have final answers, and we should not pretend to have them. To be sure, we cannot ignore difficult topics; but this does not mean that answers will be forthcoming for every question. In our exhibitions at the museum, our goal is for our visitors not only to absorb what the exhibitions have to offer them, but to draw their own conclusions.
4. There is a delicate relationship between the role of museum curator, on the one hand, and that of historian, on the other. Creating an exhibition cannot be equated with writing an academic dissertation. Certainly an exhibition creator must respect historical findings, but building an exhibition is not an exact science. It is an act of creation, creation of sense and sensibility based on the work of scientists, but also governed by the rules of the arts. Building a narrative, tracing the ebb and flow of emotion, engendering new ideas that sometimes go beyond, even transcend, traditional interpretations – these all spring from the province of the artist. Ultimately, a museum of history should be an intriguing guide to our past that can help us frame the questions and sometimes, in some measure, help to answer them.

So what, in the end, do we at the museum – in partnership with our visitors – aspire to do? The answer is a set of active verbs. We aspire, first of all, to recollect. To recollect obvious facts, yes – but also to recollect the nuances, the subtleties of the past, that perhaps, heretofore, have been neglected. We aspire, in equal measure, to surprise our visitors by showing them something in our history they did not anticipate. When a person is surprised, the world expands; the horizon widens.

This element of surprise must also be coupled with the experience of building associations. Thus we also aspire to help our visitors build associations as they travel, through space in time, among the exhibitions. Sometimes, that building experience will pass through shame. Sometimes, it will walk the path of pride. These are the emotional fruits of a truthful encounter with history.

But always we aspire to engage our visitor fully. To expand awareness. To invite him or her to become the active verb of living interaction with the living past. For it is true that “the past is never past.” We are alive in it. And the past is alive in us.

The experience of the twentieth century in Poland brought home to the Polish people just how important history is for us, for our identity and for democracy. No museum, or any other institution, has the right to formulate a complete and closed vision of the past. Our task is far too vital to make that mistake. But, by the same token, we should never shrink from the responsibility of being interpreters of history, nor allow the understandable anxiety that responsibility entails to diminish the power of good ideas, of muscular and creative interpretations. Inevitably, a new generation beyond our era will re-examine our vision. That is as it should be. That is their right, their obligation even. In our own moment, we welcome our own grand opportunity to explore the past, to help people of all backgrounds discover history, to make from their encounter with history something dynamic and transformative in their intellectual life, and in the intellectual debate of the nation. That is our right, while we live, and our obligation.



## **The All-too-brief Existence of the Maison de l'Histoire de France: a Wasted Opportunity**

Etienne François (Professor Emeritus of History at the Free University of  
Berlin and the University of Paris-I (Panthéon-Sorbonne))

### **Abstract**

Launched during the 2007 Presidential campaign by Nicolas Sarkozy, then candidate, the project of creating a museum of French history, after tentative beginnings, started 2010 taking on a more definitive shape. A scientific advisory committee worked on defining its profile and the new institution was set up in Paris in January 2012. But its existence was short due to the fact that the new political majority decided, after having won the Presidential and legislative elections in the Spring of 2012, to shut the project down. Where did the idea of a « Maison de l'Histoire de France » come from ? Which debates did the project arouse ? Which orientations were drafted by the scientific committee ? How can one explain the sudden decision to close the project down ? Those are the questions addressed in this paper.

## A hesitant start to a political project

The Maison de l'Histoire de France (House of French History) was first mentioned by presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy during the spring 2007 election campaign, set as a goal of his new government in autumn of the same year, following his election as president, and officially established as a 'public institution' by decree on 22 December 2011, but had its existence suddenly cut short following the change in presidential and parliamentary majorities in spring 2012. Its dissolution was announced in August 2012 and the official decision was published the 24th of December.

What prompted the French Presidency to launch the plan for a Maison de l'Histoire de France? How did it gradually progress from a plan to initial implementation? How did people view and receive this new plan? Why was it necessary to wait four years between the initial decision and the official establishment of the new institution? Lastly, why was the institution closed down so soon after its creation? These are the questions that this short article seeks to answer.

Similar to the project to create a 'German Historical Museum', launched by Chancellor Helmut Kohl immediately after he came to power, with the museum being established in 1987, and the project for a museum about the Warsaw uprising of 1944, promoted by the Polish President, Lech Kaczyński, with the museum opening in 2004, the project to create a Maison de l'Histoire de France was, like all initiatives of this kind, highly political.

It is therefore no surprise that it made its first appearance during the presidential election campaign in spring 2007. During that election campaign, which was marked by the clash between Nicolas Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal, the topic of national identity, the exaltation of patriotism and references to history were of central importance, as is often the case in France, and the two candidates vied with each other in this arena, which is as sensitive as it is inspiring. It was against this background that a cultural heritage official at the Ministry of Defence, Hervé Lemoine, took the initiative to write to Nicolas Sarkozy's campaign team and suggest that he create a museum or house of French history. In the final weeks of the election campaign, the team reconsidered this suggestion and publicly announced it as one of the future presidency's 'major projects'. Once the elections (presidential and legislative) were over and the new government had been formed, a mission statement sent jointly on 20 November 2007 to the Minister for Culture and Communication, Christine Albanel, and to the Minister for Defence, Hervé Morin, entrusted them with the task of devising 'the project to create a centre for research and permanent collections devoted to the civil and military history of France'. Unsurprisingly, this task was immediately assigned to the person who had come up with the original idea, Hervé Lemoine.

This was followed in subsequent years by a series of reports, public announcements and decisions which gradually fleshed out the project. Following the first report requested from Hervé Lemoine and submitted to the Minister for Culture and Communication and the Minister for Defence in April 2008, a second report was commissioned at the start of 2009 on the possible sites for the new institution. This report was entrusted to a specialist in contemporary history, Jean-Pierre Rioux, chosen because of his multiple skills: in addition to his main specialism and the duties he had performed at the French Institute of Contemporary History, Jean-Pierre Rioux is also founder of the journal *Vingtième Siècle*, which from the start established itself as one of the leading historical journals in France and abroad, the author of authoritative essays on the relationship between the French and its past and, furthermore, for several years he was Inspector

General for History at the Ministry of National Education, a strategic position which placed him at the interface between research, the world of teaching and education policy. This second report, presented in May 2009, suggested five sites that could potentially house the new institution: the Hôtel des Invalides, the Palais de Chaillot, the Grand Palais, the Château de Vincennes and the Château de Fontainebleau. Moreover, it proposed that the new institution be called ‘House’ to better emphasise that it was intended to be a place for collective history, not official history. Finally, after Christine Albanel was replaced by Frédéric Mitterrand at the Ministry of Culture and Communication in June 2009, a third report was commissioned from Jean-François Hébert, a senior official who had held several positions of responsibility at the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Culture and Communication, as well as being President of the Château de Fontainebleau, a public institution. Submitted in April 2010, this final report, entitled ‘Decision factors for the Maison de l’Histoire de France’, envisaged an *ex nihilo* site for the new institution on the Île Seguin (former site of the Renault factories at Boulogne–Billancourt). It also proposed including the new institution in a network of nine art and history museums overseen by the Ministry of Culture and Communication (Musée des Eyzies-de-Tayac for prehistory, Hôtel de Cluny for the Middle Ages, Musée d’Ecouen for the Renaissance and so on).

As this series of reports was being produced, the office of the President and the Ministry of Culture and Communication were beginning to define the contours of the future institution. The first important date in this respect was 13 January 2009. In his New Year wishes to representatives from the world of culture in Nîmes, the President publicly announced the ‘creation of a museum of French history’. One year later, on the same occasion, he confirmed this creation in a speech given at the City of Music in Paris, adding that its location would be decided soon. Finally, on 12 September, Nicolas Sarkozy announced that the future Maison de l’Histoire de France would be located in Paris itself, on the Rohan–Soubise site, in the heart of the Marais district. It was to share the same premises as the Public Records Office and would take over the buildings vacated following the transfer of public records dating from after the French Revolution to the new site being completed at Pierrefite-sur-Seine. For its part, in March 2010, the Ministry of Culture and Communication appointed Jean-François Hébert as President of a ‘pre-launch association’, a small body (having only four members at the end of 2010) tasked with shaping the future public institution.

Two aspects emerge from this brief rundown of the background to the Maison de l’Histoire de France: it was, above all, a presidential project. Although not originating from the President of the Republic himself, it did come from his inner circle, so in this regard it was similar to the ‘major projects’ launched by former French presidents (the Pompidou Centre, François Mitterrand Library and Quai Branly Museum). However, unlike these major projects, which were the result of constant effort and strong commitment on the part of the presidents concerned, the project for the Maison de l’Histoire de France appeared uncertain, struggled to define its identity and only received sporadic attention on the part of the French President.

## **A predominantly negative reception**

From the start, and increasingly as it progressed and as the President spoke in its favour, the project to establish a ‘Museum’ and then a ‘House’ of French history sparked intense debate and heated controversy among the public, particularly among historians. Formulated early on, then clarified over the years, the vast majority of positions taken were critical. Widely relayed by the

press and electronic media, both in France and abroad, they became progressively more radical and entrenched.

An initial body of criticism denounced the retrograde, insular and therefore dangerous nature of an unacceptable project. Why have a museum dedicated to national history when the focus was now, more than ever, on Europe and globalisation? Why have a museum putting forward a necessarily simplistic and static view of French history, when historical research was constantly evolving and had already dismantled the idea of an idealised, patriotic view of French history a long time earlier? How could collections equal to the project's ambitions be put together when France already had a huge number of history museums? Lastly, how could one avoid political exploitation by the powers that be? These objections — which in many respects were (unwittingly) reminiscent of those raised following Chancellor Helmut Kohl's announcement of his intention to create a 'German Historical Museum' in West Berlin — received all the more attention as they were voiced by a number of internationally renowned historians, including Arlette Farge, Jacques Le Goff, Daniel Roche, Christophe Charle and Roger Chartier, but also by several self-nominated representatives of a new generation like Isabelle Backouche, Vincent Duclert and Nicolas Offenstadt (the latter was the most extreme of them all in his rejection of the project).

A second body of objections questioned the intrusion, deemed unacceptable, of political power (more precisely of the office of the President of the Republic) into an area outside its competence, for reasons which moreover were mainly ideological and party political. This was the stance taken in particular by Pierre Nora, who a few years earlier had fought political interference in historical research in the form of the so called 'lois mémorielles' (laws about the right interpretation of the past), and had founded the 'Liberté pour l'Histoire' (Freedom for History) association to combat this danger. While acknowledging that questioning the construction, evolution and current state of national identity was relevant, Pierre Nora believed that direct intervention by politicians, with the political ulterior motives behind it (the Presidency of the Republic and the majority at the time had made the active restoration of national identity one of their political priorities), constituted an 'original sin' for the Maison de l'Histoire de France, something which it would never manage to cast off and which would deprive the project of all legitimacy from the start.

The third body of objections concerned the choices made by politicians, in particular, the decision imposed in an authoritarian way, with no prior consultation, to house the future Maison de l'Histoire de France on the site of the Public Records Office. This was the position expressed in particular by the majority of Public Records Office staff, which led to an open dispute with the Ministry of Culture and Communication and to the sudden ousting in February 2011 of the Director of the Public Records Office, who had made no secret of her sympathy for the protesters.

This criticism, voiced repeatedly and widely by historians, but also by the public, dominated the debate from the start. Many attempts were made to establish dialogue between the opponents and supporters of the project, and when Frédéric Mitterrand was appointed Minister for Culture and Communication, in June 2009, his first concern was to seek contact with the critics in order to gain a better understanding of their reasons and to take them into account. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the balance of power between supporters and opponents of the project has always remained deeply asymmetric. The feeling that the real motive behind this initiative was



economic and political, in the negative sense of the word, continued to prevail, and the arguments in favour of the Maison de l'Histoire de France never managed to seriously counterbalance those of its opponents, let alone gain the upper hand.

### **A late but promising start**

After this long phase of reflection and uncertainty, while debates and controversies were still raging, work finally began to set up the Maison de l'Histoire de France. This work was done very discreetly, with the creation in March 2010 of a pre-launch association led by Jean-François Hébert. Its intention was to prepare for the creation, planned for 2012, of a 'public institution', namely a permanent body, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Communication. At its inception, the association, located within the premises of the Public Records Office, only had two members: Jean-François Hébert (who kept his responsibilities at Fontainebleau) and Charles Personnaz (historian, senior official, Secretary-General of the 'Musées de France' national museum network and cosignatory, together with Hervé Lemoine, of the letter sent to Nicolas Sarkozy's campaign team in spring 2007) who carried out the actual work. Later, this small, young and active body, which comprised historians as well as museum and media experts, was strengthened by new recruits: it had 4 members in January 2011 and 10 members in December of the same year.

Once the pre-launch association had been set up at its premises, the second stage was to establish a scientific steering committee. The Minister for Culture and Communication, Frédéric Mitterrand, strongly backed the creation of this committee, which was entrusted to Jean-Pierre Rioux, in conjunction with the Ministry. Placed under the honorary chairmanship of Jean Favier, a medievalist historian, former Director of the Public Records Office and former President of the National Library of France, and under the chairmanship of Jean-Pierre Rioux, this committee had 20 members, both French and foreign, with varied and complementary skills (historians, museum curators, archivists, publishers and so on), who 'represented historical fields and disciplines'. Officially set up on 13 January 2011, the Ministry tasked this committee with 'drawing up and defining the heart of the project'. In my dual capacity as a German historian living and working in Germany for 20 years, but also as Vice-Chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the German Historical Museum, I was fortunate enough to serve on this committee. I am keen to stress that, thanks to the judicious choices made regarding the composition of this committee, the efficiency and professionalism of Jean-Pierre Rioux's collegial leadership, the perfect complementarity between our committee and the pre-launch association, and lastly the total freedom with which we were able to pursue our work (we were never subject to any political interference or orders whatsoever and we were shown complete trust), the work done by this committee was extraordinary. Each one of us gave his or her best, driven by the same desire to meet the challenge of designing a new institution that responded to present and future issues in the best way possible, and that was also a genuine public service institution.

In order to develop the project for the Maison de l'Histoire de France, we worked in two stages. The first part of 2011 was devoted to drawing up a 'preliminary project'. Ad hoc working group meetings, plenary committee sittings and summarising and drafting tasks carried out by Jean-Pierre Rioux led to this preliminary project being submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Communication in June 2011. This 71-page document was then the subject of a wide consultation exercise: 1 700 copies were produced and sent to a broad sample of individuals from

cultural and scientific fields, in France and abroad, who were qualified to appraise it, as well as being posted online. Between the end of September and the end of November, seven regional meetings were scheduled in Paris and elsewhere in France (Lyon, Marseilles, Toulouse, Rennes, Lille and Strasbourg). For each meeting, several hundred invitations were sent out, based mainly on the Regional Directorates of Cultural Affairs networks. Other meetings were organised in response to requests: they were therefore held with the heads of departmental archives, during the 'Encounters with History' festival in Blois, at the Pessac Historical Film Festival and with the management of the Public Records Office and of the French National Archives. Attendance at these debates by state school teachers, academics and researchers was poor, many of them not wishing to give the impression of being involved in a project considered to be too political. There was, however, much greater participation from the world of culture, museums, archives and conservation, and more generally among those responsible for, and involved in, the country's '1 000 historical and heritage sites'. A vast partnership and exchange network was thereby gradually created, which allowed both the association and the scientific committee to better gauge local expectations of the Maison de l'Histoire de France in the world of culture and research. Profitable partnerships were also formed with the world of historical research, in France and abroad, as well as with major institutions that support research (French National Centre for Scientific Research and the French National Research Agency).

As of autumn 2011, the many contacts and exchanges we had in numerous areas enabled us to go back to the text of the preliminary project and improve and supplement it, in particular drawing on the criticisms and suggestions we had received from France and abroad. The resulting 'Project for the Maison de l'Histoire de France' was submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Communication on 10 January 2012 and was made public on 27 January 2012. This document was shorter than the preliminary project (at only 40 pages long) and set seven goals for the Maison de l'Histoire de France: 'to provide digital historical resources that would meet the historiographical and technological challenges of the 21st century; to create a permanent, evolving time gallery illustrating the history of France with a chronological backbone and "snapshots of history"; to host exhibitions and temporary events on aspects of French history, enabling visitors to see and understand by implementing scientific approaches, appropriate methods and resources; to formulate major historical themes and topics likely to enthuse the public, to be covered in programmes of events on an annual or biennial basis; to help showcase historical research on an ongoing basis; to implement regional, national and international partnerships with public cultural and scientific institutions of all kinds; to accommodate all audiences, with special consideration for children and young people, history lovers, education professionals, associations and foreign tourists'. In short: an ambitious, multi-dimensional programme aiming to make the Maison de l'Histoire de France 'a home for everyone, a forum for documentation, reflection and debate, the audiences and cultural and civic usefulness of which are based on the strength of its offering and its partnerships'.

The third stage, which was under way while the project for the Maison de l'Histoire de France was being drawn up, consisted of preparing the legal and financial aspects of the public institution, due to take over from the pre-launch association in January 2012. Presented to and discussed by the Cabinet on 21 December 2011, the decree officially establishing the Maison de l'Histoire de France, in the form of a 'public administrative institution' under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Communication, was issued the next day, 22 December 2011. This

decree confirmed that the Maison de l'Histoire de France was to be established at the site of the Public Records Office and appointed Maryvonne de Saint-Pulgent as its president. A Councillor of State, former Director of Heritage at the Ministry of Culture and Communication, Ms de Saint-Pulgent, although not a historian, was chosen for her strength of character, her reputation for independent thinking, but also for her wide range of skills (at that time she was Chair of the Ministry's Committee for History, a member of the board of directors of the Orsay Museum and of the French National Centre of Cinematography and the Moving Image, but also President of the French National Geographical Institute and Chair of the Board of Directors of the French National Theatre of Opéra Comique). Shortly afterwards, a board of directors was formed for the new institution which included figures such as Krzysztof Pomian, Régis Debray, Elie Barnavi and Leïla Sebbar, while the scientific steering committee became its scientific advisory committee.

Lastly, to publicly mark the creation of the Maison de l'Histoire de France (prior to its official opening scheduled for 2015), a temporary exhibition with the potential to attract visitors of all kinds and to inform the public of the fledgling project took place between mid-January and mid-February 2012. Organised in partnership with the French National Museums Authority and the Museum of Military Scale Models, this exhibition was held at the Grand Palais. Making use of the extraordinary resources of the Museum of Military Scale Models — to be specific, a number of scale models of border towns made between the end of the 17th century and the middle of the 19th century — it highlighted the fact that far from being an unchanging constant, France, as a territory, has been built over the centuries for predominantly political and strategic reasons, and that its borders have also evolved over time. As a foretaste of what the Maison de l'Histoire de France proposed to do later on, this first exhibition was a resounding success with the public, attracting 140 000 visitors.

### **Rapid closure without appeal**

The election campaign at the start of 2012, the election of François Hollande as President in May 2012, followed by the victory of the Socialist Party in the legislative elections in June 2012, initially led to all new initiatives being suspended and then to a period of uncertainty. François Hollande had been expressing his concerns since August 2011: 'A great museum of French history is a wonderful idea', he wrote, adding: 'The Maison de l'Histoire de France, administratively improvised, created by an act of government with no consultation or consideration, refusing to take into account advances in research and the doubts expressed by its various audiences, is a project that does not live up to the expectations for France's great cultural initiatives.' In October of the same year, the Socialist Party confirmed its opposition to the Maison de l'Histoire de France. Opponents of the project took advantage of the election campaign to reassert and entrench their positions and to have their countless supporters in the Socialist Party and left-wing organisations endorse their arguments.

Shortly after her appointment as the new Minister for Culture and Communication, Aurélie Filipetti, who had never hidden her hostility to the project for the Maison de l'Histoire de France, decided to halt all the planned work in the middle of July 2012. Using as an argument the additional expense that setting up the Maison de l'Histoire de France would have entailed (there were rumours of a provisional budget of EUR 80 million) while France's public finances were in dire straits, she announced, one month later, that she was bringing the project to an end, that there would be no budget for 2013 and that all its staff would be swiftly redeployed. As a result,

Maryvonne de Saint-Pulgent resigned from her position on 30 September 2012, returning to the Council of State.

The project for the Maison de l'Histoire de France therefore sank without trace, together with all the future initiatives it had started to prepare. It must be acknowledged that there were no protests over its closure. What was this failure down to and what are the reasons behind it?

The first reason is clearly political in nature. Presented to the public in the context of the 2007 presidential campaign and advanced on several occasions by President Sarkozy himself as a project that he 'strongly desired', much of the public identified the project for the Maison de l'Histoire de France, from start to end, with Nicolas Sarkozy himself and with his government's ideas and methods, thereby giving rise to profound reservations, even a categorical opposition, among his opponents.

The second reason is that the very circumstances in which the project was gradually developed increased initial fears instead of dispelling them. The dithering of the first few years, the relaunch of the project in the context of the policy to restore 'national identity' promoted by Eric Besson, Minister for Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Cooperative Development, the authoritarianism perceived both in the decision to set up the Maison de l'Histoire de France on the Rohan-Soubise site and in the dismissal of Isabelle Neuschwander, Director of the Public Records Office, in February 2011, all served to undermine the legitimacy of the project for the Maison de l'Histoire de France by giving it a partisan, political connotation.

The third reason is due to the timing. Despite the efforts of the pre-launch association and the scientific steering committee to make the project for the Maison de l'Histoire de France an ambitious, consensual, outward- and forward-looking project, meeting expectations and current needs, these efforts came too late to be clearly perceived on the outside and to win over to the project, if not those who opposed it on principle, at least those who had their doubts as to whether it could be put on the right path. The institution only began to really take shape at the beginning of 2012, against a background where the election campaign had assumed such vital importance that it was almost impossible to escape from it. As far as I am concerned, I am convinced that if the presidential and legislative elections had not taken place in 2012, but instead in 2014, thereby giving the Maison de l'Histoire de France the time to prove itself, things would have turned out differently.

Finally, although they are less important, two reasons cannot fail to be mentioned. The first one is an ideological, and partly, a political reason. The new Minister for Culture and her advisors wanted to close, as soon as possible, a project perceived as an emblematic initiative of the Right. The second is a financial one. The implementation costs of the new institution would have been quite high and difficult to justify in a context of increasing public debts.

\* \* \*

Having taken an active part in defining the project for the Maison de l'Histoire de France, personally, I am sorry that the current political majority took this decision. I am certainly not calling it into question: the new majority was democratically elected and I fully understand that, taking into account the financial circumstances, but also the controversy that accompanied the entire history of the Maison de l'Histoire de France, the current government decided to end the

experiment. However, that does not stop me thinking that it was a wasted opportunity. In contemporary French society, which is divided, uncertain of its future and faced with the dual challenge of European integration and globalisation, a forum for discussion and debate on the place of the past in the present could have played an essential educational, civic and political role. In fact, a large number of inhabitants of France (either French citizens or not) have great difficulties to come to terms with the French history. France is by no means the only country where the project for a museum or house of national history has failed; the same happened in the Netherlands and Austria. I would, however, have preferred to see my country follow the example of Germany, Canada or Australia.



## Notes on Authors

**Peter Aronsson** is PhD in history, Lunds University 1992. He currently holds a position as professor in history at Linneaus University. In recent years he has been co-ordinating several international projects exploring the uses of the past in National Museums and participating in a large project on historical consciousness, exploring the general concept of history. See, [www.nordicspaces.eu](http://www.nordicspaces.eu), [www.eunamus.eu](http://www.eunamus.eu), [www.histcon.se](http://www.histcon.se). Among his recent publications are together with Simon Knell and A. Amundsen, (eds). *National Museums. Studies from around the World*. (London: Routledge, 2010); "National cultural heritage - Nordic cultural memory: negotiating politics, identity and knowledge." *Transnationale Erinnerungsorte: Nord- und Südeuropäische Perspektiven* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2009) "The Image of the Peasant within National Museums in the Nordic Countries." *Societal change and ideological formation among the rural population of the baltic area 1880-1939* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2008).

**Bodil Axelsson** was between Jan 2010 and Jan 2013 assistant coordinator and dissemination manager in the Eunamus project. She holds a PhD in communication. She does research in the intersections of heritage studies; museum studies; participation and digital technologies; participation and aesthetic practices; media pedagogy and education. She is currently employed as a lecturer at Linköping University and acts as managing director for ACSIS (Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden).

**Rosmarie Beier-de Haan** is a director of collections and exhibition curator at the German Historical Museum, Berlin, and Honorary Professor of Modern History at the Freie Universität Berlin and at the Technische Universität Berlin. She has been a board member of international committees for museums as well as of international scholarship programmes. Her main areas of interest and research are reflected in her many exhibitions on the history of culture and mentalities as well as in her numerous publications in this field and on the theory and practice of historical museums and the culture of memory.

**Christine Dupont** is an Historian-curator to the Academic Project team of the HEH. She holds a PhD in history (European University Institute, Florence). From 2002 till 2010 she was the curator of the Brussels Museum for Labour and Industry (La Fonderie). As a researcher specialised in the cultural history of the 19th Century she is a scientific collaborator at the Université Libre de Bruxelles.

**Etienne François** is Professor Emeritus of History at the Free University of Berlin and the University of Paris-I (Panthéon-Sorbonne) and was until 2008 Director of the Centre for French Studies at the Free University of Berlin. His research focuses on German, French and European early modern and modern history. His special fields of interest are comparative history, transfer studies and the history of memory. His latest publications include *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, ed. with Hagen Schulze, 3 vols, Beck, Munich 2001 ; *Mémoires allemandes*, ed. with Hagen Schulze,

Gallimard, Paris 2007, and *War Memories. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in Modern European Culture*, ed. with Alan Forrest and Karen Hagemann, Palgrave Macmillan, Routledge 2012.

**Marianthi Kopellou** is Archaeologist, M.A Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) and the accredited assistant by Member of the European Parliament to Prof. Dr. Chrysoula Paliadeli.

**Chantal Kesteloot** is doctor in contemporary history at the Free University of Brussels (ULB) where she obtained her doctoral thesis in 2001 on the Walloon movement and Brussels from 1912 to 1965. She has joined the permanent team of the CEGES-SOMA in 1992. She is currently in charge of the sector public history as well as chief editor of the *Journal of Belgian History*. Her main areas of interest are the history of the Walloon movement; the question of Brussels, memory of the war and Belgian history; issues of nationalism and national identities. She was a member of the Steering Committee of the project of the European Science Foundation “Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in Europe (NHIST, 2003-2008)”. Since 2010, she is secretary general of the by International Committee of the History of the Second World War.

**Robert Kostro** is a historian and the founding director of the Polish History Museum, Warsaw. He worked as journalist, as prime minister (Jerzy Buzek) foreign affairs adviser, as the head of the Cabinet of the Minister of Culture (Kazimierz M. Ujazdowski), as the deputy director of the Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, and a member of various management and advisory bodies in cultural institutions including the board of trustees of the Royal Castle Museum in Warsaw. He published essays and articles on history and social memory in leading Polish intellectual periodicals and newspapers, including *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

**Chrysoula Paliadeli** is professor of Classical Archaeology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) and member of the European Parliament.

**Dr. Martin R. Schärer** is historian and museologist. From 1973 to 1979 he was scientific collaborator of the Swiss National Museum in Zurich, then he participated in the creation of a new interdisciplinary museum on food (Alimentarium) in Vevey, and was the director of this museum until 2010. He has also held different international mandates such as president of ICOM's International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM), vice-president of ICOM (International Council of Museums), and President of ICOM's Ethics Committee (since 2012). He is a lecturer of museology, and the author of a book on exhibition theory and of many articles on museology and food history.

**Taja Vovk-van Gaal** is the Director of the Academic Project Team of the HEH. She is an Historian, Sociologist and Museum Counsellor. She graduated in 1979 from the University in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and trained and worked as a curator for Contemporary History. Training and experience in Cultural and Project management. As a Director of the City Museum of Ljubljana, Slovenia, she led the biggest investment in cultural projects in the city with the renovation of a museum-palace as well as the preparation of its permanent exhibition. The author/curator of many exhibitions and articles, a member of the board of a number of professional national and



international organisations, from 2006 till 2010, she was Head of Support in the European Cultural Foundation. From 1999 to 2011, she was a judge and the Chair for European Museum of the Year Award, a member of the Board of Trustees of the European Museum Forum and of Europeana.





All over Europe, the founding of new history museums brings to the fore questions as to which stories should be told, which objects should be put on display, for what audiences and with what results and future possibilities. This collection of papers brings together reflections on the nature and roles of history museums on a general level with reports from case studies in Brussels, Berlin, Warsaw and Paris. The cases dwell on the challenges and negotiations of collections, communities and citizenship that arise when polities create new museums. How to balance political and intellectual concerns? The report starts out with the intersection between policy and research, including interventions from the European Commission and reflections on the balancing acts involved in producing research with policy relevance. The conference and the report were co-produced by EuNaMus and the House of European History.

The conference proceedings are produced within the three-year research programme EuNaMus – European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, coordinated at Tema Q at Linköping University ([www.eunamus.eu](http://www.eunamus.eu)). EuNaMus explores the creation and power of the heritage created and presented by European national museums to the world, Europe and its states, as an unsurpassable institution in contemporary society. National museums are defined and explored as processes of institutionalized negotiations where material collections and displays make claims and are recognized as articulating and representing national values and realities. Questions asked in the project are why, by whom, when, with what material, with what result and future possibilities are this museums shaped.

Linköping Electronic Conference Proceedings, No. 83  
Linköping University Electronic Press

Linköping, Sweden, 2012

ISSN: 1650-3686

eISSN: 1650-3740

URL: [http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp\\_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083)

