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

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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 50th 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)

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

funders, 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:

European Policy Settings ⟷ National Policy Settings

Dissemination

Museum Professionals ⟷ Academy
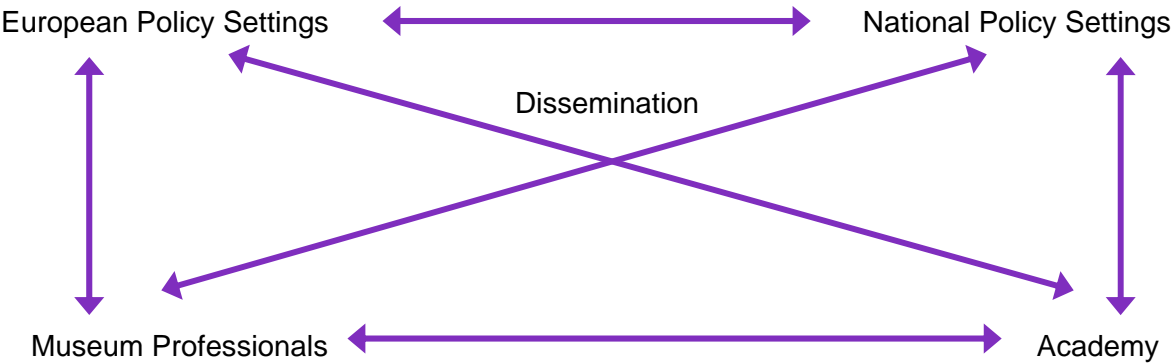
Eunamus' field of policy-making is here depicted as a square figure with dissemination at its heart. The arrows reaching out from the centre refer to both the interactions between stakeholders, and the need for dissemination that reaches out to all four corners to understand their respective agendas. 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".[1]

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 Paliadeli 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 Paliadeli 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. Paliadeli 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.[2] 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

[1]   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.** 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. Last visited 2012.12.19.

[2]   It is impossible to give a global overview of all the works published on this topic. To mention a few, the publications of Eric Hobsbawn, 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.

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