

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

REGION, MEMORY AND AGENCY IN EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE

Bristol (UK), 1-4 September 2010

Convened by:

Dr. Raingard Esser and Professor Steven Ellis

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

1. Executive Summary

The workshop brought together scholars from the following academic fields: History, Geography, Architecture, Heritage Studies, Cultural Studies, Modern Languages and Area Studies and Musicology. The team also included specialists in other academic-related areas such as Archive Services. The nineteen invited participants from eleven European countries were at different stages of their academic careers with a significant proportion of PhD students (five) and a number of well-established experts in their fields. The team also profited from discussions with ESF rapporteur Professor Ruta Marcinkeviciene and from the expertise of the curatorial team of the new Museum of Bristol, M-shed, led by Ray Barnett, who hosted a site visit to the museum in Bristol's city centre. The workshop was held at the University of the West of England, Bristol, and was based on group sessions, presentations of pre-circulated brief papers and discussions. It included an afternoon visit to the M-shed with a guided tour around the new museum and an extensive question-and-answer session with the curatorial team.

The east-west comparison of regionality and its agency in the extended European Union, which had been at the starting point of the investigation, was reflected in the geographical distribution of the participants: five scholars came from Eastern Europe, six academics are based in Western Europe (of whom one, Professor Milos Reznik, TU Chemnitz, specialises in Eastern European History), two participants came from Nordic countries (Norway and Finland respectively). Five colleagues are based in the UK.

We think it is fair to say, that the workshop took place in a collaborative, engaged and very friendly atmosphere. Communication and exchange of ideas was further facilitated by accommodation arrangements which enabled colleagues to continue debates over a glass of wine in the common room of the Halls of Residence at St. Matthias Campus booked for this occasion. The close vicinity of the halls, catering facilities on site and the workshop rooms was certainly a bonus and allowed for greater focus on the task at hand.

The introductory paper set the agenda for the meeting and presented approaches to the topic. Working groups (with an international, interdisciplinary composition) then discussed regionality and agency in European comparison. Findings of the working groups were brought together in the plenum where the question of a "new regionalism" based on economic, cultural and institutional markers was identified as a common theme. While the constructed nature of regional identity has become somewhat of a common

place in regional research, questions about agency and the role of mediators of a regional agenda still need to be addressed. Important topics in this context were identified as the role of regional identity and globalization, heritage and government policy, minorities and representation, borders and regionality. The analysis of the different agents of identity also raised the question of the position of academic historians in this context. The role of the academic as facilitator, critical commentator, indifferent spectator or other was frequently discussed throughout the workshop. In this context, it was particularly helpful that a number of academic historians acted as consultants to museums and heritage projects and also had first-hand experiences with the organization of exhibitions. It was this bridge between practitioners and academics, which became one of the key themes of the workshop. This point was further explored at the visit to the M-shed at Bristol's harbour side, where participants had the opportunity to discuss the practicalities of setting up a museum for the people of Bristol with those in charge of the project. Workshop participants then had a chance to explore the tangible history of Bristol through a guided tour by one of the workshop members with an intimate knowledge of Bristol's past and present. It was particularly helpful in this context to connect the virtual world of the museum with the architectural heritage of the city outside the confines of the M-shed.

Much of the third day was devoted to planning strategies for future initiatives. It was agreed that there is still a disconnect between academics and other mediators of regional memory, which needs to be addressed. A way forward would be to further explore this agenda by providing a platform for dialogue between the different agents of regional memory and to devise policy documents on how to communicate academic research more effectively in the public arena. It was suggested to apply for an ESF Conference Grant. A grant application, which was submitted for the deadline of 15 September has been deemed eligible and is awaiting further scrutiny by the ESF Scientific Committee in early 2011. It was also agreed to seek publication of the conference papers. The organizers have approached the international journal "European Review of History", whose editors have expressed an interest in publishing articles presented at the workshop as a special issue. This route is currently being further explored. As a first step to keep the group together an online discussion platform "ReMeA" is currently under construction.

2. Scientific Content of the event

The introductory paper and the working groups set up at the beginning of the workshop facilitated discussions about the “new regionalism”, the constructedness of a regional agenda and the role of different agents – regional politics, the state, ethnic, economic and other interest groups – in these contexts. During the afternoon the introductory paper by Milos Reznik (Region and Memory in the East-Central Europe after 1989: The Czech and Polish Case) and a number of shorter case studies of Eastern and Western European regions specifying the role of towns and cities (Elena Mannova, Border region – Border Capital. Specific Management of Memory in Bratislava), of migration and regionality (Laure Teulieres, Migration and Regional Memory) and of contested border areas (Martina Krocova, The Border Region of the Czech Republic and Germany, Brecht Deseure, Memory practices in 18th century Brabant) sharpened an understanding of differences, but, more importantly, similarities of a regional agenda in Eastern and Western Europe. Here, powerful economic agents such as the tourism industry, EU policies, but also regional strategies such as the use of the heritage sector as part of wider regeneration policies were discussed. These discussions challenged in many respects the difference between regional memory and agency in Eastern and Western Europe, which we set out to explore. Differences in regard to the success of a regional agenda were not determined by the respective position on either side of the “Iron Curtain”. While Poland, for instance, developed a regional agenda which successfully explored the different ethno-national heritage of the country and also provided markers of identity for “outsiders” (the marketing of the city of Gdansk, which specifically targeted German visitors was presented in this context), these tendencies were not perceived in the Czech Republic. The underlying reasons for the different role of a regional agenda in different states remain still to be explored.

During the second day the focus of interest shifted from academia and the regional agenda to the other agents and mediators of regional identity, which operate in very different environments and can comprise of family networks, amateur societies (Sarah Blowen, Histotainment – Education – Policy: The Role of Public History in the Southwest of England) grass roots movements with a cultural agenda such as the revival of Karelian folk music among student groups in Finland and Russia (Pekka Suutari, Music in Karelia) and web communities (Assen Kanev, Perceptions and Representations of History, Memory and Region in Bulgaria. The Case of Digital Cultural Heritage). Ulrike Spring’s paper (Channelling and Challenging (Regional) Identities in Museum Exhibitions) also reminded the group of the

agency that visitors bring to museums and exhibitions and the role of the curators and mediating, but also “selling “ a particular version of a regional agenda to their audiences. Again, the question was raised how academic historians could and should be involved in the interpretation of heritage and regional identity. This point was further explored by Jaroslav Kilian’s presentation of the work of AINOVA as a facilitator of heritage projects in the Slovak Republic. Mark McCarthy introduced the remit of Heritage Studies at GMT (Academics and Public Engagement in a Regional Agenda: Perspectives from a Heritage Lecturer working in the West of Ireland). Ulrich Tiedau (Spatial Concepts in historiography: the case of North-Western Europe, 1920–60) then added a further dimension to the discussion with a case study on “Westforschung” cautioning historians against the danger of becoming uncritical handmaidens of a political agenda. The theme was further explored at the visit to the M-shed at Bristol’s harbour side.

Impressions of the visit and the discussions at the M-shed were then brought to the workshop session on the third day. Here a number of issues were further explored, which had already been part of the debates of the previous days. These included a critical assessment of the politics of emotion which formed a key component of the M-shed strategy. Questions of marketability and accountability of a publicly funded institution to a fee- and tax-paying public and their wishes to be entertained were discussed. It was agreed that there is still a disconnect between academics and other mediators of regional memory, which needs to be addressed. The role of the historian has to be that of a guardian of “the truth”. This does not necessarily mean that academic research has to be presented in the Rankean dictum of “wie es eigentlich gewesen ist” (how things actually were), but that the historian has to caution against myths and a distortion of historical facts which merely supports a present-centred agenda. It was agreed that a way forward would be to further explore this agenda by providing a platform for dialogue between the different mediators of regional memory and to devise policy documents on how to communicate academic research more effectively in the public arena. It is hoped that a successful application to an ESF Conference Grant will allow for further debates on this topic.

3. Assessment of the results, contribution to the future direction of the field, outcome

Discussions have fostered a dialogue between academic disciplines, but also between academic and other stakeholders of the regional agenda. These include political, economic

and institutional agents, such as curators and policy makers, but also members of alternative, “grass roots” groups who increasingly appropriate the historical agenda. Within the arena of public history, the heritage industry and regeneration projects on a regional level, communication between academics and others is becoming increasingly important. This theme is not harnessed to differences of the regional agenda on either side of the “Iron Curtain”. Here, it seems that similarities are more prevalent than initially thought. Practicalities of communication between academic and “the public” shall be further explored. Outcomes and further aims have already been outlined in section 1 of this report and shall be repeated here: A grant application, for an ESF Conference Grant has been submitted for the deadline of 15 September and is awaiting further scrutiny by the ESF Scientific Committee in early 2011. Publication of the conference papers is envisaged as a special issue of the international journal “European Review of History”, whose editors have expressed an interest in the topic. As a first step to keep the group together an online discussion platform “ReMeA” is currently under construction.

4. Final Programme

Wednesday 1 September 2010

Afternoon/evening: Arrival

19:00 Dinner at Porto Lounge, 765 Fishponds Road, Bristol BS16 3BS

Day 1 Thursday 2 September, Room M029 St. Matthias Campus

Ideas: Charting New Academic Ground

Morning Session: Beyond National Identity: Regions, Frontiers and Identities in Europe in Transdisciplinary Perspective

9:30 Welcome and opening words by Professor Paul Gough, Pro-vice Chancellor Research and Enterprise

Introduction of ESF by ESF representative

9 :45 Introductory Paper: Steven Ellis/Raingard Esser (introduction by Pavel Šuska)

10:20 Coffee Break

10:45 Working groups: Regionality and Agents of Regionalism in European Comparison

Participants join transdisciplinary working groups discussing the regional agenda in different European contexts.

Guiding questions include: the agents of a regional agenda, the role of a regional agenda in a national and a transnational context, regional and local identities

Group Leaders: Peter Fleming, Diana Newton, Judith Pollmann, Kieran Hoare

11:30 Plenum: – A different regional agenda in Europe?

The Plenum will discuss the findings of the working groups presented by their representatives

12:30 Lunch (Room M030)

Afternoon Session: From National to Regional: New approaches to Memory Studies

14:00 Introductory paper

Region and Memory in East Central Europe after 1989 : The Czech and Polish Case, Miloš Řezník

14:40 Open Discussion

15:15 Tea

15:45 Forum: Regional Memories in Comparative European Perspective

Speakers: Martina Krocowa, Brecht Deseure, Elena Mannova, Laure Teulières

16:35 Open Discussion

17:00 Finish

19:00 Dinner at Marhaba Bistro, 611 Fishponds Road, Bristol BS16, 3AA

Day 2 Friday 3 September, Implications: Regions and Memory between European Policy and the Heritage Industry, Room M029 St. Matthias Campus

A Regional Agenda and Public History

Morning Session:

Public History in a European Context

9:30 Introductory Papers: Histotainment – Education – Policy: The Role of Public History in a European Context, Sarah Blowen, Pekka Suutari

10:10 Discussion: National – Regional – European Narratives on Display

Guiding questions: the role of academia in public history, memory discourses between grass-roots memory, academic research and policy directives

10:40 Coffee

11:00 Case Studies: Academics and Public Engagement in a Regional Agenda: Mark McCarthy, Ulrike Spring, Jaroslav Kilian, Assen Kanev, Ulrich Tiedau

12:20 Buffet Lunch (Room M030)

13:30 Discussion

Afternoon

15 :00 Visit to the new Museum of Bristol, M-Shed, Harbourside (Prince Street Bridge) and guided tour around medieval Bristol

19:00 Dinner at Bordeaux Quay, V-Shed Canons Way, Bristol BBS1 5UH

Day 3, Saturday 4 September, Implementations, Room M029 St. Matthias Campus

Morning Session:

9 :30 Plenum: Regional Memory – a Useful Category in European Transdisciplinary Research?

10 :30 Coffee

10 :45- 12 :15 Working groups: Comparative Regional Memory Studies – where do we go from here?

Plans for follow-up activities

12 :30 Lunch (Room M030)

Departure

5. Final List of Participants

Dr. Raingard Esser (History, UWE Bristol, UK)

Professor Steven Ellis (History, NUI Galway, Ireland)

Dr. Peter Fleming (History, UWE Bristol, UK)

Sarah Blowen (ELS, UWE Bristol, UK)

Dr. Diana Newton (History, Teesside University, UK)

Dr. Ulrich Tiedau (Dutch Studies, UCL, UK)

Professor Miloš Řezník (History, TU Chemnitz, Germany)

Dr. Mark McCarthy (Heritage Studies, GMIT, Ireland)

Mr Kieran Hoare, MA (Archives Services, NUI Galway, Ireland)

Professor Pekka Suutari (Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland Joensuu Finland)

Dr. Ulrike Spring (Cultural Studies, University of Tromsø, Norway)

Dr. Laure Teulières (History, Université de Toulouse II-Le Mirail, France)

Dipl. Ing. Jarosláv Kilian (Academia Istropolitana Nova, Svaty Jur, Slovakia)
Dr. Elena Mannova (History, Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava Slovakia)
Mr. Pavel Šuska, MA (Geography, Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava, Slovakia)
Mr. Assen Dobrinov Kanev, MA (Cultural Studies, University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria)
Ms. Martina Krocova, MA (History, Charles University Prague, Czech Republic)
Professor Judith Pollmann (History, Leiden University, The Netherlands)
Mr. Brecht Deseure, MA (History, Universiteit Antwerpen, Belgium)

6. Statistical Information on Participants

Gender balance: 8 Female, 11 Male

Age bracket, Academic profile: PhD students: 5

Mid-Career Researchers: 10

Established Chairs: 4

Countries of Origin: UK: 5, Ireland 3, The Netherlands: 1, Belgium: 1, Germany: 1, France: 1, Norway: 1, Finland: 1, Bulgaria: 1, Slovakia: 3, The Czech Republic: 1.

Academic and Academic Related Disciplines: History: 10, Cultural Studies: 2, Heritage Studies: 1, Geography: 1, Languages and Area Studies: 2, Archive Services: 1, Architecture: 1, Musicology: 1.