

## ABSTRACTS

### PANEL "Europeans on Display"

**Wolfram Kaiser (UK):** *From great Men to Ordinary Citizens? The Biographical Approach to narrating European Integration History in Museums*

One prominent way of telling stories about European integration history in museums, and the focus of this paper, is the biographical approach. Conceptually, we can distinguish two dimensions of this approach, although they become amalgamated in museums: first, the inclusion in exhibitions of individual Europeans as crafting the present-day European Union and participating in various forms of integrating Europe; and secondly, the use of the biographical approach drawing upon objects and testimonies as a narrative strategy of engaging visitors and transporting particular messages about the benefits of European integration and the EU. In this paper, I argue that we can distinguish three varieties of the biographical approach: first, the "founding fathers" myth with its focus on prominent politicians who played a key role in the origins of post-war continental western European integration; secondly, more or less strategically selected testimonies of Europeans, who are not prominent, but who are particularly active participants in integration in their professional or private lives; and thirdly, encouraging visitors to become active participants in narrating European integration history by employing oral history methods and creating opportunities for them to contribute their personal stories of what we might call "lived integration".

**Steffi de Jong (NO):** *The figure of the witness in Second World War and Holocaust Museums*

After his visit of the concentration camp memorial Breendonk, the anonymous first-person narrator in W.G. Sebald's novel realises that "the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on". In Second World War and Holocaust Museums we do at the moment find a praxis that tries to counter this draining process. Alongside the silent objects and inside the emptied buildings, visitors can more and more often watch video testimonies of witnesses of the time that, to a certain extent, refill those buildings and objects with some of the stories that they have been drained of.

In what concerns the Second World War and the Holocaust, we are at the moment right in the middle of what Jan Assmann has called the "floating gap", a time of transition that separates communicative memory – a memory based on everyday communication – from cultural memory – a memory based on materialised and ritualised markers of the past. While this transition does generally happen without much ado, in the context of the special memory of the time of national socialism and fascism, the disappearance of the last witnesses appears as a "moral scandal" (Assmann). We have therefore started to record, collect, materialise and exhibit what for previous memorial contexts was lost in oblivion: the personal memory of those who experienced the events first hand as narrated by themselves. Treating the museum as one of the main carriers of cultural memory, I will analyse this process of turning communicative memory into cultural memory. First, considering the museum as a collecting and researching institution, I will ask about the practice of collecting personal memory. Secondly, considering the museum as an exhibiting institution, I will analyse the relationship between the mute museum objects and the narrating witnesses on the screens. Finally, I will look at the introduction into and adaptation of the videos to the exhibition spaces considering if and how the videos are turned into museum objects.

**Ines Keske (DE):** *How a Swabian Dynasty has become European.*

*The two German so-called "Staufer-Exhibitions" of 1977 and 2010 in comparison*

In 1977, the *Württembergisches Landesmuseum* in Stuttgart inaugurated the major exhibition "The Age of the Hohenstaufen Dynasty", which has been considered as the "mother of the major medieval exhibitions". Thirty-three years later *the Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen* in Mannheim are re-enacting this topic in their major exhibition "The House of Hohenstaufen and Italy: Three regions of innovation in the European Middle Ages". While the *Staufer* in 1977 were presented in their regional dimension, the exhibition of 2010 puts "the most important European dynasty of this age" into a European narrative.

As a Swabian noble dynasty, the Hohenstaufen Dynasty (briefly *Staufer*), has spawned not only Swabian dukes but also some famous German kings and Holy Roman Emperors during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. In this age, they were amongst others active in Italian affairs and enlarged their territory from Swabia (in nowadays Southwest Germany) to Northern Italy and Kingdom of Sicily. Until today, they represent Germanys' most popular and most remembered dynasty of the Middle Ages.

According to Aleida Assmanns observation within the framework of history exhibitions, in which museum exhibits, once considered to plot the regional narrative, are today imbedded in a European one, the two "*Staufer-Exhibitions*" are reflecting a similar development. The paper, therefore, will discuss how the displayed conceptions of the *Staufer's* history between 1977 and 2010 have changed, and how the characteristics of the European narrative are constructed today around this dynasty. Analyzing the exhibitions, the key player's intentions, conceptualization processes, and the visitor's evaluation will be highlight how a dynasty once presented in its regional context was put on a European stage. The paper uses while looking at the period since the 1970s the approach of Europeanization-research thus investigating how the process happened and who are the main drivers of it.

**Anne Overbeck (DE):** *Is Everything That Moves a European? On the Chances and Risks of Using a Biographical Approach to Display Abstract Phenomena*

Europe still is an *essentially contested concept*<sup>1</sup> – ambiguous, hard to grasp but omnipresent and ideologically charged – as is the term European. Is it lifestyle, citizenship, religion, travel and work habits or value systems or none of the above that defines and distinguishes a European from the rest of the world? Travel – the ability to cross borders for work or pleasure - often stands at the center of exhibitions on the European development.

Taking a biographical approach is a tempting and often necessary way for exhibition curators to present the European experience in an exhibition. Exemplifying abstract social and historical trends through individual experiences can be of great value. But it also contains the risk of imbuing simple life choices with a higher significance, because we as curators have an (abstract) point to prove.

In the summer of 2009, the LWL-Industriemuseum Zeche Hannover put on display an exhibition on the history of the Italian ice cream makers in Europe in general and the Ruhrgebiet in particular. 80% of all ice cream makers in Germany and the Netherlands stem from two small valleys in the Dolomites – the Zoldo and Cadore Valley. Since the mid 19th century this group has traveled to all over Europe during the summer to work and returned to their villages in Italy for the winter month. This traditional lifestyle continued with minor alterations until the 1990s and for some families until today. So at first glance this group of

migrants should serve as an ideal case of European citizenry, having lived in two or more cultures for over 150 years. On the other hand, during that time this group of Italians have held on to their regional ties to an astounding extent.

The paper will take a closer look at this mixture of regionalism and European life style and take this exhibition as a starting to point to explore chances and risks, when taking a biographical approach to display abstract phenomena. Using personal objects and oral history interviews as an example it will show the difficulties in drawing an interpretive line between traditional regionalism, migration history, and narratives of Europeanization.