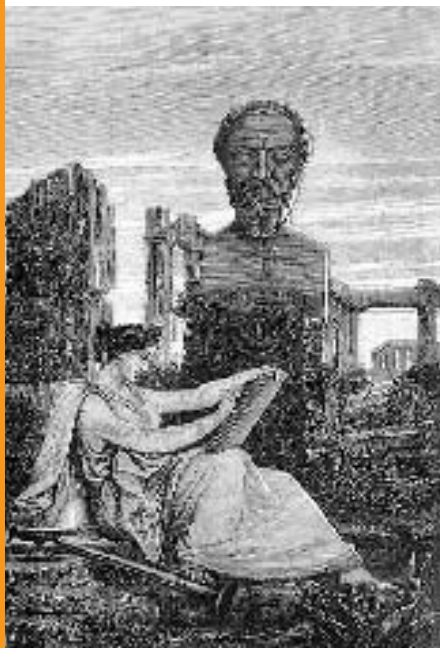


National history is central to national identity. A sustained and systematic study of the construction, erosion and reconstruction of national histories across a wide variety of European states is a highly topical and extremely relevant exercise for two reasons: firstly, because of the long and successful history of the national paradigm in history-writing; and, secondly, because of its re-emergence as a powerful political tool in the 1990s in the context of the accelerating processes of Europeanisation and

Representations of the Past: National Histories in Europe (NHIST)

An ESF scientific programme



globalisation. National histories form an important part of the collective memory of the peoples of Europe. National bonds have been, and continue to be, among the strongest bonds of loyalty. A genuinely trans-national and comparative investigation into the structures and workings of national histories will play an important part both in understanding the diversity of national histories in Europe and preparing the way for further dialogue and understanding among European nation-states.

The project will bring together the histories of Western and Eastern Europe in a concerted attempt to bridge the historiographical divide fostered by the Cold War division of the continent. Methodologically, the project unites cultural transfer and comparative approaches, which are the most appropriate means for exploring the complex relationship between national historiographies and national historical cultures in Europe. The last decade has witnessed an acceleration of projects involving comparative and cultural transfer approaches. Now is the time to bring those diverse attempts together in a Europe-wide research programme.



The European Science Foundation acts as a catalyst for the development of science by bringing together leading scientists and funding agencies to debate, plan and implement pan-European initiatives.

Aims and objectives

National history is understood as a specific form of historical representation which accompanies the formation of a nation-state, or seeks to influence the existing self-definitions of a national consciousness. It develops its perspectives and criteria from the contemporary self-understanding of the nation.

National 'master narratives' and their protagonists are of crucial interest to this project, as they reflect the attempts to answer important questions related to cultural identity. It is through historical representations of their nation in relationship to others that people make sense of, and identify with, particular versions of the past. This project starts from the assumption that the fruitfulness of a postmodern critique of master narratives does not entail any assumption about their eventual dissolution and disappearance. A thorough analysis of the perpetual construction and reconstruction of these narratives is needed. One cannot achieve this by simply looking at the history of ideas and textual interpretations. Instead one needs to start by asking questions about cultural and political power relationships within nationally constituted societies.

The concept of 'master narrative' seems particularly suitable for the comparison of the West and East European historical systems after 1945. The narrative strategies of both systems were informed by their particular ideological constructs; their historical 'master narratives' were linked to the specific conditions of their institutional production, relations of hegemony and forms of political organisation.

Overall, only a detailed and comparative analysis of the processes of construction, stabilisation and erosion of national histories and wider historical representations will enable us to facilitate the development of a truly European historical culture. In order to prevent the emergence of a 'fortress Europe' mentality, it will, however, be equally important to consider the relationship between national histories and trans-European, global and/or world histories. This project will, in the first instance, help us to gain an



Engraving of the Muse of History from Bernard de Montfaucon's *Antiquité* (1719).
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Napoleon studying military history (painting by François Flameng, 1856-1923).
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insight into how diverse European states and peoples have constructed and continuously reconstruct their national histories. From this vantage point it will, secondly, problematise the stumbling blocs that have prevented a constructive interaction between national history and trans-national tendencies. Finally, such an analysis needs to be broadened by asking how European societies have generally dealt with the territorialisation of social processes and their re-enactment in historical constructions. National histories seem to prove beyond doubt that most social processes relate to spatial concepts and that the relationship between territory and social process is often legitimated with reference to a historical justification. Comparing national histories can thus help us to understand processes of territorialisation, which are not necessarily restricted to the national level, thereby providing important insights on regionalisation, Europeanisation and globalisation.

The interrelatedness of national historiographies is most clearly revealed when considering a number of national histories taken together. Historians writing national history often take into account developments in other countries.

While institutionally and intellectually, history was 'nationalised' in the course of its professionalisation, historians at the same time began to think of themselves as belonging to a single republic of letters. Even during periods when aggressive nationalism poisoned mutual academic relations, historians often remained aware of other national agendas and publications. Cultural transfer studies have begun to explore questions such as: why have some intellectual departures been received in one country but ignored in another? How far have particular institutes, organisations and individuals been responsible for making specific academic 'products' of one country accessible in others? How far have national works or approaches to history been re- and even misinterpreted in different national contexts? When and why have there been significant instances of the policing of the boundaries of one national historiographical tradition against encroaching influences from another? What role have exiled historians played in facilitating contacts between different historiographical cultures? Perceptions and transfers are equally crucial to our understanding of national historiographies as are comparisons.



Budapest (Hungary): The millennial memorial of the Hungarian Land-taking, 1896. © Richard Ishida

The programme has been initiated and is chaired by **Professors Stefan Berger, Christoph Conrad and Guy P. Marchal**. It is based on the collaboration of more than 60 leading scholars from more than 20 countries. Its agenda will be implemented by four teams led by leading experts in their areas (for the details of the team

leaders see below). The teams will be investigating:

1. the institutions, networks and communities which produced national histories and were themselves influenced by the idea of national history;
2. the construction, erosion and reconstruction of national histories in relation to other master narratives structuring diverse forms of historical writing (such as class, race, religion and gender);
3. national histories and their relationship with regional, European and world histories;
4. the spatial relationships between national histories.

The research teams

Team 1: Institutions, Networks and Communities

Team leader: Professor Ilaria Porciani, Università di Bologna

This team will investigate the role of social actors in constructing national histories, focusing in particular on their institutions, networks and communities. It will seek to explain the relationship between the professionalisation of the historical discipline and the emergence of national histories during the last two centuries. By comparing a wide number of cases drawn from diverse parts of Europe, contributors from various countries will answer the following questions:

- (1) how did the institutionalisation and professionalisation of history shape different national historiographies?
- (2) What has been the role of specific networks in the process of nation-building?
- (3) What has been the role of specific networks of sociability and communication?

(4) What impact has politics had on the institutionalisation of the discipline?
 (5) When, where and why did women become professional historians? The team will also establish a comprehensive database of the institutions of national histories.

Team 2: Narrating National Histories

Team leader: Professor Chris Lorenz, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

National 'master narratives' always stand in close relationship with narratives, such as those based on gender, ethnicity, class and/or religion. In what ways have such social cleavages mattered to national history writing? This team will investigate the links and interdependencies between histories written from a national perspective and those written from a perspective of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and religion. It will focus on the following five areas:

(1) what were characteristics of the national master narratives in different national historiographies? (2) In which way has the national interacted with other master narratives in key national histories? (3) Have there been conscious attempts to construct histories around non-national narratives and thus to replace national with other master narratives? (4) What influence did the



Kyiv (Ukraine): Monument to the founders of Kyiv, 1982. © Carole S Bradford



Lisbon (Portugal): Monument to the Discoveries (Padrão dos Descobrimentos), 1960. © Getty Images/Digital Vision

national master narrative in historiography have on other forms of national representations?

Team 3: National Histories and its Interrelation with Regional, European and World Histories

Team leaders: Dr. Matthias Middell, Universität Leipzig, and Professor Lluís Roura y Aulinas, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

The very concept of national historiography could be better explained by contrasting it with other spatial forms of historical writing, such as regional, European and world histories. This team will look at the relationship between national history on the one hand and the spatial historical representations (the regional, European and global ones) on the other. It focuses on hierarchies of spatial dimensions and investigates their interrelationship. How open or closed have national spaces been in historical writing with regard to sub-national or supra-national spaces? In pursuing this theme, the following research questions will be tackled: (1) what has been the precise relationship between national and regional/local history? (2) What has been the relationship between national and European history? (3) What has been the relationship between national and world history?

Team 4: Overlapping National Histories

Team leaders: Dr. Frank Hadler, GWZO Leipzig and Professor Tibor Frank, ELTE Budapest

This team will explore the different ways in which national histories in Europe have been politicized and subjected to nationalist interpretations. In multinational states and empires, a common past and a shared territory have had a double-effect on history writing: it could unite histories but it could also increase attempts to assert differences and construct borders. The team will explore how changing border lines have created overlapping and competing perspectives on national histories. It will take up the subject in three directions:

(1) territorial overlaps and traumatic interdependencies in different national histories; (2) the impact of territorial changes on the construction of national histories; (3) the construction of ‘other’ nations as reflected in the construction of one’s ‘own’ nation.



Stockholm (Sweden): Viking ship ‘Svea Viking’, rebuilt 1996-98. © Getty Images/Digital Vision

Other programme activities

Cross-team conferences

Although the four teams have identified their own distinct themes and areas of research, some of the research agendas involve a certain amount of overlap. Themes and topics to be discussed by all teams in separate workshops, in which core researchers from all four teams and external specialists would be present, are:

- Forms of Representation and Representational Techniques: Narratives and Genres
- Collective Identity, Memory and History
- Political Uses of History

Travel grants

NHIST will offer travel grants to enable scholars to undertake research that falls within the programme’s framework. The

applicants will have to demonstrate that they can meaningfully contribute to the work of one of the four teams investigating the area, or to the programme as a whole, through research and active participation in a workshop or a conference.

Accordingly, the grants may serve to fund research trips to academic institutions involved in the programme or to attend workshops or conferences organised by the programme.

Applications will be reviewed by the NHIST Executive Group which consists of the programme chairs and two elected members of the programme's Steering Committee. More details about conditions and applications will be advertised through the NHIST and ESF websites:

<http://www.uni-leipzig.de/zhs/esf-nhist/> and <http://www.esf.org/nhist> respectively.

Final conference

In 2007 a major international conference will be organised involving around one hundred scholars from all over Europe. This final conference will aim to publicise and summarise the results of the previous workshops, conferences and other activities related to this research programme.

Publications

The programme chairs will establish a book series on the theme of the programme with a major English-language academic publishing house. In addition, the individual teams will publish additional volumes and special editions of scholarly journals on specific aspects of their respective themes. The programme will provide synergies for collaborative research projects across European borders.

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Cover picture: Unattributed engraving of Herodotus with Clío, the Muse of History from Louis Figuier, *Vies des Savants illustres depuis l'antiquité jusqu'au dix-neuvième siècle* (1865-72). © Mary Evans Picture Library

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