

**Europe and media:  
the History on the Web**  
France, Great Britain, Hungary,  
Italy, Slovenia, Spain

In this volume of “Il Filo d’Europa” we bring out the first research report made by Istituto storico Parri Emilia-Romagna with Europe Direct Emilia-Romagna and Videoteca of Legislative Assembly of the Emilia-Romagna Region, for the project “Europe and media: the history in the web”.

We continue in this way our engagement, after the conclusion of the project that has investigated the European history on the national televisions, in order to understand how history is described through the new media and to imagine together a possible European history.

Stefania Fenati

### **Istituto Storico Parri Emilia-Romagna**

The Istituto Storico Parri Emilia-Romagna was established in 1963. Its mission is to promote retrieval and knowledge of contemporary history’s sources. The main objective of the Institute is the study and research of the history of the 20th century.

### **Videoteca Regionale**

The Regional Video Library was established in 1996 by the Legislative Assembly of the Region Emilia-Romagna in collaboration with Istituto Beni Culturali, Artistici e Naturali. It is part of the Library of the Legislative Assembly of the Region Emilia-Romagna.

### **Europe Direct of Emilia-Romagna**

The Europe Direct network is the main instrument used by the European institutions to encourage contacts with regional territories and citizens. It acts as intermediary between the EU and citizens at local level and allows citizens to have information, advice, assistance and answers on EU policies and funding, and an opportunity to communicate with European institutions as well.

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## Introduction

### HISTORY THROUGHOUT THE WEB

#### First step of a trans European investigation

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#### Objectives of the research

Today, the E.U. is provided with an institutional structure and the embryo of a financial system, but the majority of its inhabitants conceive of themselves as citizens of a nation, not as European citizens. The sense of belonging to a community is based on the sharing, with one's fellows, of traditions, customary practices, and expectations. Ideas and images related to the past of the nation are part of such background, in manners that change from country to country and, inside each country, from group to group and class to class.

Institutions that have been extensively studied, in the first place school, diffuse the basic notions relating to a common past. What mark school teaching leaves in the mind of those who have long lost close contact with the institution? Politicians and social analysts are in a quandary about the problem. The historical Institute Parri in Bologna, sponsored by the Italian region Emilia-Romagna, made a five year investigation about the representation of history diffused by the television networks of the European Union whose final step was the publication of *That many pasts for a Common future? History on Television in the Countries of the European Union*, a volume completed thanks to the collaboration of 18 specialists, that shows how History is presented on the televisions of 14 countries, puts in the fare the similarities and differences, and offers guide lines for history programmes likely to interest all citizens of the European Union.

The importance of television in the creation of an historical memory is undeniable but the question remains open to understand how viewers have interpreted and memorized what they have seen on the small screen. It is now possible to answer at least partially this query by resorting to Internet, more precisely by looking at the messages

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that circulate daily on the web or at the debates that take place in forums, especially in occasion of anniversaries, or when political or economic crisis conjure up personal memories, historical common places and stereotyped tales.

The rumours that circulate continuously on the web give an inkling of how people see the world and judge their epoch. What are the weight and part of notions about a common past in these exchanges? Do they occur often, seldom, never? When they are cited, what are the circumstances, events, figures that are evoked?

More precisely, where the E.U. is concerned, is the past that is mentioned in social networks exclusively national, or related to other nations? In a friendly or a diffident way? Do allusions include, at times, references to Europe or to the European idea?

We don't know whether, in Europe, as it is now, the interest for the national past is noteworthy or insignificant. There is probably no general answer. On the one hand, Europe is a "union" of many different pasts, with peculiar history narrations. On the other, some contemporary events make a particularly strong impact on public opinion and reactivate old reminiscences. Those who have followed the evolution of the Greek financial and economic crisis have noted how quickly records of WWII resurfaced and how much they mattered for a large portion of the Greek population.

Our aim is to gauge the importance of references or allusions to historical facts that circulate on the net but our field of view is limited to the small part of Europe that we know. We have therefore had recourse to experts of other countries, namely France, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom, because we assume that "natives" are more intellectually equipped than us to tackle the problem.

The study of cyber social networks, forums and blogs is a rather new field of research. The reason may be that the messages registered in social networks are often blunt, originate in previous messages, develop along a long chain of antecedent missives and

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any rate are ephemeral. In the last decade of the 20th century pioneers have begun to develop storytelling on the web, much has already be done in this area, but the study of forums, social networks and blogs as a potential source of social or historical investigations is still in its infancy. The Internet Memory Foundation (<<http://www.archive.org/index.php>>) federates some web archiving institutions but, most of the time, the collections are not available on line and, when they are accessible, must be consulted on the premises. Moreover, the catalogues, rudimentary, are not fit for a research as precise as ours. Among the few works dedicated to the study of the field, we must highlight the doctorate of a member of our squad, Martin Pogacar. Martin has scrutinized the historical memory of the ex Yugoslavia such as it appears in today social networks. His work, written in English, is a first class contribution to the study of these media; the material he uses is close to the one we should study.

### Our questions

The messages that go around the web, being short and sent without previous planning, have recourse to the patterns, news of the day, debates and chats prevailing et the moment. Unwillingly, they convey an immediate reaction to topics considered of interest but soon forgotten. History, or rather allusions to events, dates, individuals labelled as “historical” are part of the common references shared by the members of any community, be it a nation or a small village. For many, the past is a “heritage” to be safeguarded, some forumers, web surfers or bloggers are intent on saving and spreading “unknown” documents or documents likely to be lost or destroyed.

Our assumption is that in many occurrences historical hints serve to give more substance to a short message and establish connivance between the issuer and those who catch the signal. Do people refer to the same data when they argue about past events? The warmth of some discussions gives the impression that, at times, they don't. There is often passion in the talks, the past may be a mere starting point for a contest – but its use as a pretext to begin a debate is probably not insignificant.

The aim of our research is to spot such rudimentary uses of history. Allusions are generally short, misleading, untimely, but we are not concerned with accuracy. On the contrary legends, false interpretations, inventions, polemics about the past matter a great deal for our exploration. Is the word “legends” too strong? In the place where we live some events or characters, while factually attested, have acquired such a dimension that, cancelling other events or characters, they have acquired some sort of legendary stance. It may be that such distortions have never occurred in other countries.

We are not concerned about “historical truth” or accuracy. Yet, in some instances, it may be useful to signal false interpretations or manifestly wrong statements. Those who surf the net, regularly come across statements such as “It is not because it won WW II that Germany must rule Europe”. Errors of that dimension, far from being negligible, deserve attention especially when they give way to a debate with other web surfers.

We do not care about the resources historians and other specialists find on the web, much has already been done in this field. We would rather study the vision “from the bottom”, what people who are non professional but have opinions say about the past, how they conceive of it and use it in their exchanges.

The most relevant questions might be:

- What are the historical topics that surface in the everyday talks conveyed on the web?
- In which occasions are they used?
- To what extent are/aren't they developed?
- Are there hints at the history of other countries or at Europe as a whole?

Methodological propositions

The web is a huge, labyrinthine territory where it is easy to get lost, it is impossible to utterly explore it because new sites and

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circuits appear (and disappear) every day. When we got in touch with the members of our research team we knew that the end of our investigation the net wouldn't be what it was at the beginning. We thought therefore that the journey should be carefully mapped out. On the one hand, any country has its own historical talks and traditions, we didn't want to confine our research within over-rigid instructions, it was up to any participant to define their criteria. On the other hand, the handling of social networks changes from country to country, some topics, fashionable here, are minor there – and there are also local networks operating only in one country. We didn't specify what kind of analysis should be used because, at least where we live, interventions on the net are usually sentences, aphorisms, judgements that seldom result in what we are used to calling a "text". Again, this may be specific of the place where we work. Here, the net has given birth to a new kind of written production, declarative, brisk, and not much attentive to the link between successive statements. We thought that any member of our team would be obliged to contrive a new type of analysis, adapted to this particular form of expression.

Yet we put forward a few suggestions.

In the first instance it was convenient to chart the territory. We must pay attention to the networks we studied, value their relative weight and the number of people who visited them or took part in a debate, roughly estimate the age of those who chat, observe the number and frequency of the interventions. What were, in each country, the sites where history is likely to be divulgated? Here are a few examples:

- Sites that give themselves the title of "historical", some of which are mere collections of data, while others, the forums, are opened to discussions. It is not possible to explore them thoroughly but their orientation and the topics they privilege (national or local history, history of minorities, of some social classes, of farming, industries, art...) are important. It will be necessary to question them on the "transversal topics" mentioned bellow. Although it is not specifically historical, Wikipedia is one of the relevant sites.



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- Reviews and magazines on line. Some of these periodicals are international magazines that use the web instead of print. Others, more relevant for our investigation, are managed by local societies or institutions. Everyone would have to decide which reviews were worth a glance. Here again what themes do they tackle?
- Sites of societies that keep in existence documents, records, testimonies like those managed by veterans or curators of various forms of "heritage".

Then came the most busy social networks:

- Facebook is in itself a complicated, multifarious world. Individual profiles might be of interest but investigating them would require too much time. General profiles devoted to world famous or locally important people or to historical events or to countries are more accessible. It must be noted that quite often there is, in parallel with general sites, Facebook profiles, in which bloggers give their own opinion on a question and, in some countries, "History of... Face book". Skimming through such profiles is easy, most people are content with saying that they (dis)like what appears in the site, while the few who give an opinion try to justify it.
- Youtube offers a wealth of videos and images related to historical problems or characters, sometimes with commentaries by those who sent the documents. Usually there is a title that helps to selection the most relevant items.

How to move on the web? Martin Pogacar recommend "hovering attention" throughout a selection of a few relevant cases.

The "great figures" might be a good starting point. We meant nationally famous people but also internationally well know ones: how often did they come to the fore, what images were associated to them, what (often harsh) debates focused around their personality and historical role.

A second step might be an investigation on some periods such as Renaissance, enlightenment, world wars, dictatorships...

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On forums can be found discussions with answers from various origins. Debates about factual events (it happened like that - no, it was different) can be overlooked, more attention should be paid to opinions based on historical references and to manifestly wrong or biased statements.

Dates ritually celebrated, even when many didn't remember precisely why they are important, deserve a close examination. What documents, however irrelevant they might be, were introduced in the debate? What reactions, queries, objections were raised by the initial allusions to a name, a fact, a date?

The method we had propounded was surely incomplete and the topics we mentioned partially irrelevant but there are not well-established ways of working with social networks and we hoped that other investigations would soon complete our pioneer joint venture.

## HISTORY ON THE FRENCH WEB

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### Mapping the territory

At first sight, the web is a boundless territory where millions of words, sentences and opinions flow every day, any attempt at mapping it out seems doomed to failure because of the overabundance of messages and of the ceaseless opening/disappearance of websites. After a while, it turns out that such plethora is an illusion and that quantity means neither wealth nor variety of information. A careful inspection is enough to detect the social networks, content-based sites forums or blogs relevant for an investigation as precisely targeted as ours. The web, it is true, is in permanent transformation, but the changes must not be overrated: where history or other “serious” topics are concerned, variations are limited.

The relevant topics, those which look of importance and give rise to debates are not fixed by individuals, they are part of a common knowledge circulated by school lessons, novels, magazines (there are, in France, eleven history magazines, all benefiting with a big readership), films and television broadcasts. Every now and then political events, crisis, death of important figures revive forgotten occurrences but the questions to which people refer usually are stable, at least in the middle course – say twenty years, the length of time that separates two generations. Next year, new bloggers will comment, on the web, songs, sporting competitions and personal issues different from those that move round now, but for the individuals who participates actively in one or more online forums the historical subjects of discussion will still be broadly the same as today.

Where France is concerned, the websites pertinent for our research are, in decreasing order of interest:

Forum websites: all-embracing sites which provide original papers and general information, are open to debates and receive copious contributions from people intent on taking part in the debate.

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**The main forums are:** Etudes coloniales (Colonial Studies); Forum histoire pour tous (Forum history for everybody); Geostrategic, **site of high standard, mostly orientated towards contemporary problems**; Herodotus; Internaute Histoire (Net Surfer History), **one of the most popular history sites thanks to its quizzes and its short, clear papers**; Passion histoire (Passion History); Café histoire (Pub History); Le monde en guerre (The World at War).

**Community sites:** where people exchange information and communicate with each other by chat or elaborated messages: Newsring: "On Newsring you, readers, lead the debates, we are content with organizing the site, nobody interrupts, all are equal"; Pearltrees, adapted from an English website, highly socialized forum where visitors can discover, share and comment everything they like.

**Video websites:** sites on which users can upload selections of films or videos they have produced. Visitors can add commentaries. Downloading is usually impossible. Imineo, French site founded in 2004 offers a large wealth of history videos, especially on world wars. YouTube, international site launched in 2005, bought in 2006 by Google, the most popular video website.

**Newspapers' websites:** discussion or information sites published by newspapers. Le Figaro and Le Monde, dailies aimed at highbrows, use blogs as supplements to the printed version which include discussions about various topics, among other things about historical issues.

**Facebook:** the most popular social network, launched in France in 2004, which boasts millions of visitors. Since November 2008 maintains a special section, History of France Facebook, where bloggers post online peremptory and generally derisive opinions on past periods

**Twitter:** in full expansion, likely to challenge Facebook. Short messages with constant and possibly unconscious sexist ("queer" qualifies mechanically all those that the bloggers don't like) and racist connotations. The comments on history programs broadcast on television

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show a profound ignorance of what happened in the 20th century.

Blogs of history magazines: all magazines edit blogs that advertise and supplement their paper versions and are open to debates. Readers are mostly people of age who do not like to communicate via Internet, so that discussions are of little consequence. An exception, *Colonial Studies* which, because of the burning character of colonial problems in France, provokes harsh polemics.

Blogs of history teachers, who maintain pages about their didactic experiences. These blogs sound like textbooks and attract few visitors.

Who are they?

Net Surfer History brags of 70,000 visitors, Passion History 30,000, History of France Facebook 20,000, Geostrategic 15,000. Taking into account the other sites we may estimate that yearly some 150,000 French, one out of 4,000, and one out of 2,000 people wandering on the web (1) pay at least a visit to a historical site. Active contributions vary according to the theme, ongoing issues (the decline of the Western world) or calls for testimonies ("How did you live through WWII") are likely to arouse up to 300 answers, but the average is of about 20. It is worth noticing that queries about the nature, function, value, and objectivity of history provoke animate controversies. Many openly confess their curiosity about past events and such seems to be the motivation of most visitors: "I am interested in history because I am crazy about it, it's a deep-rooted passion, its great credit is that it stimulates imagination" (Forum history for everybody). Every week Net Surfer History publishes a questionnaire, which obtains many answers (up to 7,000; around 1,000 on average) since it often suffices to say "yes" or "no".

Who are the users?

Most have recourse to a nickname so that it is impossible to identify them. Yet a few clues may help to roughly place them. Nicknames tell a lot, the patronymics of singers or footballers in vogue signal young bloggers, Christian names or surnames of famous in-

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dividuals are adopted by adults and, in the last instance, provide last instance, provide an indication about the intellectual or political likings of the person who has chosen that appellation. References to documents or testimonies, frequent in historical debates, are interesting hints, Jeremy who mentions the records of a grandfather who fought during WWII (*Pearltrees*) is probably forty of age, or even more. Quotations of original sources or second hand works, of historians, novelists or journalists point out a cultural background. Most, not to say all history websites, being freely accessible, are obliged to include commercial advertisements whose subject matter, design and targets inform about those who frequent the site. There is no certainty, but we can approximately define the regular customers of the social networks pertinent for our research.

If we take into account the indications people leave on the sites they have visited we see that four types of guests call on occasionally or regularly the history websites:

- Bloggers, individuals who keep a personal, on-going diary, and dialogues with friends, fill pages with trifles or private data that seem of limited value. It is frequently a film or a photograph that inspires these comments. The intellectual level is often weak. In October 2012 a ah-channel, Tf1, broadcast *The Roundup (La rafle)*, film telling how, in July 1942, 15,000 Jews living in Paris were arrested by the French police and put in a camp, before being sent to Germany. The fact, regularly mentioned in the press, is well-known and the film makes it clear that all was perpetrated only by French policemen. There was, on Twitter, a flood of messages manifesting surprise and anger against Hitler, "Nasty son of a whore, Hitler fuck your mother queer". After the publication on Facebook of a picture taken in Nazi Germany, and showing everybody but one man giving the fascist salute, the observations were surprisingly odd: "Ach! What a shame, I lost an arm" – "What an indolent! No arm, no chocolate". Someone noted that this man was risking his life, but derision went on: "He his searching cigarettes in his pocket". Such remarks point out the limited curiosity of some young about history.

"Net surfers" who regularly wander throughout the web, skim idly

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over a few sites, click on “I like” and sign to leave a mark of their visit but do not express any opinion.

- Active forumers who leave personal remarks at times much developed.

- Producers of original writings. These are not numerous, there is at time merely one specialist in a website (such is the case of *Monde Blog*) or a tiny set of friends who try to provide an accurate, comprehensive knowledge, are careful not to take side on burning issues, while prompting the active bloggers to voice their opinion.

For my study I have taken into account the messages diffused on historical websites during the three last years thanks to the fact that all forums keep an archive going back to the time of their opening. When a debate had been launched earlier I have gone back to the first contribution.

### **The web as a source of information**

A large majority of visitors click merely to check a detail, a date, a name, or to get some data on an issue that interest them. Such queries, being purely factual, do not generate debates. *Passion History* and *Net Surfer History* regularly ask their guests what interests them most. Civilisations external to Europe and North America do not provoke curiosity, out of the 30.000 visitors of *Passion History* only 87 have an interest in the Pahlavy Iran, and despite the conflicts about Islam that shake French society demands about the Muslim world are not frequent. Ancient history, Egypt, Athens, the Roman conquest awaken concern in a limited but stable cluster of readers, anxious to know what is new in archaeology, from the grave of Christ to the traces of Julius Cesar’s campaigns in Gaul. Scandalous or bloody anecdotes attract attention, 993 people visited the *Net Surfer History* paper devoted to king Henry III of France, notorious homosexual who was assassinated by a fanatic monk. Amateurs of ancient history or spicy details are content with reading the texts, they do not give opinions – mere facts do not prompt to make comments.

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Another area appealing to a specific public is military history. 28,000 visitors called upon *Passion history* when the site asked: "Who is your favourite military hero?". Two websites, *Battlefields* and *War and History* are entirely dedicated to the topic. Those who frequent these sites, mostly practitioners of *World of War* or similar videogames, talk about their hobby, not about historical problems.

Surprisingly, historical periods or names that were long landmarks in French culture and provoked bitter political controversies have lost their appeal. For about a century right and left quarrelled about Joan of Arc, saint sent by God or daughter of the people. The present view is more relativistic: "Michelet has invented the Joan of Arc familiar to us at a time when the State had the power to create symbols. Such old icons are now shattered" (*Pub History*). *When Net Surfer History* asks: "Which date marks a milestone in French history" the taking of the Bastille, national holiday, is mentioned in merely 92 out of 6,600 answers. On the same site, only 24 people think that the revolution was of importance, while 48 express about Napoleon mixed judgements: "Like many others before and after he behaved as if he were head of clan, his nepotism was boundless. His genius, not merely military, let us pillars that continue to support our society in the 21st century" – "I admire his understanding of French mentalities which helped him to manipulate our ancestors. I am impressed by his innovative, efficacious enterprising mind. I admire less the military leader". De Gaulle is seldom mentioned. A few thank him for defending the honour of the country; others find him ambiguous ("I have never understood his ideas about Algeria", *Colonial Studies*) or old-fashioned (because of his incapacity to understand what happened in May 1968).

Wikipedia is by far the most sought-after site, because it heads the list on the first page of Google, but also because it is usually accurate and precise - hence the choice of three problems which seem relevant for all European countries. Here are the French Wikipedia articles on these questions, with a comparison with the English, German and Italian Wikipedia:



The largest part of the French text is dedicated to general characteristics that give its originality to this side of the conflict. The article stresses the various motivations of the partisans, some fighting against the invaders, some combating fascism. In many instances both motives were shared by all fighters, but at times there was a division regarding the objectives, which could result in conflicts between two organisations, as was the case in Yugoslavia and Greece – the case of Italy is not mentioned. For France the article notes the political unification under the lead of a National Council of Resistance, but does not signal the numerous local divergences.

Three forms of resistance are distinguished: civilian, organised, exterior. Civilian resistance came to the fore through non-violent mass manifestations such as inscriptions on the walls, wearing of forbidden signs or symbols, strikes as in the Netherlands against the persecution of the Jews, gatherings in Greece to counter the forced departure of workers towards Germany and above all shelter offered to Jews, allied soldiers who did not want to be captured, people in danger of arrest. Organised resistance consisted in: publication of clandestine papers, collection of information to be transmitted to the Allies, operation of sabotage of railway lines. There were also guerrilla organisations, which in Greece, Yugoslavia, Poland, were able to take control of wide territories where the occupiers could not penetrate. Special mention is reserved to the Jewish resistance movements in Warsaw and in forty ghettos, as well as in the extermination camps of Sobibor and Auschwitz. A final party goes through the various national movements of resistance.

The article attempts to give a synthetic view of resistance. Interesting as an introduction to the topic, it is however extremely superficial, fairly different and less comprehensive than its English counterpart titled: "Resistance during WWII" which puts aside the fight against Nazism. The English text relates the conditions in which resistance was possible, lists more precisely the various forms of resistance, follows the operation year by year, which gives a better view of the progressive development of the clandestine struggle.

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This article mentions also the cases of resistance against the Allies, especially against the Soviet army in Eastern Europe. The German essay, "Resistance against National socialism" is a comprehensive list of topics that should be dealt with and an outline of these various points. The paper opens with a much restrictive specification: "We take into account as resistance against Nazism the resistance of individuals or groups, the 20th July attempt on Hitler's life, the White Rose as well as the action of unions, churches and political parties in Germany and that of states that existed between 1933 and 1945" – in other words clandestine resistance in occupied countries is written off. The Italian Wikipedia item is a translation of the English one.

- Shoah

In a long introduction the French article signals the "unique" character of the mass slaughter of the European Jews. Going back to Hitler's seizure of power, in order to show the evolution from persecution to annihilation, the text expands on the Nazi ideology and the measures taken, up to the attack against the Soviet Union. Then it divides the matter geographically. For Eastern Europe it describes the ghettos in Poland, explains what were the *Einsatzgruppen* and what their mission was, enumerates the massacres perpetrated in 1941 and 1942. It passes then to the death camps, evokes the harassment of the German Jews, mentions the Wannsee conference, shows how raids were organised systematically throughout the occupied countries, with a special insistence on the French situation, and on the participation of the French authorities and police. A paragraph is dedicated to the extermination by gas of the Polish Jews, which leads to an extended, precise study of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The shipping to Auschwitz and murder of nearly half a million of Hungarian Jews is treated separately. The text ends with forced work and death marches.

Like its German counterpart, which is much longer, the French text is precise but, despite an excellent illustration, lacks emotion. There is no final assessment of the consequences of the slaughter, neither to the Nuremberg trial, not to emigration to Palestine. The Italian chapter follows chronologically the extermination of the Jews in oc-

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-cupied Europe; the Italian case is briefly presented as a consequence of the German invasion in the country.

These articles are not indebted towards the English text titled *The Holocaust* (there is a brief mention of the term, Shoah). The introduction is a clumsy survey of the slaughter which stresses the fact that all Germans and the collaborationists their allied countries were directly or indirectly involved in a massacre that did not provoke any proclamation of solidarity with the victims during the war, although the killing, industrially organised by the state, was known to many. Extermination camps and medical experiments are briefly signalled. Then comes an extensive, well-documented analysis of German anti Judaism, from the unity to the advent of Nazism. The policy against the Jews is chronologically related, in terms more precise but not much different from the French account but with an accurate study of German public reactions and of the Jewish resistance. The structure of the article is a bit muddled but the distinctive features of the Shoah are much better analysed than in the French and German articles.

- End of the communist "bloc"

Rather short French article, which begins with the fall of the Berlin wall, then returns to Stalin, describes the situation of the Soviet Union and its "satellites" during the Cold War with an emphasis on the ageing of political leaders and on the incapacity to improve the economic situation. After a brief allusion to changes that occurred in Hungary and Poland in 1989 the text focuses on Germany. A final paragraph details the end of the communist regime country by country.

It is a precise, elementary exploration of the 1989 events, which does not explain why the "bloc" broke up so quickly and does not consider the long-term consequences of its collapse. The Italian article is equally concise. Laconic on the origins of the crisis it outlines the events in the different eastern countries. The German entry is a general history of the communist world, the fall of which is imputed to the division of the bloc during the perestroika: "In the fall

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and winter of 1989, the communist leaderships lost in all Eastern European countries (excluding the Soviet Union) their monopoly power. The reasons lay in the economic collapse of uniformly structured States, the internal problems of the Party dictatorship and external problems caused by the divisions between the different countries". The introductory chapter of the English equivalent is better, it takes into account the campaign of civil resistance in the people's democracies and the adoption of varying forms of market economy, shows the important part played by Solidarity and includes the failed manifestations of Tiananmen Square in the story. The study of the various countries is not much different from the French and German ones, but the repercussions of 1989 are cleverly analysed.

There is a stunning difference between the English and the other articles. The former are better informed. They present and comment documents, texts or illustrations, quote and discuss judgements of contemporaries or historians. The French texts, which try to be synthetic, are short, lack documents, pass over too many events. Whatever their authors they sound like papers written by amateurs, in the style of many contributions published in history websites.

### **The active forumers and their controversial issues**

"Do you read history books?" asks Forum history for everybody: only 211 say "yes". "Do you agree with the reduction of history teaching in primary schools?" interrogates it some time later: sixty per cent find it's a good reform.

It appears that internet has generated a new public, people who have no time or no desire to plunge into books and, at least in a partial manner, do not like history lessons, but who have pleasure in skimming history websites. The gathering of numerous inquisitive visitors, intent on finding simple information, is a godsend for the active forumers, the minority of Sunday historian who read books and are roughly aware of what is fashionable in the field. A debate

launched in Forum history for everybody about “Who may claim to be historian?” has given way to revealing statements: “A historian – it is nothing, it doesn’t exist” said someone; another one pointed out that: “You may have a history degree and misinterpret the facts. You may also have no degree and prove methodologically perfectly accurate” – in other words these amateurs insisted that they were as good historians as the professional ones. But they warned the passive visitors against oversimplification and factual errors: “How can we popularize history without making it coarse?”, “Can historical erudition hinder mythical representations?” (Monde Blog) “History is told in so contradictory terms” (Colonial Studies). Implicitly, the active forumers presented themselves as clued-up, on the ball minds entrusted with imparting a minimal knowledge to a mass of illiterate. In Newsring, Paratout (a nickname which means “Attending to urgent things”) maintained peremptorily that “Young French ignore their history” and started offering them a lecture. These active forumers do not hesitate to correct the “tourists” who put forward ill-considered statements. An amateur having said that “After the Muslim conquest, the jihad eradicated Christianity from North Africa” an activist rectified severely, with documents in support of it: “Where have you found that? After the Muslim conquest there were Christians there at least up to the 12th century as proved by a letter of Pope Gregory VII to the archbishop of Carthage” (Forum history for everybody). The same thing may happen in Community sites, essentially managed by active bloggers, who are not lenient towards amateurs.

Whatever their age, those who move on history forums are massively inquisitive about the contemporary period. The most successful quiz on Forum history for everybody, with 6,000 participants, was about “History and current events”. What appeals to the majority is war, not the details of operations, weaponry and strategy, in other words precise data, as is the case with those who cultivate military history, but something more general, the part played by war in the evolution of the 20th and 21st centuries and the theoretical debates about legitimacy of killing, collective or individual responsibility, necessity or ineffectiveness of armed conflicts.

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27,000 visitors of *Passion History*, practically the near total of users called for more papers about WWII. A half of the 6,600 visitors who reacted to the *Net Surfer History* questionnaire mentioned above said that the milestone in French history was the end of WWII, and 998 that it was the end of WWI. Three main themes come forth in this realm: WWI, WWII, the Algerian war.

WWI is less often mentioned than WWII, yet it is an extremely important topic, because forumers or bloggers are unanimous in expressing sorrow about the conflict, and because, as we shall see later, it is the question that best documents the recent evolution of French public opinion. All users agree in grieving the sufferings of the soldiers: "We mustn't forget this sad period of French history. Knowing what happened twenty years later we feel ashamed, it is as if these young men had died for nothing, only for glory" (*Net Surfer History*); "Nearly all of us have lost a grandfather or some relative" (id.). Some 8,000 visitors consult the *Passion History* file dedicated to "How were they able to bear it?". Some suggest an explanation: "We must thank them for their bravery and for the fact that they were faithful to their ideal, even if they did not know what fate awaited them. They had trust in what they were doing" (*Net Surfer History*). The greatest number is not in concord with such idealistic vision. Interestingly, many signal broader aspects of the conflict, Forum history for everybody expands on the colonial troopers sent to the front line, while Didier (above 40?) explains: "Algerian soldiers of French countrymen, they fell by thousands to the profit of a few bourgeois and for absurd dreams of vainglory. Today Alsace [the province France wanted to recover during WWI] forms with Bade [German province, on the other side of the Rhine] an Euro region" (*Pearltrees*). The memory of the Great War, that had been for decades the object of a national cult, binding together all French in the celebration of the national army, has become the record of a tragic slaughter.

WWII is a rather different occurrence in front of which the French do not know where and how to place themselves since their country played a modest role in a conflict on the subject of which they are still divided. "Opinions voiced any time that collaboration/deporta-

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tion/resistance in France are at stake disclose a deep uneasiness" (The World at War, July 2011). Geostrategic is a site of high quality where participants aim at sustaining dispassionate, thoughtful dialogues about warfare in modern times, but when France in WWII comes up for discussion forumers rush over and arguments begin. A straightforward question, introducing a purely theoretical debate: "In a war, is it better to take the towns or to wait until they fall?", unleashes a controversy because someone has made allusion to Paris in 1944 and to the fact that the Allies liberated the town instead of skirting round it. 77 people take a stand, 15,000 bloggers read conflicting observations: the taking, wanted by a French general, was profitable to the Allies who were not obliged to skirt round the capital and leave behind them the garrison; no, the garrison would have capitulated soon, the taking was useless and achieved uniquely to please the communist party.

The deportation and extermination of the Jews occasion the most violent discussions. Since the President has acknowledged, in July 1995, the responsibility of the French government and police for the arrest of more than 15,000 Jews, who were then handed over to the Germans, the Shoah is at the centre of all talks relating to the conflict. Given that, after the President's statement, it is no longer possible to transfer the blame onto the Nazis, another query arises: who was answerable? Only the public authorities? Or all those who did nothing to prevent the drama? The point of importance is that lots of ordinarily passive visitors find it urgent to take a stand on the topic. Being not used to writing long text, they express themselves briskly: "There is an attempt at minimizing the part played by our country in the all-encompassing Nazi enterprise of extermination" – "Is that to say that everybody is accomplice, therefore guilty?" – "The mere fact of shutting one's eyes on the deportation of one part of the population means that France had its part in the whole operation" – "What you are saying is a sheer manifestation of Franco phobia by someone who is taking no risk" (The World at War).

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Indignation and condemnation of the French submission to Germany predominate, nobody tries to justify the authorities, at the utmost some plead: "in a situation of war you have no possibility to react efficaciously" (*ibid.*). At the present moment the dispute is frozen on incompatible stances. Such retroactive considerations, based on feelings, with no hint at concrete situations, sound unrelated to the tragic reality of the Shoah. Beyond the fate of the victims, it refers to political preferences (especially in the debate about Pope Pius XII and the Jews launched in *Passion History*). It reveals also a desire, from the part of the "tourists", to have their say. We are confronted, here, with the subjective, affecting side of history discourses, those who take sides on the web may be at the same time intent on learning and eager to manifest their personal views, especially when they are filled with emotion or feel indignant. The advantage of history, glance taken from the present at events that cannot be reproduced, is that it lends itself to both operations deepening of one's knowledge and expression of one's opinions.

My assumption about the will to give vent to one's strong beliefs is reinforced by a strange phenomenon, WWII serves as a pretext to display contradictory but impassioned judgements about the USA. "America" has long provoked admiration, envy and hostility in France, but the refusal to take part in the second Iraq war, approved by a large majority, has accentuated the diffidence. Calling forth the memory of his father who, being a resistant-fighter, was arrested by the Germans, Laget (most likely above 50) notes: "He has never understood my hostility to the Iraq war, for him the American star painted on a jeep entering the concentration camp was still the symbol of liberty" (*Pearltrees*, January 2010). In such occurrence the divergence between two generations is rational. Outspoken diffidence comes to the fore when an anonymous blogger explains that "After the war, the division of Germany allowed the US to fight against the communist expansion in Europe. Stalin would have preferred an unified Germany to get more war reparations. Germany was divided. The Russians were the losers on two sides, Germany was not unified and they had the poorer, less economically developed part" (*Passion History*). On occasions, we are close to



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non-sense: “De Gaulle has liberated us from the Americans who, thanks to secret agreements, were going to occupy our territory during 99 years” (Net Surfer History). According to the content of this contribution, the author is a man over 70, but the young are not better informed about the NATO treaty, “After the war we were colonised by the Americans, luckily enough de Gaulle kicked them out” (History of France Facebook).

However contradictory they may be, the comments on WWII prove moderate. Opinions about the Algerian war show acid and strained. Two generations were born after the end of the conflict, those who fought it are now above 70 of age, but even in “historical” websites participants are not prepared to play it cool. “I believe that we are knotted in a dialogue of the deaf. If you take into account propaganda and brainwashing on both sides you realise that it is an explosive mixture” (Figaro Blog). Is it better to have a discussion about it or to keep silent? “Talking is good to root out the devil” – “Yes, but it is the job of historians.

A debate, why not, but only with the passing of time, to get rid of mawkishness, laments and claims” (Newsring) “At school I was never told anything regarding the Algerian war. It is crucial to teach the horror of this independence war, not only to children but to all French” (Newsring). “It is not a “forgotten” history, rather the opposite, much is said about the colonies in schools, there is too much about it – which is not better than too less” (Forum History for everybody). As is the case with WWII, but on a much larger scale, bloggers repeat endlessly the same assertions which boil down to two leading ideas, on the one side: “The present state of disorder in France results from the abandonment of Algeria” (Herodotus), on the other: “France condemns the Armenian genocide but doesn’t recognize what it did in Algeria” (Monde Blog). On the web the Algerian war is not yet amenable to a relatively dispassionate, historical approach; for the time being it gives way to an enduring harping. Still, something is worth considering: those who debate are over thirty of age or even older, they contend in the blogs of Figaro and Le Monde, newspapers read by “serious” people. The

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11 March 2012 the channel A2 put in the air a two-hour history of the conflict, *The Algerian War. The Split*. The program, diffused on YouTube, gave way to harsh arguments akin to those circulating on Facebook and characteristic of young net surfers. Instead of disputing about facts and dates the visitors indulged in sexual insults, fuck, queer, poof a.s.o.. "Stop using coarse expressions, neither our parents nor our religion allow us to do it" warned naively a surfer.

### Europe on the march

A glance at historical sites shows that there is practically nothing about the past of other European countries. Net Surfer History asked its visitors which country interested them, they said that it was Russia, not the 20th century Soviet Union but what preceded it, the realm of the tsars, the Orthodox Church and Dostoyevsky. We have signalled a negative perception of the USA, the opinions expressed about other nations, especially about Britain are not more favourable: "English people loathe Napoleon, they are jealous and it gives me great pleasure" (Net Surfer History). [A young, while looking at the picture of a extreme-right celebration around a statue of Joan of Arc, with a French flag]: "Joan of Arc! These English! swines, bastards, pigs, we should hang them with their guts. I like our flag, but the European Union's is a bit of a nuisance" (History of France Facebook).

"If de Gaulle had kept Algeria this country would be French today, with its oil and gas, we would be a great power and not entangled in a paralysing Europe" (Herodotus). We have mentioned above the indignation aroused by the film *The Roundup* about the arrest of the Jews in Paris; a few bloggers took advantage of it to blame the German: "I understand why I have never th Germans with their queer Hitler". The numerous bloggers who participated in a debate regarding the admission of Turkey in the U.E. were unanimous in stating that its entrance was undesirable, suffice to quote one message that summarizes the predominant opinion: "It will not be possible to federate Europe with Turkey whose territory holds the most

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important quantity of US military bases. To boot, like Britain, Turkey champions the international interests of the United States. Britain hasn't adopted the euro and is only interested in a European common market, which explains why it backs the admission of Turkey" (Pearltrees).

However, a closer study of the sites reveal a different attitude, which appears clearly in texts dedicated to WWI. French politicians and historians asserted for decades that Germany's aggressive policy and worldwide ambitions had triggered the conflict. The point of view prevailing today in history forums is radically different: "If, after the hostilities, Germany was proclaimed responsible, it was because of the meanness of the victors, a way of getting profitable reparations. In fact all belligerents had their part in the rise in international tension" (Forum history for everybody) – "It was a crazy conflict. The United Kingdom and France signed the Entente Cordiale to help each other in their respective colonies and counter the growing power of Germany. Russia entered the alliance. Germany and Austria were surrounded by potentially hostile powers" (Imineo) – "France lost Alsace in 1871. It was a traumatism but it was not normal to 'enclose' public opinion in what turned out to be a national obsession. It would have been cleverer to start negotiations about the status of the region" (Forum history for everybody) – "And today they would be European citizens like the French, Germans, Belgian and others" (Id.) – "A typical French victory. They made Germans believe that it was the end of the war with a return to the previous borderlines. Something Germany had proposed in 1916. The Germans agreed but they were obliged to accept the Versailles treaty. They were completely taken aback but could not do anything but sign" (Youtube).

We have already encountered this curiously distanced view of Alsace which, as one of the bloggers rightly says, was an "idée fixe", an axis of the French foreign policy late after the end of WWII. The change of mind with regards to Germany is doubly noticeable. It is first the fruit of a hard, long-lasting work, carried through by a German-French team of historians, which wrote an account

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acceptable in both countries and now taught at school. The opinions expressed by bloggers, their general agreement on a responsibility common to all the nations engaged in the fighting, demonstrate that the enterprise has produced the desired effect. They prove also that pupils or students remember and reproduce what they have learnt. Scholarly teaching continues to govern the way that earlier period can be meaningfully talked of and reasoned about. Reciprocally, once it has been assimilated by the majority, the new reading of the past becomes obvious and everybody hastens to repeat it.

The joint commission of historians has produced a different discourse about the origins of WWI that supplants the pre-existing one. There is no doubt about the dedication of the team-members, but they were able to work together, and their account was ratified, because the political, or historical, circumstances made it possible. The talks that circulate on the net regarding this topic evidence a change in the relationship between Germans and French, a playing-down of superseded prejudices kept alive by a history-based tradition. The relinquishing of unfavourable bias is a limited but significant furtherance in the building of the E.U.

## Conclusions

For a long time, approximately a century, history, as it was told in schools, aimed at persuading the young French that they were heirs to a glorious past, work of great men and heroic anonymous heroes, and that it was their duty to defend it. What was the impact of such exhortations? We shall never know, on that subject we have only a few testimonies written by people who spoke for themselves, nor for the mass of ex school pupils.

The web provides us with a new source of evidence; it allows us to follow those who visit history sites, to observe what interests them and to take notice of their opinions. In relation to the whole French population these people are not in great numbers, but even in other disciplines there are not that many inquisitive minds who,

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being not content with surfing on Facebook, pop in specialised networks either to amuse themselves or because they are looking for some specific information. We lack opinion polls likely to tell us why these individuals wander through the net and whether, previously, they were or were not used to glance at history magazines. Yet the fact that, according to their own declarations, most do not read history books suggests that another public was born with the free access to internet.

In the pre-digital era, there were writers who produced history articles or books, and clients who bought and maybe read these texts. The web has not destroyed this scheme, history magazines and books mushroom, but what is fresh and innovative develops outside the traditional circuits, in a different sphere, which is the realm of web users. A distinct, unprecedented process is maturing under our eyes. Those who travel throughout the web are still consumers of ready-made information, but unlike book readers they are not silent, they can express a point of view and do not hesitate to do it. The main, most striking change is the emergence of an uncommon category of visitors, who insert on the web texts in which they mingle data, judgements, queries and criticism. These forumers are not content with telling what they have in mind, they start dialogues, answer to each other, introduce other arguments and quote documents. In various instances, the conversations gather tens of participants and take an extremely vivacious turn. Yet such talks seldom last long since they express more feelings or impressions than precise, verified data. Collective interest spreads out rapidly, then declines gradually. Some questions do not launch replies, other trigger off animated debates. All reactions interest us, the former because they make known which topics appeal to history-buffs, the latter since they show what worries and even divides a sector of public opinion. We have come across three moments that are of particular importance for the French. All of them came in the 20th century and, given the distance in time, may be deemed historical events. However, with regards to WWII and the Algerian war, the talks moving round the web prove subjective, passionate and do not contribute to an understanding

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of what happened. They reveal an anxiety about how history speaks to the present and raise questions of national disunity and self-image. Such is the worth of history sites: by giving free rein to their convictions instead of narrating what happened, amateurs evidence questions that bother them. All of us feel concerned with lots of every day problems such as accident, unemployment, cost of life, and we ignore whether the situation will improve or deteriorate. Uncertainty regarding the future is always distressing. Conversely, what went before our days, the events that occurred for instance in 1914-18, 1939-45 or 1954-1962 will not change. Earlier periods can be endlessly reinterpreted, but there are no doubts about the way they finished. Retrospective discussions give satisfaction because they do not relate to immediate, urgent, at times insolvable difficulties. Yet, the survey of these controversies does not merely satisfy an intellectual curiosity, it helps to detect veiled sources of social conflicts. Take the enduring division of French public opinion regarding the colonial adventures of the country: while being carefully kept out of political debates, such partition emerges through history debates under way on the net. Serving as a pretext to express opinions, history gives also fuel to prejudices and unfounded, hereditary animosity – remember the peremptory judgments made against Americans and English. The balanced valuation of responsibilities in the launching of WWI shows that unfavourable bias can be corrected.

Of course, history lessons were not enough to rectify firmly rooted preconceptions, many factors contributed in bringing together Germans and French, however a dispassionate appraisal of both nations' pre-war policy removed an irrational obstacle to mutual understanding. Other blockages, illusorily justified by olden crimes, bring into conflict countries belonging to the European Union. Taking advantage of opinions expressed on the web, the Union could lend a hand in clarifying contentious issues – not an easy task and one that requires time and patience.

### Notes

(1) Precise figures about the number of people who visit the web in all countries can be found in <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8552410.stm>>

## HISTORY ON LINE: GREAT BRITAIN

Robyn Cooper (University of Leicester)

### Introduction

The presentation of history of the Internet in the United Kingdom is varied, a wide variety of sources presented by a variety of organisations and users from major websites, blogs and other sources as well as debate and discussion online via YouTube, social media and forums. The examination into the presentation, debate and discussion has uncovered some very interesting points in relation to the presentation of British history of the internet. It could be argued that the examination of history online highlights the issues and trends within the study of history as a whole. Exploring the different types of website as well as the outlets for history online have uncovered a rich and varied presentation of different historical periods as well as varied approaches to sources, for example film and images. Gender history, social, cultural and domestic history are all part of the way the history is presented in Britain across websites, blogs, YouTube videos, social networking and magazines.

There is a lack of broad sweeping narrative history, an importance placed on accuracy and informed debate and also a prominence of a narrow specialised focus in the representation and discussion of topics. A knowledge of as well as a critical approach to sources was also an important feature of unofficial debate. The other key points to highlight are the strong connections with education within history online and the links with television and broadcasting generally. This type of history that dominates the presentation of history online in Britain results in the dominance of a focussed history and one that does not necessarily examine Britain's place in Europe and the rest of the world. There is some evidence of the Britain's place in Europe and the resistance to Nazism; however it does not form a large part of history online in Britain.

There are a number of issues in terms of scope that need to be resolved before starting the discussion and findings.

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The potential scale for this research is large. The amount of resources, possible topics and consequently possible search terms is vast. Consequently, the possibility of the research becoming unwieldy and without focus was an issue. Initial research on the type of information that was available and how it was presented aimed to focus the research. The initial research aimed to gain an understanding of the predominant history websites in Britain. The popular websites were discerned using the terms 'history' within a google.co.uk search and then further general searches for 'British history' and 'history of Britain'. The initial analysis will start with these websites on the first three pages of the Google search results for these terms.

The initial searches highlight a further issue that emerges when examining history of Great Britain or the United Kingdom, what terms do you use? The scope of this project in terms of Britain also needs to be defined. Examining the history of Britain on the internet opens up some issues surrounding definition of what encompasses British history. The history of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and even Ireland could be incorporated. There is also a body of scholarship that argues for the inclusion of the British Empire in domestic British history. The research will focus on the presentation of British history and discussion, comments, posts that defines content as 'British history' rather than history of England, Wales, Scotland or Ireland. This particular issue has become more prominent over the past decade or so as devolution of the Welsh parliament and discussion of Scottish independence have resulted in more definite English, Welsh, Scottish histories compared to an all-encompassing British history. These areas could form individual studies in themselves, and consequently will form one of the recommendations at the end of this study.

The discussion will start by outlining the main historical websites in Britain and chart what type of history is presented, particularly examining what periods and topics are given prominence. This will include a brief look into the representation of British history on Wikipedia.



Official websites dominate these searches, particularly broadcaster, media and education organisations, and the actual debate within them is limited however there is still interesting analysis to make. Examining the dominant themes that emerge within the results of these very basic and broad ranging search terms highlights the 'big topics' in British history online. In particular what are the key time periods, figures or topics that dominate as well as the approaches that these sites take?

The discussion will then go onto a look at the more unofficial presentation of history online. Firstly, it will look at the numerous blogs on British history and those that focus on broader history. It will also look at who created and wrote these blogs, what is discussed and the comments and debate that emerge. It will also look at the capacity for connectivity with social media and how that influences the spread and debate of history online. Once again the discussion will look at how these sites connect to the key findings of this overall discussion, mainly through the links to education, the media and the style and type of history that is presented, i.e. narrowly focussed history topics. The discussion will then move onto a brief look at social media and social networking through an examination of Facebook; however this aspect of the research needs more work. The debate was informed and this section of the paper will look briefly into where the information comes from and the inter-connection of history knowledge online.

The discussion on the 'unofficial' presentation will then move onto an examination of comment and debate on YouTube and forums/discussion boards. Generally, YouTube it is a site of a great deal of debate, discussion and comment and has ended up being a very fruitful site for this research. Reading through the comments and discussion can be very frustrating and demonstrates the pitfalls of researching online comments and debate; however the discussion reinforces the general trend of history online. A number of videos of documentaries on British history have long debates some featured hundreds of comments. A discussion that will look at these comments and also debates within forums will look at how history

is debated on these sites.

There are a number of issues and ideas that have emerged while undertaking this research that could be taken further. The paper will conclude with a few recommendations for further research as well as general conclusions about the key findings of the project. The main recommendation is a more in-depth look at the connection between blogging and social media and the sharing of posts, topics and sources. Twitter in particular is a website which historians, particularly postgraduate students, archives, museums and university departments have utilised to a great extent. Research into what is 'Tweeted' and shared would be very beneficial within the broader research of history online in Britain.

## **Discussion**

### **Websites**

The starting point for analysing history online in Britain has to be Google and the search engines. To understand the presentation of history online in Britain a number of Google searches needed to be undertaken to get a broad overview of the major sites and institutions. A search for history within google.co.uk resulted in sites from broadcasters, universities, institutions, magazines and museums. The search for 'British History' brought up a similar range of websites from official journals, broadcasters, blogs, museums, schools and tourist agencies. An investigation into these sites allows an understanding in the type of British history that is being presented when broad search terms are used. This is an important point. It allows an understanding into the angle on British history presented when searching broadly on the history of Britain. The majority are official broadcaster and education sites and a couple will be examined here. However, it is also important to note the occurrence of archives and museums particularly the major organisations such as the National Archives and the British Museum (1). A couple of magazines were also within the search results, again these are official, History Today and BBC History Magazine (2).

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The search term the 'History of the United Kingdom' brings up some different results to that of 'British history' but the overall trends are the same. The sites that emerge range from those that are generally historical and focus on history of the UK again include British History Online and more academic sites, broadcaster sites such as the BBC and the History Channel and also a couple of museum websites.

Education, connected to both schools and universities dominated the results for searches for 'British history' and 'history of the United Kingdom'. The first website on the search for 'British history' is British History Online, a digital library that brings together primary and secondary sources from the medieval to the modern period of the history of the British Isles<sup>(3)</sup>. The website is a joint venture by the Institute of Historical Research and the History of Parliament Trust and they 'aim to support academic and personal users around the world in their learning, teaching and research'. Even though it is an academic/educational website it is not a subscription database and so is available to the public. However, the site is aimed primarily at the academic and the student as a database of a range of primary sources, the majority of which are specialist and in-depth. For example letters used as evidence against Mary, Queen of Scots, The Casket Letters, from the Calendar of State Papers for Scotland, an architectural account of the Covent Garden Theatre and the Royal Opera House from the Survey of London, the Bill of Rights from the Statutes of the Realm, letters on the marriage of Katherine of Aragon from the Calendar of State Papers for Spain and Titus Oates's Narrative concerning the 'Popish Plot' from the House of Lords journal to name a few.

The main source for British history on the Internet is arguably the BBC (4). The searches for all the variations of 'British history' result in the BBC History and other related pages featuring in the top pages of results. The timeline of British history is the first BBC result which acts as a gateway to the main sites on each of the periods of British history (5). The main section on British history features links to the 'big topics' of British history - Normans, Middle Ages,

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Tudors, Civil War and Revolution, Victorian Britain, WWI, WWII and 'the making of modern Britain (1945-present).' As well as the major topics the site also features 'special sections' on 'Empire and Sea Power' and 'abolition of the slave trade.' The topics outline some of the bigger events of each period, for example the Boer Wars during the Victorian period. The main method of presentation of history on the site is specific in-depth articles that delve into social and cultural history. 'Tudors and Victorians: Dressing Up', 'The Victorian Seaside' by Prof. John Walton, 'The Foundling Hospital' by Rhian Harris and 'On the Best in Birmingham' by David Cross are just some examples in the Victorian section of the site. Articles on the site also often feature topics and themes that are part of the BBC schedule and current programmes. Clips and additional material often features prominently and the main homepage links viewers to history stories within the main news. Indeed, the links between history on the internet and history on television is an important one and alongside education dominates history online.

The BBC as a major distributor of history on the internet as well as one the television highlights the link. Within the first pages of the 'British history' search results the BBC programming features heavily including links to the recent 'A History of the World in 100 objects' BBC project and 'The Great British Story: A People's History' a BBC Two production. The search for 'history of Britain' and the 'the history of the United Kingdom' also brings up a number of YouTube videos and links to television productions. Youtube will be discussed later in this project; however, the connection to television is an important factor within simple searches on Google too. A search for the 'History of Britain' will result in links to Simon Schama's A History of Britain documentary series as well as YouTube clips of the BBC 'A History of Ancient Britain' programme. Indeed, the portrayal of history on the Internet and on television can be seen to be strongly linked in Britain. Blogs and magazines feature 'popular' history or what could be described as 'flavour of the month history'. Articles and blog posts link to the history on the television and the history in the media and particularly the BBC and leading newspapers.

Wikipedia does need a brief examination due to its prominence within the searches for history on the internet. Wikipedia entries feature in the first half-page of Google results for searches for 'British history', 'history of the UK' and other variations of the terms. For many, searching the Internet for history would bring them to a Wikipedia entry; indeed Wikipedia entries dominate the results of searches for historical events, periods, people and themes. On the whole the presentation of British history on Wikipedia follows the trend of the rest of history online. The general broad sweeping history of Britain is relatively limited. The 'history of the British Isles' Wikipedia entry has a sentence on Roman Britain with a link to the entry on Roman Britain (6). There is no text on 'Early Medieval,' 'Early modern period,' or the '18th and 19th centuries'. The '20th and 21st Centuries' was split into 1900-1945, 1945-1997 and 1997 to present. There is no mention of the 'big topics' of British history, Henry VIII and the Tudors, the Victorians or the Industrial revolution and World War II is only featured in half a paragraph. The entry on the British Isles is a stepping off point to the more in-depth articles on British history, indeed there is a list featured at the bottom of the entry of all the periods of British history from pre-historic to modern Britain. To read through more in-depth history, the topic, period or historical figure would have to be known and searched for or found by clicking through the links to other entries. The main difference between the presentation on Wikipedia and other sites is the approach in terms of topics. The history of the United Kingdom' and other big topics tend to focus on the political and monarchical elements of British history. Unlike the websites, blogs and social media the presentation of history is not about the cultural, social, material and domestic history but the political and economic side of history.

The second dominant source of history online is the education sector. The presentation of history on the first pages of Google results is dominated by higher education and sources for schools. There are a number of sites aimed at schools and students with a focus on homework and the history curriculum. It is higher education however, that really dominates. Journals, Universities and associated

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research centres feature throughout the results, the 20th Century British History journal, the British Society for the History of Science, The Centre for Contemporary British History (CCBH) a research centre based at King's College London (KCL), the Institute of Contemporary British History at KCL, the Royal Historical Society, the history department at University College London, the British Society for the History of Mathematics at Warwick University and the Institute of Historical Research all feature in the first three pages of Google results (7). It is also interesting to note that the majority of blogs within the general Google search results are linked to academic and official institutions (8).

The examination of the themes presented in the official and most prominent websites highlights the dominant themes and the priorities of history in the UK. The media and education dominate the presentation of the history online. The sites present a narrow topic based history with a focus on sources. These sites do not allow for a great deal of discussion, it is the unofficial sources that allow for an examination of the debate and comment. Blogs, social media, YouTube and forums reflect the trends in the official sources but also reveals interesting features in the understanding of history and sources.

### **Blogs**

There are a large number of blogs centred on history and these include general history blogs but the majority are focussed and look at a particular period or source type. There are blogs that look at Georgian history, Victorian history, Tudor history, photographic history and oral history to name just a few. The very nature of blogs allows a more in-depth look at a specific topic or source; however it is interesting to note what type of history is being examined and what sources are being used. An examination of these blogs once again highlights the in-depth and sometimes specialist nature of British history and the lack of a broad sweeping presentation of history online, the importance of highlighting little known sources and topics, the strong connections to education and the links with the media and history on television in relation to what topics are discussed.

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Blogs such as 'Parliament and Women,' 'Georgian London,' 'Mercurius Politicus: A Blog about Early Modern Books,' 'History and Culture,' 'Health, History and Happiness,' 'Travels and Travails in 18th Century England,' 'History and the Sock Merchant: A Modern History Blog,' 'British Social History,' 'Cradled in caricature: Some Thoughts on History, Cartoons, and Satire,' and the 'Scottish Diaspora Blog' are just a few examples of the specialist nature of the history presented in blogs (9).

The presentation of history within blogs in Britain again highlights the importance of education, particularly higher education. A number of blogs emerge in a general Google search 'history of Britain' or 'British history' and the majority are linked to higher education. 'The History of Emotions blog' is connected to Queen Mary University, the London School of Economics blog is also a feature and there is also a blog connected to [British History Online](#) (10). A great number of the bloggers on history in the UK are postgraduate students. A project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council encouraged postgraduate, particularly PhD student create blogs about their research and surrounding periods (11). The History Blogging Project aimed to create opportunities for these students 'to engage with specialist and non-specialist audiences, and to demonstrate the impact of their work by creating and informing new, virtual, public spheres and spaces.'

"Through the development of an online collection of how-to guides, advice and examples taken from current history blogs, the Project aims both to inspire postgraduate historians to blog and to challenge existing bloggers to think about the ways in which they share their research with a range of different audiences"(12).

The project and blogs created are intrinsically linked to history in higher education. Debates focus on how students can reach a wider audience with their work.

The topics and sources that the blogs highlight are often pictorial or material history based. Blogs often highlight where new sources have been put online and include a variety of types of sources in

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which sources can be promoted:

“William Cowper’s poem of 1788, *The Negro’s Complaint* is often quoted regarding the abolitionist movement. Rarely is the point made that it was in fact, created as part of a simplistic textbook intended to teach the evils of slavery on a basic level, probably to children, but this is instantly apparent by the BL’s putting it online. This is an important subject of interest to many thousands, few of whom will have the opportunity physical access to the original text. Now they do, and can see it in context”(13).

There is a connection between online history, particularly blogs and social media, and the digitisation of sources. Often the dissemination of the history online uses the increasing amount of primary material that is being placed online. It is interesting that the top site on the Google search for ‘British history’ is a site that collates primary sources for anyone to use.

Many authors/bloggers use their blog as a way of looking in more detail at topics, figures and periods that are prominent within the media. This brings us back to the point of connections to television and the media. Over the past few weeks blogs and forums have been dominated by the Richard III archaeological dig and other stories of history in the news across the world. Blogs include in-depth discussion based on what history is being presented on the television, whether that is documentaries from the BBC and other networks or historical dramas such as *Downton Abbey*. Posts are often linked to the news; one blog post in ‘Georgian London’ written during the London riots in August 2011 looked at the history of Tottenham and the built environment. Another post was a reply to an article in *The Guardian* written by Tristram Hunt on online history (14).

The debates and discussion on these blogs are not overwhelming in number however what is posted reinforces the points already made about history online. The majority do not see a large amount of comment and debate and the comments that do emerge tend to be offers of thanks for posting the information. Occasionally posters



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bring more information to the topic or highlight a source that might be of further interest. A typical example of this can be found in the comments in the post on 'The History of the Female Shipwright' in the Georgian History blog:

"What an incredible story. Good on the Royal Navy acting fairly in giving her the pension. This opens a up a whole range of questions about sexuality in the 18th century and what could be accepted."

"This is the most fascinating story. And I'm stunned that the Royal Navy paid her pension when we mainly read of their ill treatment of sailors. Being a woman makes the story even more amazing" (15).

One commenter added more material and examples of sources within their post and others pointed towards podcasts and articles that may be of further interest. Comments on the post 'Grub Street in 1641' on 'Mercurius Politicus: A Blog about Early Modern Books' also highlights this trend. The comments include questions on sources, evidence and further information.

"Great stuff, Nick ... I don't suppose the parish books survive from this period? It would be interesting to know if he and his collaborators served in parish offices during the 1630s-40s or whether they were entirely excluded by the conformist/laudian vicar and vestry. I would not be surprised to find that they argued viciously over parish worship but still all took turns as, e.g., constables or overseers."

"Irritatingly, none of the vestry books survive! As you say, I would love to know more about what is going on during this period within the politics of the parish, but beyond a petition reprinted as a pamphlet, the state papers, and some discussions on the floor of the Commons noted by various diaries, there's nothing direct. I am however trying to explore some leads about Walker's time at Cambridge, which may tell me more about his faith and who he studied under there" (16).

The trend in which commenters add further information and sources is important one in terms of history online.

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Debate could also be analysed in terms of the connection to social media and social network sites. Blogs provide the opportunity to link to the post via Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and other sites. Lucy Inglis the author of 'Georgian London' stated that her blog gained 'traction' through Facebook and Twitter (17). It could be argued that blogs are read and commented on by a different type of online user than those on social media and YouTube. Readers and commenters on blogs are more likely to be already interested in the topic and have a knowledge that could be brought. However, the links between social media and blogs would benefit from further study, what topics are 'linked' between these websites? What is re-blogged and retweeted? This is a different type of debate and discussion to that found in blogs and on YouTube, but a great deal of the history online is distributed via social media websites.

### Youtube

YouTube saw a large amount of 'debate' by commenters, with many clips of documentaries on British history including hundreds and some thousands of comments. In terms of the unofficial debate and content online by non-historians, the comments and discussion offer a great deal of material. There are issues with looking through these comments and sieving through some of the inappropriate posts is part of this type of research, however, the majority of the discussion reflects the general trend in history online. The posters and commenters focussed on the factual information and the in-depth aspects of history, looking at the details rather than the broad sweeping narrative. The source of their knowledge is not clear, unlike blogs and forums, links are not common, however the debate reveals some interesting comments on the use and approach to history.

A search for British History on YouTube brings up mainly BBC documentaries on various aspects of the broad topic. The most popular videos that feature in the results are Simon Schama's 'The History of Britain', Andrew Marr's 'History of Modern Britain', a number of clips from the children's BBC series The Horrible Histories and a couple of short clips of wartime history. It is the discussion attached the clips, however, that the interest lies.

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There was discussion on sources, factual issues, evidence and interestingly the approach of the historians. Debate, even though it often included inappropriate and deliberately inflammatory comments, was informed and focussed. There are insightful comments on approach and bias within the debate. This exchange between two posters on the Simon Schama documentary 'The History of Britain' is a good example of the types of debate attached to the clips and documentaries:

"It's a great series, notwithstanding Schama's utterly bizarre notions of what British "history" he wants to tell us about. George Orwell shares equal time with Winston Churchill. The Spanish Armada is barely mentioned. Trafalgar and Waterloo each get a sentence or so.....a few seconds in an episode which devotes many? minutes to tell us about Mary Wellstonecraft [sic], including her suicide attempt and grisly bloody death. Schama is idiosyncrasy personified." (18)

"Quite true. That's why he insisted the series be called "A History" not "The History" because he was making a clear distinction between his interpretation and a cut-and-dried affair. Simon Schama is known for taking a very subjective approach to history, and this series has a very clear through-line, which is about the notion of individual liberty. Schama likes to talk about history through the personal lives of people who embody and defy their time." (19)

Another example commenters discuss the approach Schama took to the Vikings:

"What a sneering, shamelessly ignorant disdain for the Vikings (an inadequate term in itself) this man has. "Historians of Vikings say this and this—but think how their victims must have felt!" You could say the same thing about any invading people, from the iron age inhabitants of Britain through to the Normans. "If you look at any culture long enough you can find nice things to say about it." He's clearly made up his mind, and has little patience for facts that contradict it. What a historian". (20)

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“What you forget is, that this series is about the history of Britain and not about the history of the Danes or the Norwegians. The impact [sic] of these people on the British islands was raiding and conquest and in that, the term “Viking” is accurate. You can’t expect an extended [sic] view on foreign invaders, for a “yes but there were very nice ones too”, it would extend the series to infinity. The Vikings, where an episode and fact is that they didn’t shine with cultural [sic] grandeur but with steel and blood”. (21)

The posts and comments had an understanding of the issues within the study of history. In a discussion on early British history, one poster approached the topic of sources, “Unfortunately the English are the ones that are telling the story of Britain, with the English [sic] slant on it. When [sic] in fact they were the last to arrive here, and Stone Age dwellings were Celtic houses”. (22) Sources and the approach taken by the presenter were analysed. The research into the YouTube clips highlighted that people were not passive viewers, they criticised from a historical perspective:

“I wish the historians would consider the old British writings. There were King lists that the Britons wrote themselves and preserved. According to the pre-Roman Britons, their first king was Brutus the Trojan. People should at least consider these old histories rather than just assume [sic] that it is false history because the academics say so. We should consider everything”. (23)

Posters and commenters discussed terms and the accuracy, detail and complexity of the ideas of nationalities and identity when examining British history. A good example of this can be found in the discussion on the Norman period of British history where the relationship with the Vikings and ideas of culture and language are highlighted and discussed in detail. (24)

Debate within the comments and discussion on YouTube was often informed and facts and points within the clips were questioned and corrected. For example, these comments on the history of the police force:

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“Uhm, not to be pedantic but wasn't the City of Glasgow Police founded on the 29th September 1800, and Robert Peel's Metropolitan Police Act, 1829? Are my facts wrong?”

“Your right there were lots of “police forces” throughout history and I do not know how that one differed but I know that the Peeler's are considered the first modern police force on which all others are modelled [sic]. This is what we learn in school anyway.” (25)

And this post and subsequent comments on the dates of the independence of South Africa after a clip on the history of the British Empire:

“South Africa actually got it's [sic] independence in 1910, just to correct a 'factual' error in this video.” (Swanbow)

“Yeah from the union but you didn't officially became independent until 1961.” (AdamTheMan1993)

“In 1961 that we became a Republic, we still had independence before this granted with the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. For example in South Africa almost remained neutral in the Second World War. Using that logic Canada, New Zealand and Australia are still part of the Empire as they aren't Republics.” (Swanbow)

“Well no, the Empire no longer exists, Canada, New Zealand and Australia are commonwealth nations, which have there [sic] own parliaments, we just call the Queen the head of state, despite having very lil power.” (GuruJudge21)

“I know, I was just using that to make an example of how the original persons statement was wrong.” (Swanbow)

The following comment was posted in a video on the 'History of the British Empire':

“2:18 the hyper host says that Australia & Canada left the British Empire after WW1. In fact that's [sic] not accurate. In 1931 the Statute of Westminster was written authorizing the handover of state

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authority from London to the local dominions within the empire. Canada was the first to recognize the statue in 1932, Australia in 1939. Neither left the British Empire, the empire just dissolved into what is now called the British Commonwealth Realm which consists of 16 nations including Canada & Australia". (26)

The importance of historical accuracy also finds its way into the clips that feature 'historical' topics but may not site themselves as history, for example, topics related to the British Empire and its former colonies. These clips often featured long debates on the nature of imperialism or a debate surrounding the positives and negative of Empire or whether the United States was an imperial power. Indeed, the topics that could be considered to be more contentious within the scholarship did have more debate and comments. One six minute clip of the children's programme the *Horrible Histories* in which they explain the history of the British Empire using a comedic, but still educational, method had almost 6,500 comments. A large amount of these comments are not about history, and many comments descend into angry heated attacks. This is also the case in the comments on the Niall Ferguson documentary 'Empire: How Britain made the Modern World'. Debates revolve around the cruelty of the British Empire and also argue against the idea that Britain 'made the modern world'. History was used, whether it was using facts on figures or events to highlight points and arguments or prove another poster was incorrect.

The discussion and debate within YouTube comments reflected the broader trends in the presentation of history online in Britain. The posts on YouTube were informed and showed a good knowledge on the approaches to history as well as the topics themselves. However, the source of the knowledge was not clear. It is through forums that a more focussed debate occurred and provides another angle on the 'unofficial' presentation of history online in Britain.

## Forums

There are a number of forums that focus on history. Again, a narrow specialist approach to history dominates. A Google search for history and forum/debate reveals a great deal of local history sites and also specialist history topics, for example naval history and Scottish Local History (27). Family history is also a feature of the forums and the discussion on them. General history forums are viewed and posted on by thousands and the majority of these are not British history focussed however some relate such as the Napoleonic Wars and other military history topics(28). The main forums look at specific historical figures, such as Chamberlain and Henry VIII (29). Again this debate highlighted the informed nature of debate online.

It is within blog comments and forum posts where links and sources were cited or highlighted. The source of these informed comments and debates are linked back to websites, books and other sources. As we have seen within the blog comments, the additional information that is included is archival reflecting the more academic nature of the blogs and their readers/commenters. The forum posts take a slightly different approach. Where sources are cited or linked to, they tend to be popular and non-academic; however, citations are made and on occasion asked for by other forum users.

The discussion surrounding the post 'Why is Henry VII so overshadowed by his son?' on historum.com highlights the variety of sources the posters use and link to within their discussion of history (30). The debate within the thread is informed although often speculative in nature, however, unlike the blogs, the links and sources of information are not academic. The first poster who poses the question uses Wikipedia to provide the background for the topic and the historical figure. A poster within the thread uses television as part of their answer:

"Because the reign of Henry VIII was more exciting and more dramatic. Henry VII was a clever, shrewd man, but did not have such an exciting personality as Henry VIII. Nor did he have six wives. Nor

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did he have six wives. Nor did he preside over a major social and religious upheaval [sic], like Henry VIII did. Henry VIII is simply more colourful and exciting.

But there was a good TV series about Henry VII in the 70s, it's called *The Shadow of the Tower*, and is available on DVD. Inevitably, it wasn't as popular as *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, or *Elizabeth R*, but it is quite entertaining."

A commenter further down within the thread links to a site of 'Fun Trivia: Henry VII' as a starting point for the discussion (31). The discussion then moves into a debate on the influence of private lives on the notoriety but also prominence of Henry VIII within subsequent history. A number of non-fiction books are also mentioned (and linked to). The popularity of Tudor-based novels

"In the book I'm reading on Catherine, he is portrayed as penny-pinching (once gold goes in his coffers, it never comes out again), in love with Elizabeth of York (although much fonder of his mother and listens more to her than his wife) and very unpopular with his subjects. An accurate portrait? I want to find out."

Sources were often asked for by other posters, for example, this exchange in the forum, 'Was any British Citizen Ever Prosecuted for Involvement in the American Civil War? (32)

"The British Government declared a Proclamation of Neutrality on May 13th, which prohibited Englishmen to enlist on either the side of the Union or the CSA."

"Do you have a source for this claim? Neutrality rules were different in the 19th century to what they are today, and I doubt that Britain had any rules banning private citizens from volunteering for foreign wars at their own risk."

The awareness and importance of accuracy and evidence, even though it's different to the blogs is evident and can be seen as a key point within the research on the forums.



The style of debate and discussion topics has led to a revisionist historical line of thought in some areas. This was particularly the case through the posing of questions within the forum posts, such as who was a bigger threat to Britain, Hitler or Napoleon? The very nature of the post topic allows the discussion to look at different angles and highlight new approaches to topics, which often take into account other actors in an event. However, these still tend to be focussed on the domestic and the in-depth focus on a topic, rather than the broad sweeping history of Britain.

### **Britain and Europe**

As we have seen throughout, on the whole, the history online in Britain focuses on domestic history and international history is presented as a separate from British history. Blogs, websites and other outlets look at social, cultural, gender, medical, history of the home and other topics that look in depth into the a particular period focussing on Britain. The representation of history in general online in the UK is one of British domestic history that focuses on these approaches and a separate world history which includes Europe. The British Empire connects the two to an extent, however the history of Britain as connected to Europe is not a feature. Even the history of the two World Wars on the BBC website, the major source for online history in Britain, focuses on 'the home-front'.

There is a link to Europe through an article on the interconnection between the Royal houses of Europe in WWI, however this is not the general trend. The section on World War II focuses on the Blitz, evacuation, the Home Guard, the role of women and advertising and information posters. Discussions online also follow this trend, particularly in blogs.

Consequently, the ideas and issues such as the relationship to Europe, resistance to Nazism, the Shoah and post-socialist society do not form part of the history presented online. Even the general history sections of the BBC that features sections on the Cold War etc. do not present Britain's involvement rather a focus on topics such as 'John F Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis.' The only article

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that looks at Britain's involvement discusses the 'Cambridge Spies'. The discussions online that connect Britain to topics outside domestic history tend to be comparative in nature, for example comparing the British and American impact on the world within YouTube debate. This is similar to the presentation on Wikipedia. When the history looks beyond the United Kingdom or Britain the representation of history looks to the British Empire or occasionally America (with its historic links to Britain). For example, the Wikipedia entry on the 'History of the United Kingdom' includes a section on the Empire at various points from 1707 and also includes a section on the American Civil War. Ireland also features quite heavily but very little on European connections. On the whole, European history and the associated topics tend to be separated from British history across sources and websites.

### Recommendations

Social networks, particularly the connection between social networks and the other history online deserves further research. This work has highlighted the interconnection between social media and blogs as well as the interconnection between the media and history online, however more work needs to be done here. 'British History' on Facebook has over 4,500 'likes,' but what does that mean for history online? Through a brief examination of Facebook a few general points can be made. The topics that feature and consequently will appear on the feed of those who have 'liked' the topic are linked to big historical figures, battles and events that have occurred on or around the date that they are posted, 'Today in History'. Examples for September/October include the Battle of Poitiers and features on Samuel Johnson, Alexander Flemming and Isambard Kingdom Brunel. There are not many comments, the majority featuring between two and ten.

The interest lies in the links between social media and other websites. As has been noted earlier, an examination of how topics, sites and sources, particularly via Twitter and blogging, are linked is important would be an interesting angle to take in the study of the presentation of history online, particularly in Britain. Further and

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more in-depth analysis of the forums would also be beneficial, particularly in relation to examining the links and sources users have cited.

Linked with these ideas, further research into some of the smaller social media websites would also be beneficial. The scope for this project is large so there have been some sites that have not been looked into which could prove fruitful for further research. Social media websites such as Tumblr and Pinterest, both predominantly image based may yield some interesting information.

And finally, as highlighted at the beginning of this work it is important to examine the specific countries within the United Kingdom. There is a great deal of Welsh, English, Northern Irish or Scottish history on the net. As in this current period of devolution and independence debates this would be a very fruitful area to look into, particularly the discussion on the use of history within broader topics and ideas.

### **Conclusions**

The presentation of history online in Britain is linked strongly to education, particularly higher education as well as strong links to the media and television. The history online focuses on the specifics of history, it's not a broad sweeping narrative approach, which has resulted in a much more focused presentation. Accuracy, sources and detail are important both in the presentation on websites and blogs and also debate and discussion on YouTube and social media. Overall the debate, blogs, websites etc. are focussed on the niche and specifics of history. On the whole, the history online is presented as domestic or world history, separated by websites and web users. Consequently, there is not a great deal of examination of Britain's place within the world or Europe. Even the major sites for British history such as the BBC narrow down the focus of broader periods such as World War II to information on the home front. The history online in Britain is informed and varied and this research has shown the varied websites and methods of distribution have all highlighted these trends.

## Notes

- (1) National Archives <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>>; The British Museum <<http://www.britishmuseum.org/>>
- (2) History Today <<http://www.historytoday.com/>>; History Extra – The Official Website of BBC History Magazine <<http://www.historyextra.com/>>
- (3) British History Online <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>>
- (4) BBC History <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/0/>>
- (5) BBC History – British History <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/>>
- (6) 'History of the British Isles,' Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_British\\_Isles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_British_Isles) (October 1, 2012)
- (7) 20th Century British History (Oxford Journals) <<http://tcbh.oxfordjournals.org/>>; British Society for the History of Science <[www.bsos.org.uk/](http://www.bsos.org.uk/)>; The Centre for Contemporary British History (CCBH) <<http://www.ccbh.ac.uk/>>; Institute of Contemporary British History (KCL) <<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/groups/ich/index.aspx>>; The Royal Historical Society <[www.royalhistoricalsociety.org/](http://www.royalhistoricalsociety.org/)>; History (University College London) <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/>>; British Society for the History of Mathematics <[www.dcs.warwick.ac.uk/bshm/](http://www.dcs.warwick.ac.uk/bshm/)>; Institute of Historical Research <<http://www.history.ac.uk/>>.
- (8) The History of Emotions Blog (Queen Mary University) <http://www.emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/>>; History Division News (University of Glamorgan) <<http://historydivision.blogs.glam.ac.uk/>>; British Museum Blog <<http://blog.britishmuseum.org/>>; National Archives Labs <<http://labs.nationalarchives.gov.uk/wordpress/>> History of Science Blog (British Library) <<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/oralhistoryofscience/>>
- (9) Parliament and Women <<http://parliamentandwomen.wordpress.com/blog/>>; Georgian London <<http://www.georgianlondon.com/>>; Mercurius Politicus: A Blog about Early Modern Books <<http://mercuriuspoliticus.wordpress.com/>>; History and Culture <<http://kathleenmcil.wordpress.com/>>; Health, History and Happiness <<http://markhohnigsbaum.blogspot.co.uk/>>; Travels and Travails in 18th Century England <<http://phdpanacea.wordpress.com/>>; History and the Sock Merchant: A Modern History Blog <<http://historyandthesockmer>
- (10) The History of Emotions Blog (Queen Mary University)

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<http://www.emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/>; British History Online Blog <<http://britishhistoryonline.blogspot.co.uk/>>

(11) The History Blogging Project <<http://www.historybloggingproject.org/>>

(12) 'About', The History Blogging Project <http://www.historybloggingproject.org/about/>

(13) Lucy Inglis, 'Response to Tristram Hunt's 'Guardian Article,' (July 3, 2011) <http://www.georgianlondon.com/response-to-tristram-hunts-guardian-article>

(14) Lucy Inglis, 'Tottenham: Never do anything when you are in a temper, for you will do everything wrong,' (August 7, 2011) <<http://www.georgianlondon.com/tottenhams-loss-nobodys-gain> >; Lucy Inglis, 'Response to Tristram Hunt's 'Guardian Article,' (July 3, 2011) <<http://www.georgianlondon.com/response-to-tristram-hunts-guardian-article>>

(15) Lucy Inglis, 'The History of the Female Shipwright,' (June 7, 2012) <<http://www.georgianlondon.com/the-history-of-the-female-shipwright>

(16) 'Grub Street in 1641,' (August 28, 2012) <<http://mercuriuspoliticus.wordpress.com/2012/08/28/grub-street-in-1641/>>

(17) Lucy Inglis, 'A Social Engagement' <http://www.historybloggingproject.org/2011/02/a-social-engagement/> (21 February 2011)

(18) Dannys998877 (Comment on A History Of Britain Pt1 Beginnings 1) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7ndvcAYIE4>>

(19) SaintAlia10191 (Comment on A History Of Britain Pt1 Beginnings 1) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7ndvcAYIE4>>

(20) Avidyachild (Comment on A History Of Britain Pt1 Beginnings 6) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQDPdeZI8Uc&feature=relmfu>>

(21) Bahutsauvage (Comment on A History Of Britain Pt1 Beginnings 6) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQDPdeZI8Uc&feature=relmfu>>

(22) BigWoodyAllen (Comment on A History of Britain 1) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RrLDBtvpcw&feature=BFa&list=PL85445144620C0E49>>

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- (23) PaganWarrior (Comment on A History of Britain 1) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RrLDBtvpcw&feature=BFa&list=PL85445144620C0E49>>
- (24) 'History of Britain 1' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RrLDBtvpcw&feature=BFa&list=PL85445144620C0E49>
- (25) Blacbear and reply from WillShakespeare2007 (Comment on 50 Things You Need to Know About British History: Freedom) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUA2DpvE8Qk>
- (26) JimmyG228 (Comment on History of the British Empire) [http://www.youtube.com/all\\_comments?threaded=1&v=bWedTbuAtR4](http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?threaded=1&v=bWedTbuAtR4)
- (27) Naval History Forums <http://www.kbismarck.org/forum/>; Scottish Local History Forum <http://www.slhf.org/>
- (28) 'Napoleonic Era' <http://www.armchairgeneral.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?s=18d203707cf9f2cb96834184df7daf8e&f=140>
- (29) European History (including the British Isles, Scandinavia, and Russia.) <http://www.historum.com/european-history/index4.html>
- (30) 'Why is Henry VII so overshadowed by his son?' <http://www.historum.com/european-history/49189-why-henry-vii-so-overshadowed-his-son.html> (November 6, 2012)
- (31) 'Fun Trivia: Henry VII' <http://www.funtrivia.com/en/People/Henry-VII-10423.html>
- (32) Was any British Citizen Ever Prosecuted for Involvement in the American Civil War? (Posts by NelsonSmith and reply by redcoat)<http://www.historum.com/european-history/48171-any-british-citizen-ever-prosecuted-involvement-american-civil-war.html>

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Georgian London <<http://www.georgianlondon.com/>>

Health, History and Happiness <<http://markhonigsbaum.blogspot.co.uk/>>

Historum <http://www.historum.com>

The History Blogging Project <<http://www.historybloggingproject.org/>>

History (University College London) < <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/>>

History and Culture <<http://kathleenmcil.wordpress.com/>>

History Extra – The Official Website of BBC History Magazine <<http://www.historyextra.com/>>

'History of the British Isles,' Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_British\\_Isles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_British_Isles) (Accessed: October 1, 2012)

## Great Britain

History Division News (University of Glamorgan) < <http://historydivision.blogs.glam.ac.uk/>>

The History of Emotions Blog (Queen Mary University) <http://www.emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/>>

History of Science Blog (British Library) <<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/oralhistoryofscience/>>

History and the Sock Merchant: A Modern History Blog <<http://historyandthesockmerchant.blogspot.co.uk/>>

History Today <<http://www.historytoday.com/>>

Institute of Contemporary British History (KCL) < <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/groups/ich/index.aspx>>

Institute of Historical Research < <http://www.history.ac.uk/>>

Mercurius Politicus: A Blog about Early Modern Books <<http://mercuriuspoliticus.wordpress.com/>>

National Archives <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>>

National Archives Labs <<http://labs.nationalarchives.gov.uk/wordpress/>>

Naval History Forums <http://www.kbismarck.org/forum/>

Parliament and Women <<http://parliamentandwomen.wordpress.com/blog/>>

The Royal Historical Society < [www.royalhistoricalsociety.org/](http://www.royalhistoricalsociety.org/)>

Scottish Diaspora Blog <<http://thescottishdiaspora.wordpress.com/>>.

Scottish Local History Forum <http://www.slhf.org/>

Travels and Travails in 18th Century England <<http://phdpanacea.wordpress.com/>>

20th Century British History (Oxford Journals) <<http://tcbh.oxfordjournals.org/>>

Youtube <http://www.youtube.com>



## THE REPRESENTATION OF HISTORICAL TOPICS ON THE INTERNET IN HUNGARY

Teréz Vincze (Helte University, Budapest)

### 1. The special logic of the Internet – history thematized by Google

The Google search engine seems to be the single most defining factor in accessing information available on the Internet – in this regard Hungary is no different from other parts of the world. In my opinion it has two main consequences for this research. Firstly, this kind of research – and any research that investigates the representation of a certain topic, and data connected to that topic on the Internet – necessarily should deal with the phenomena called Search Engine Optimization (SEO) (1). Although the present paper does not discuss this aspect, partly because my knowledge about the field is quite limited, I am aware that the lack of this aspect could affect immensely the relevance of the data presented here.

Secondly, even if my knowledge about the working mechanisms of search engines is limited, it seemed necessary to investigate what and how Google “think” about history in general and about certain historical topics in particular. To see “what and how Google think” I explore the search results produced by Google in connection with the chosen search terms.

#### General search – a truly hypothetical case

Firstly I have searched the term “history” (‘történelem’ in Hungarian) in Google. This kind of a search is obviously a truly hypothetical idea. In real life users search more specific terms, try to find an answer to some specific question, or would like to know more about something that is more clearly defined. Nevertheless, I was interested whether such a search would result in a list of sources that could be considered as a representative sample of the material present on the Internet. It has turned out that this search actually provides the user with a list of links to sites/documents

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that are, in a way, representatives of data types available on the net concerning history(2).

Page and data types present in the search result:

- link inventories
- general interest history portal
- Hungarian Wikipedia
- general interest history blog
- educational resources for primary and secondary school students
- historical gaming site
- academic institution (history department of a university)

### **Link inventories – attempts to catalogue the Internet**

The first item of the search's result is a 'lap.hu' [page.hu] site that Hungarian web-users are quite familiar with. Most of the searches about general terms like 'history', 'biology', 'mathematics', etc. leads to the Hungarian link inventory page [www.startlap.hu](http://www.startlap.hu). This page is operated by Sanoma Media Budapest Inc., the Hungarian branch of the European media conglomerate Sanoma Co., and one of the biggest private media company in Hungary. Startlap.hu administers around 9000 thematic pages (like [tortenelem.lap.hu](http://tortenelem.lap.hu), [biologia.lap.hu](http://biologia.lap.hu), [matematika.lap.hu](http://matematika.lap.hu), etc.) and – for the average Hungarian user – functions as a secondary Internet filter after Google. This phenomenon is similar to the thematic catalogue of libraries and helps those who really do not know where to start the search about a certain topic. However, since with the help of Google it is possible to search any particular term, these inventories not necessarily channel users who conduct searches about more specific terms than 'history'.

From the point of view of the present research these catalogue sites might be interesting as far as they conceptualize history by creating groups of links according to the assumable fields of interests of users. The opening page of [tortenelem.lap.hu](http://tortenelem.lap.hu) creates thematic

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groups and directs users either to further general lap.hu pages, or actual webpages about a certain topic (3).

I have found another Hungarian link inventory page (linkma.hu) that maintains a collection dedicated to history topics (tortenelem.linkma.hu) as well. This page is a community project, anyone can participate as editor of link collections as far as (s)he regularly updates the link collections (s)he is responsible for (4). Participation means to be the “host” of a certain collection of links: the host collects and updates the links that (s)he is responsible for. Through the selection of links the hosts can express their opinion and preferences concerning a certain topic but there are no options for posting comments or expressing personal opinions at this page. This is simply another Internet catalogue maintained by participating users.

Unfortunately the history related collection of linkma.hu turns out to be an altogether poorly maintained collection of often dead or misleading links. However, I suppose it would be unwise to jump to conclusions about pages/collections maintained by collective efforts based on the case of linkma.hu.

### **Community products on the Net: Hungarian Wikipedia**

Many history related search terms lead users to the Hungarian version of Wikipedia. As far as I can judge the Hungarian version is quite well developed considering that the Hungarian speaking community is not particularly big. The History Portal of the Hungarian Wikipedia (5) is a collection of sub-portals of historical topics. The following themes have their own sub-portals: ancient history, ancient Rome, Middle Ages, the French revolution, Napoleon, the 1948-49 revolution, WWI, WWII, the Cold War, heraldry, numismatics.

In order to develop, up-date and maintain historical pages of the Hungarian Wikipedia a workshop/workgroup had been organized. The Hungarian History Workshop organize itself and distribute tasks on-line at the following page: [http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipédia:Magyar\\_történelmi\\_műhely](http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipédia:Magyar_történelmi_műhely). It seems that consi-

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considerable amount of work and care has been invested in the development of these pages.

### **General interest history portals**

Based on my research I have the strong impression that the most popular history portal in Hungary is [www.mult-kor.hu](http://www.mult-kor.hu) [past-time.hu]. Many history related Google searches lead users to this portal. It has the highest number of followers on Facebook, it covers a huge amount of topics, and it uses media synergies very well. Mult-kor.hu is operated by a public foundation that applies for state support in order to maintain its activities. The members of the board of the foundation, the contributing editors, and authors of the portal are well known historians, journalists and television reporters. Múlt-kor also exists as a television programme (30-minutes weekly magazine on the main public TV-channel) and publish a printed quarterly history magazine as well. Múlt-kor has been operating on-line and publishing its journal since 2000.

The portal often chooses topics that have some connections to actual events. For example this summer they have produced a collection of articles about the history of the Olympic games (6) . They also produced a collection about the phenomenon of economic crisis and its presence in different historical periods. They often treat popular topics from historical perspectives such as beer, legends and myths, but regularly present serious questions as the climate problem, war crimes, the Chernobyl catastrophe, and the 1956 revolution in Hungary as well.

Among the topics and thematic collections there are many that concentrate on a problem that currently is the focus of interest in public discussions and the articles intend to shed light on the historical context of these issues. For example collections of articles can be found at [mult-kor.hu](http://mult-kor.hu) about the following topics: the history of Romani people, rival national historical narratives in Hungary vs. Romania, the common history of Hungarians and Slovaks represented in Hungarian and Slovakian history books.

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Approximately 70% of the articles and collections at this portal are about the history of the 20th century. The labels most often used by authors/editors of the page are the following: Hungary / cultural heritage / WWII / archaeology / mysteries / The Roman Empire / Great Britain / USA / Germany / Italy / Egypt / military history / Holocaust / communism / exhibitions / museums. Labels clicked most often by users are the following: archaeology / The Roman Empire / USA / TV-programme / WWII / exhibition / cultural heritage / Great Britain / Middle East / Hitler / Hungary / Germany / mysteries / Italy / military history / Holocaust / 1948-49 / art / Egypt (7).

Another popular history portal is [www.huszadikszazad.hu](http://www.huszadikszazad.hu) [twentiethcentury.hu]. The project is interesting from the point of view of the present research since it is, in a way, about the re-building and reinventing of the past with the help of archive material. The project was initiated by history teachers. Currently it contains 26 000 articles, 37 000 pictures, and has 4000 registered users. It was elected "The Cultural Webpage of the Year" in 2010.

The concept is the following: the webpage recollects and publishes archive articles from old newspapers. The page starts with 1st of January, 1900 and the editors collect clippings from the newspapers and journals of that period those were printed/published on a certain day. Users can click on any day of the last century and read a collection of texts that was published on that day in the Hungarian press. The project intends to be an Internet based newspaper that uses the press of the 20th century as its raw material. With the help of the selected material the page try to represent all political tendencies present in the newspapers of those days, and evoke the most important events of Hungary, Europe and the world. The press clippings are arranged by topic to the following categories: politics, economy, culture, science, sport, yellow press. The page is continuously developed, at the moment it contains daily collections from 1900 till 1946.

There are 16 bloggers who regularly comment on the articles and it is open for users to comment on their posts.

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There are also several well known persons (television commentators, historians) who also have their own section where they comment the articles and clippings.

In forums and comments users do not seem to be very active. Although, there is a section called "Private 20th century" where anyone can upload pictures from their private collection and share their private experiences and memories of the century. This section seems to be quite popular among users.

Based on web statistics the most popular topic at this page among users is the material connected to the history of the Trianon peace treaty (I will come back to this topic later) and its consequences. But we should not jump to conclusions based on this, since the time period that is present on the page at the moment is dominated by this topic anyway.

### **Blogosphere**

The most popular Hungarian news portals operate blog services where bloggers can start their own blogs. The parent portal integrates the best blogs into its own structure by placing links of the chosen blogs on its opening page: [www.index.hu](http://www.index.hu) - blog posts are marked by orange coloured title labels, [www.origo.hu](http://www.origo.hu) - blog posts are marked by turquoise colour labels. The best and most popular history blogs seems to come from the [index.hu](http://www.index.hu) blog-family(8).

One of the interesting features of the Hungarian language blogosphere is that military and police history seems to be a topic that many serious bloggers are interested in. The best example is <http://lemil.blog.hu>. It seems to be a community of people seriously interested in the topic. There are about 20 bloggers who contribute posts to this blog more or less regularly many of whom have their own separate military history themed blogs. At [lemil.blog.hu](http://lemil.blog.hu) there are many posts that have more than 100 comments, it seems that readers are actually participating in the discussion. This is a very rare phenomenon compared to the activities present on other history sites.

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“The Great War Blog”(9) is about WWI and can be categorized as a blog on military history. The founders of the blog are historians (specializing in military history), librarians, archivists and researchers. Their aim is to treat the events of WWI mainly from the Hungarian point of view, but they hope that with the help of new contributors joining their blogging community the scope of the blog can be widened. The blog is operated by a public foundation and was started in 2010.

They have published diaries written by soldiers while at the theatre of war, posts about the everyday life during the war, reports about the research concerning actual battlefields, and collected personal stories and memories left behind by participants of WWI. The posts and documents are illustrated by maps and copies of original documents.

There are only a limited amount of comments on the page (5 to 10 comments per post), and the blog has 900 followers on Facebook.

One of the most popular general history blogs is “History for Everyone”(10) . Their slogan is “History not only for historians. Everything about history in popular, blog-like style.” The blog was started in 2008, it is updated regularly and has accumulated a quite rich collection of posts as of today. There are 5 resident bloggers who post regularly with the help of several guest bloggers. The topical sections that have the most articles are the following: 1. military history, 2. cultural history, 3. the history of the Balkans, 4. Hungary. But there are a collection of articles about the history of Central-Europe, the Mediterranean region, and the Middle East as well. One of the most discussed articles on the blog is about the Spanish Civil War – readers have appreciated the balanced point of view presented in the article.

The posts usually have 5 to 20 comments, but there are surprisingly popular topics that attract many comments for example the story about the charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War attracted more than 70 comments and a relevant discussion seemed to form around the topic.

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The most popular posts according to the blog's own statistics are the following:

1. The history of family names (95 comments).
2. A legend from the medieval ages about a possible ancient Hungarian capital city.
3. A review article about the Hungarian version of the on-line history game: Medieval II Total War.
4. A post about famous, several hundred year old trees in Hungary.
5. The origin of the Romanians – 69 comments follow the post where readers and bloggers discuss the history of language and nation. Romania is always interesting for Hungarians, mainly because of our turbulent common history. This discussion is interesting because it is not nationalist in tone, the commenters are discussing scientific facts about the Romanian language, and comparing works of different historians on the topic.

Finally, I would like to mention a blog that is quite popular and one of my personal favourite. It is called "Falanszter [Phalansteres] – Centuries of Building and Destruction"(11). The blog discusses architecture and its connection with history, politics and ideology: investigates how the different political regimes since the beginning of the 20th century tried to shape the space around us. It is about the history of architecture and the history of ideology at the same time. The blog is full of interesting pictures of finished and unfinished architectural projects from the last hundred years. The posts try to discover and present objective facts about these past and often forgotten projects. The most popular posts have 70 to 150 comments, and the blog has 3200 followers on Facebook. This perspective history seen from the point of view of architecture – is quite unique and seems to be popular among web users.



## **2. The representation of certain historical topics and the great ideological divide**

### **Nationalist and extreme right wing opinions**

In the following section I would like to mention some of the portals that represent “alternative” visions compared to the mainstream history concepts that are present at most of the above mentioned sites and portals operated mainly by professional historians, history teachers and archivists.

The following sites represent (extreme) right wing opinions. Their interest in history is very selective. There are key questions these sites have an interest in, other topics are completely ignored. For example the “National Portal for Hungarians”(12) is interested in – according to their mission statement “national politics, ancient history of Hungarians and spirituality”. The site represent the pan-Turanist ideology, the idea that there is a natural historical bond that ties Hungary not to Christian Europe, but to the pagan Asian tribes the Hungarian tribes used to live together with before they conquered the land of Hungary.

The historical questions the editors of the site are concentrate on are the following: history of Turanian nations, the Benes decrees (this decree dealt with the status of ethnic Hungarians in post-war Czechoslovakia and laid the ground for the forced deportation of approximately three million Germans and Hungarians from lands held by their ancestors for centuries), the era of Miklós Horthy (the period between the two World Wars), Ferenc Szálasi (leader of the Hungarian Nazi party in the 1930s). The site represents the very strange mixture of Christian and pagan/mythical concepts about the origin of the Hungarian nation.

One of the most controversial webpages of Hungary is [www.kuruc.info](http://www.kuruc.info). This page openly supports Nazi ideology. Considering history [kuruc.info](http://kuruc.info) is interested in the traditional extreme right wing favourites: Jews and gypsies. The page have a rich collection on Holocaust denial (13) . Their other favourite topic is the question

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of informants and secret agents during socialist times (14) Not being solved and discussed openly in public and political debates the issue of socialist secret agents is unfortunately pushed aside and to these extremist sites. This is one of the great deficiencies of post-communist Hungarian history/politics. A problem that not even the Internet could solve. It is rather unfortunate that, instead of open public discussions, such an important historic question is pushed to these kind of sites.

In the section above where I presented the result of the Google search using the term "history", the tenth link on the list of results led to another nationalist, extreme right wing site. By following the link (15) we find ourselves at a page that reads: "It is common knowledge that our so called official history has been written by our enemies. It was against the interest of the alien invaders and emperors, and their servants disloyal to their own country to allow the research and teaching of our real history. These alien regimes could not tolerate a nation with a strong and unified self-conscience and with its own traditional historic conscience. (...) This is what the Habsburgs did after 1849, it was continued after WWII by the so called "communist" regime, and the same continues even today under the current post-communist system. Above we publish articles and essays about the key questions of our history." (16)

This page represents the tendency of nationalist sites: they are interested mainly in ancient Hungarian history – the historical origin of the nation, anti-communism often means to them the return to the traditional law of the Hungarian tribes that invaded the region of the Carpathian Mountains in the 10th century and founded Hungary. One of the most important recent historical trauma from this nationalist point of view is the Trianon peace treaty (1920) that redefined the borders of Hungary (the country lost 72% of its pre-war territory). Henceforth these webpages when dealing with history focus on ancient Hungarian history and the crimes, such as the Trianon Treaty, committed against Hungarians.

For the authors of these sites Europe represents an empire of

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invaders and alien emperors, and they consider Turanian people as natural allies of Hungarians. However, it is hard to generalize about this nationalists groups because there is a considerable difference between the pan-Turanist ideology represented by this webpage and other right wing concepts that consider Christianity and the Catholic state as the founding principles of Hungarian statehood, and consequently they are a bit less anti-Europe. But often these two ideas are mixed together in a strange manner.

The problem of these ideologies go far beyond the questions of the Internet, but it is important to recognize that the web is an ideal place for extremists to spread their views, although I am unable to judge the overall presence/significance of extremist thoughts on the Hungarian web.(17)

### **Representation of certain historical topics**

I have used the Google search “method” to investigate what is to be found at the Internet concerning several historical topics. I tried to explore what kind of information is available, how balanced are the views expressed at those pages that have the highest rank on Google’s search result when using such search terms as “Holocaust”.

The Holocaust

There are several entries in the Hungarian Wikipedia about the Holocaust. The two main entry being “Holocaust”(18) and “Jewish Holocaust in Hungary”(19). The above mentioned popular history portal *Mult-kor.hu* also have several articles about the Holocaust(20) . The page “Holocaust in Hungary”(21) contains digital course material for students and teachers about the Holocaust. The page of the National Committee for Attending Deportees (22) maintains a huge database of testimonies of Holocaust survivors that was collected right after WWII by the National Committee of Welfare of Deported Persons. The Budapest Holocaust Museum and Educational Centre also publishes information and educational materials about the Holocaust on its webpage(23) .

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The Museum of Terror also maintains a webpage dedicated to the topic(24) that includes an introductory article, a detailed chronology of the events of the deportations in Hungary, a photo gallery and a bibliography of the topic. And finally the above mentioned extreme nationalist site, *kuruc.info* has its collection of materials about Holocaust denial (25) .

A simple Google search using the word “Holocaust” produces the following result:

1. Hungarian Wikipedia’s Holocaust entry
2. Holocaust in Hungary – digital educational material for students and teachers
3. A documentary film on YouTube by David Cole, supporting the idea of Holocaust denial (according to the counter on YouTube it has been played 136 000 times)
4. The webpage of the Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest
5. Pictures related to the Holocaust
6. The Holocaust entry of Metapedia – the nationalist version of Wikipedia that exists in many languages
7. 66 questions and answers about the Holocaust – Holocaust denial in a nutshell based on the materials of *www.ihr.org* (Institute for Historical Review, USA)
8. A short news piece at *www.index.hu* about a beauty pageant held for Holocaust survivors in Israel (29 June, 2012)
9. *www.holocaust.lap.hu*

It can be concluded that a wide range of information is available at these sites about the Holocaust. The first two entries contain very detailed information based on historical research and documents. The view represented here seems to be considerably balanced: for example the Wikipedia entry discusses in detail the negative role played by Hungarian authorities and Hungarian civilians in the

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“Endlösung”. By studying these two pages one can acquire a balanced basic knowledge about the topic. And it is quite obvious from the list of results that the believers of Holocaust denial busily spread their views as well.

At most of these pages there is no comment function. Where it would be possible to comment on an article (for example the articles at [www.mult-kor.hu](http://www.mult-kor.hu)) there are no comments at all. (The page uses the ‘comment through Facebook profile’, that usually filters more effectively those extremist commenters.) It is only the YouTube documentary that has an open discussion function. The believers of Holocaust denial posting their usual conspiracy theories while relatives of Holocaust victims use their personal examples as the proof of past events.

In general, I would say that each and every kind of information is available, it depends on users how can they use and interpret it.

### **Contemporary history related controversies in Hungary**

Hungarians at the moment live in a politically turbulent time. The governing party that has a two-third majority in parliament uses its unprecedented political power to redefine democratic standards. Many of the contemporary political debates are rooted deeply in historical questions since the governing party actively participates in the re-invention and re-interpretation of Hungarian history (26). The current redefinition of the relationship of Hungary to Europe is part of this process. The key concepts are independence and the emphasis on the natural historical relationship between Hungarians and Asian nations.

One of the important history related contemporary debate was over the new Hungarian Constitution. The Constitution was ratified by the governing party in 2011 with no support from any other parties. The whole problem has many historical connections. The debate on the Constitution is a debate about the identity of the Hungarian nation, and about the conceptualization of historical continuity and discontinuity. It is also connected to the

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(re)definition of the roles played by conservative and leftist thinking in our history. The historical concept expressed by the new Constitution is the symptom of the re-invention of Hungary as a right wing, conservative and religious country.

In this process there are topics that are more important than others, the canon of important historical figures and significant historical periods are being redefined. The setting of the new agenda is present in each form of the Hungarian media. The two main questions are the origins of the nation (the founding principles of Hungarian statehood: Christianization of the nation by the first king of Hungary vs. the pagan traditions of the Hungarian tribes), and the tradition of the right wing, Christian Hungary (this tradition is exemplified by the era between 1919 and 1944, the so called "Horthy-era", that followed the period of the proletariat's dictatorship in 1919).

The topic of the founding principles of Hungarian statehood dominates the above mentioned extremist websites and portals. Although, the situation is quite confusing, because the two seemingly opposite views of Christian Hungary and the Hungary represented by pagan tribes from Asia are mixed up in, some times, surrealistic manner.

Meanwhile these contradictions are clear for the "neutral" reader of these sites, there are no considerable public discussion about these topics, partly because these ideas based on faith and can not be contested by rational arguments.

The other key issue, the Horthy-era, can be represented through two concepts: the question of the Trianon Peace Treaty, and the political leader of the era, Miklós Horthy (Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary between 1920 and 1944). I would say that for a young user of the internet who would be interested in questions that dominate contemporary political rallies and news programmes in Hungary, the search terms "Trianon" and "Miklós Horthy" would be very important. So I will present shortly the result of Google search concerning these two terms.

Trianon

Concerning Trianon the results on the first page of the Google search are the following:

1. The Wikipedia entry of the Trianon Treaty (27)
2. Trianon.hu (28) - revisionist, extreme right wing page expressing the view that the whole world was always against Hungary, and we are the victims of evil forces of the West
3. A neutral summary about the historical facts of the Trianon Treaty (29)
4. www.trianon.lap.hu - a sub-site of the above mentioned link inventory, lap.hu
5. A short clip on YouTube(30) about "the most painful day of Hungarian history", according to the counter it has been played 320 000 times, not possible to post comments
6. The page of a museum dedicated to Trianon (31)
7. An article on the webpage of Magyar Nemzet (right wing daily newspaper) on the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty (4 June, 2012) (32)
8. A link to the on-line version of a 14-part documentary film about Trianon(33)

Based on these resources the user can establish a basic knowledge of the historical facts about Trianon, and can also detect the rightist sentiments surrounding the issue. But this way users will not find any open discussion about the topic, the different opinions are present on different sites. This is not surprising, it is the dominant trend in contemporary Hungarian politics and public affairs that there is no communication between different point of views and opinions. This aspect of Internet practices mirror our society faithfully.

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Miklós Horthy

The list of results provided by Google search:

1. The Wikipedia entry about Horthy (34) - the page seems to be an ideologically neutral account of the facts and views about the life of and role played by Horthy. Different opinions are presented and the historical resources and the works by historians are used as references.

2. pictures of Horthy

3. Who is who? Miklós Horthy(35) - a short biography and list of recommended books about Horthy. This short biography slightly tends toward a positive representation of the political role played by Horthy (that is the current, new trend).

4. The entry in the Hungarian Biographical Dictionary(36) - a short, neutral biography

5. An interview with a historian specialising in the Horthy-era published on the webpage of the right wing daily newspaper Magyar Nemzet (37) - This historian is a PhD candidate whose research concentrates on trends in evaluating the Horthy era since the fall of communism and how political parties using the figure of Horthy in their identity politics. He runs a blog (The Myth of Horthy Today (38) ) about the topic. He posts 1 to 3 short entries per week since 2010 and represents a moderate scientific standpoint, and so do his readers and commenters. Those who are really interested in the Horthy phenomenon would find this blog a very useful and objective resource.

6. A 3-minute-long clip on YouTube (39) made of pictures about Horthy, had been played 68 000 times, the 217 comments of the clip mostly statements by the admirers of Horthy, and there is a discussion about the differences and similarities between the role played by Ferenc Szálasi (the Hungarian Nazi party leader) and Horthy in Hungarian history

7. The page of the Miklós Horthy Association (40)



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8. Call for a survey about the views on Horthy – it was posted on the above mentioned popular history blog (“History for Everyone”) (41) by the historian who runs the “Myth of Horthy Today” blog - there is no trace of any result or follow-ups of this call

9. A report published at [index.hu](http://index.hu) on a conference organized about Horthy (June 2012)(42)

10. <http://horthymiklos.lap.hu>

In general it could be said that the Wikipedia entry and the “Myth of Horthy Today” blog provide proper basic information about the whole phenomenon. Interested users can gather the wide spectrum of pro and contra opinions on the issue. But, again, besides the neutral, research based sites that present facts and balanced views, other sites tend to represent uncritical, right wing opinions. And again, there is no discussion or debate between different point of views.

### 3. Summary

Concluding my observations I have to admit that the views and conclusions I presented above are partial in many aspects. It is obvious that without an internet specific research method these observations always remain accidental, and it is impossible to generalize the results of these observations. Henceforth my concluding remarks are no more that vague impressions about certain features of the presence of history on the Hungarian language web.

I have the impression that usually a wide range of information is available to users in Hungarian about many historical topics. With a little bit of search material supporting any point of view and its complete opposite also can be found. It depends on users how they use and interpret the information they have found. Most of the Google searches about history topics would lead users to the Hungarian Wikipedia where – as far as I have experienced so far – the entries about history are reasonably competent.

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The aim of the community maintaining these pages is clearly to represent wide variety of views about each topic and include information that can be verified on the basis of up-to-date historical research.

The general interest history portals and blogs try to cover the widest possible range of topics. Although, Hungarian history usually dominates these pages, the material about other parts of the world also significant. Most of these pages are maintained by professionals – historians, teachers, archivists – and represent standard quality.

It is also clear that the Internet is a place for alternative and, often, extremist views. With a bit of a search a huge amount of material can be found on Holocaust denial, anti-Semitic sentiments, etc., but the opposite views are also present and can be found just as easily.

In general, most of the pages and blogs lack significant discussions or debates. Hungarian users tends to be quite passive when they have to present their rational arguments, but they seems to be rather active in stating their sentiments and beliefs.

## Notes

(1) „Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of affecting the visibility of a website or a web page in a search engine’s “natural” or un-paid (“organic”) search results. In general, the earlier (or higher ranked on the search results page), and more frequently a site appears in the search results list, the more visitors it will receive from the search engine’s users.” (Wikipedia)

(2) Here is the first page of the search’s result on 10th of September, 2012:

1. <http://tortenelem.lap.hu>
2. <http://www.mult-kor.hu>
3. <http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Történelem>
4. <http://toriblog.blog.hu>
5. <http://eretsegizz.com/eretseg/tortenelem/>
6. <http://www.tortenelemklub.com>
7. <http://kvizpart.hu/kviz/tortenelem-/tortenelem>
8. <http://tortenelemszak.elte.hu>
9. <http://hirmagazin.sulinet.hu/hu/search/all/Történelem/magazine>
10. <http://www.hunmagyar.org/tor/tor.html>

(3) Among the proposed thematic groups one can find the common categories concerning history: periods (prehistory, ancient history, Roman Empire, middle ages, modern history), Hungarian history, military history, significant personalities, history of religion, history of technology, history of writing, etc.

(4) The opening page of [tortenelem.linkma.hu](http://tortenelem.linkma.hu) sets up eleven categories and sorts history related links according to them. The categories are the following: history of England, history of USA, history of Europe, military history, history education, history books, Hungarian history, world history, periods, historians, history journals. But before we get too excited about

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the section "history of Europe" it turns out that half of the, altogether 7 links are dead.

(5) <http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portál:Történelem>

(6) <http://www.mult-kor.hu/e-folyoirat.php?issue=64>

(7) The methodology of using properly these statistics about clicks and labels that sometimes present on pages needs further research. It is certain that these features should be core elements of understanding how the web in general and webpages in particular function when we speak about the representation of cultural information on the Internet.

(8) Or maybe there are many other very good blogs that are completely invisible because not supported by the crosslinking possibilities provided by index.hu to their best blogs?

(9) <http://nagyhaboru.blog.hu>

(10) <http://toriblog.blog.hu>

(11) <http://falanszter.blog.hu>

(12) <http://www.nemzeti.gportal.hu>

(13) <http://kuruc.info/r/2/65341>

(14) <http://kuruc.info/r/7/65370>

(15) <http://www.hunmagyar.org/tor/tor.html>

(16) This was my translation of the Hungarian introduction of the webpage. The page has an English version as well: <http://www.hunmagyar.org/main.html>. The following is the beginning of the English introduction: "The Hungarians have a saying that their history was written by their enemies. This is justified given that the official version of Hungarian history which is still being propagated today is in fact the product of centuries of foreign rule during which the occupying powers and their puppet regimes took care to fabricate a "Hungarian history" which suited their objectives: to present a distorted and unfavourable image of the Hungarians, in order to weaken their national identity and self-consciousness. Our website does not endorse this politically and ideologically biased "official version" of Hungarian history, as we seek to present a more

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objective picture of the historical facts.”

(17) Considering user activity it seems to be a general tendency that the believers of extremist views are more actively – and some times more aggressively - express their attachment to the views they believe in. Concerning this I find interesting the statistics of the Facebook followers of Hungarian news sites that represent different ideological views. The above mentioned Kuruc.info has 49 000 followers on Facebook, nol.hu (leading leftish-liberal daily newspaper’s website) has 14000 followers, mno.hu (leading right wing daily newspaper’s website) has 5800 followers.

(18) <http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holokauszt>

(19) [http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zsidó\\_holokauszt\\_Magyarországon](http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zsidó_holokauszt_Magyarországon)

(20) For example: <http://www.mult-kor.hu/cikk.php?id=927>; <http://www.mult-kor.hu/cikk.php?id=849>

(21) <http://www.holokausztmagyarorszag.hu>

(22) <http://www.degob.hu/index.php>

(23) <http://bphm.hu>

(24) <http://www.magyarholokauszt.hu>

(25) <http://kuruc.info/r/2/65341>

(26) In Hungary contemporary politics, in a way, always was and will be the battle between political forces that are convinced that they are entitled to decide which (hi)story is “the” proper history of the nation.

(27) [http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trianoni\\_békeszerződés](http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trianoni_békeszerződés)

(28) <http://www.trianon.hu/keret.phtml?trianon/>

(29) <http://www.doksi.hu/news.php?order=ShowArticle&id=466>

(30) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ\\_XIIQxIE4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ_XIIQxIE4)

(31) <http://www.trianonmuzeum.hu>

(32) <http://mno.hu/vezercikk/trianon-sebei-1080751>

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(33) <http://tdyweb.wbteam.com/Trianon.htm>

(34) [http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horthy\\_Miklós](http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horthy_Miklós)

(35) <http://www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/bibl/mil/ww2/who/horthy.html>

(36) <http://mek.oszk.hu/00300/00355/html/ABC05727/06486.htm>

(37) <http://mno.hu/interju/horthy-miklos-szelektiv-antiszemizmus-1077427>

(38) <http://horthy-mitosz.blog.hu>

(39) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsruFvtwh9g>

(40) <http://www.horthy.hu>

(41) [http://toriblog.blog.hu/2011/02/18/kerdoiv\\_horthy\\_miklos\\_megiteleserol](http://toriblog.blog.hu/2011/02/18/kerdoiv_horthy_miklos_megiteleserol)

(42) [http://index.hu/belfold/2012/06/27/horthy\\_miklos\\_horrorthaza/](http://index.hu/belfold/2012/06/27/horthy_miklos_horrorthaza/)

## **WEB AND HISTORY: A QUESTION OF IDENTITY \***

Claudia Covelli (University of Milan)

According to the Web Index Report, which was published in September 2012, Italy occupies the 23rd world position as far as the incidence of the Web on people's lives is concerned. In other words, less than an Italian every two surfs the Web each day. This figure does not only show that Italy is a country somewhat belated in what could be called digital literacy, but it is itself quite interesting, especially considering that a year has passed since the Celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy, certainly the most important historical phenomenon to influence Italian society in recent years.

2011 has been such an important anniversary for Italian national memory and identity. It has meant for Italy the first real chance to deal with the tools and opportunities of digital communication. It has significantly sealed one of the most intense and important decades in the light of historical events and communication in the internet. Events like 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan and the execution of Saddam Hussein as well as the invention of Facebook and YouTube, the mass-production of smartphones, and the affirmation of charismatic men like Steve Jobs, have all contributed to the creation of a fertile soil. The latter has turned the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy into a true media event. This is the first time that the "world of the web" has been able to compete with the traditional media, first among all, the television.

There is an issue which deserves to be further investigated and will be mentioned here only in passing, namely that the United States have been at the centre of the public debate in the very same decade which sees them both protagonists and producers of the technology and the means of communication they have imposed on the entire world. Thus, the main characters of the past decade have also become its narrators, defining the ways in which the latter has been told. It is no coincidence that the principal innovations of the first decade of the new millennium, namely, Facebook, YouTube

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and the iPhone, are American products.

Going back to the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy and its proliferation in the Internet, there is another element that deserves to be taken into account, namely its troublesome first appearance, unfit to be “narrated” by the traditional media (1). A comparison with the televised 100th Anniversary of the Unification is enough to illustrate this point. Since July 2009, it has clearly emerged that the narratives constructed around the celebrations of the national unification would have been numerous, controversial and would have needed a more “fluent” means of communication in order to leave room for different nuances and interpretations. The aim was to set the ceremonial voice of the institutions, especially the one of Italian President Giorgio Napolitano, against the voices coming from the common people, hence the voices of Italians themselves. Crucially, the latter were called to speak their mind on such a complex issue as national identity.

It is here that one can see how the labyrinthine dimension of the Web implements one of the conjectures of this research. The Web has a democratic structure, whose unique moderation tools have a technological nature, such as Google’s algorithms. Furthermore, the Web has permitted the institutional narratives to be placed on the same communication level. These are the narratives of the so-called “experts of the field”-the both loved and hated historians-as well as those of journalists and opinion makers not to mention the narratives of the “common man”. History, conceived as a narrative of documented events, has been taken, torn, often denied, sometimes re-proposed, and even fanatically celebrated.

Such multilayered framework of short stories is made of posts, comments, tweets, thumbs up and shared images. And yet this framework as labyrinthine and confused as it may be, has left an important mark, namely that the history of the Italian Unification is still “alive”, written and read, but also commented and imagined by thousands of Italians, all convinced that contemporary phenomena should be read in the light of the past.



If on the one hand, this aspect confirms the inclination towards an historical reading of the present, which characterises European culture in contrast with other realities focused on the connections between present and future, on the other hand, the issue is which narratives are prevailing in contemporary Italy.

In other words, no position is legitimate unless it is supported by a suitable historical narrative, placing it in an historical dimension, and wondering on which past, how it is constructed and through which means it is told. This is not the central issue for contemporary historiography, whose relationship with the internet has a primary role as far as interpretation and analysis are concerned.

For the aforementioned reasons, I suggest to start from 2011 and from an analysis of phenomena related to the 150th Anniversary of the Italian Unification in order to reflect upon the relationship between history and the Internet. The aim is to follow the thematic thread of the construction of the Italian National identity, a line of inquiry more and more entangled with Italian contemporary history. Even so, embarking on such a virtual debate does offer interesting impressions/suggestions.

The issue of political, national and local identity is not only a fertile soil for contemporary historiography, particularly inside of the European debate, but in its religious and historical dimension-consider the survivors of the Holocaust, the Italian partisans, the protagonists of the 1968 protests and so on- it is a fundamental instrument to understand the relationship between history and the Internet. What are the Facebook profiles and the blogs of so many famous strangers if not a public affirmation of one's identity? And is it not true that the entire mechanism of social networking is supported by the logic of mutual identification and swapping of identities? The celebrations for the Unification offer a good opportunity to reflect upon the issue of memory and identity, perhaps the most complex, but also central to contemporary historiography.

The multilayered nature of the Internet allows for a study of the elusive contemporary identity. The latter is grounded in a necessary

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yet distorted reading of the past. The mechanism of mutual identification and shared interests between Internet users is at the root of the "social" dimension that has marked the Web in recent years and moves towards a shared interpretation of present facts and past memory.

The affirmation of identity often prevails on the narrative, distorting the memory and yet turning it into the first element of the encounter of people who are geographically and culturally distant. What weight does History have in this context? What shapes do the narratives take on? My challenge is to provide answers, incomplete as they may be, in such pioneering research, stemming from the following questions: which History do the Italians tell themselves? What are the main issues discussed?

The first aspect to be investigated is that of the digital sources available in the Internet. According to the Web index Report, only 0,293 % of Italian institutions recurs to the Web for its services. The institutions that deal with historical research, archives and databases for instance, are probably more web-oriented if compared to the national average. In fact, they have embarked on important operations concerning the digitizing of Italian archives.

During the Unification celebrations, these institutions did have the economic opportunity to start new projects to implement documentary data, and yet they have been object of increasing attention by the public opinion in relation to the possibility of preserving and modernizing such heritage.

A few figures are necessary to have an idea of the huge amount of data we have to deal with. The Central Archives of the State own 20,000 downloadable files containing important documents and pictures going back to World War One and Fascism. The Istituto Luce has digitized more than 400,000 downloadable pictures and 4,000 hours of video-documents available in streaming. The ANPI (National Association of the Italian Partisans) has published a catalogue online with more than 3,000 biographies of men and women fighting for the *Resistenza* and available through different

research criteria.

What emerges clearly from this information is that the official narrative of History through online documents is a biased account, temporally placed almost exclusively in the 20th century and focusing on three thematic areas: World War One, Fascism and the War of Liberation. These great themes intermingle with the memory of the Holocaust, the post-war role of women in Italian society, and the world of economy and job. It is here important to highlight that the Internet user who chooses digital sources for a research on Italian history has a limited scope.

Other than institutional sources, History is told by historical magazines, certainly constituting the first approach of the ordinary internet user who needs to find historical subjects in the Web. If one analyses the Italian historical magazines available online, one will realise that they are helpful for scholars who look for specific sources. Nonetheless, if one recurs once again to the data obtained through the Web Index Report, one will notice that only 60% of the Italian contents is to be found in the Web. If one is to trust this figure, the result is that in Italy only 60% of historical contents passes through the Internet before it enters debates and is made known to the public. This figure is even more realistic in the light of an analysis of the historical magazines online, which often cover the function of advertising the paper versions. These magazines have a partial approach if compared to the number of publications in the field of historiography and are “lukewarm” as far as the debate among scholars is concerned. And all of this happens despite the tools available through the Internet such as comments, forums and content sharing.

If one recurs exclusively to web-magazines and e-journals, the result is that it is hard to have a precise idea of what the historical debate in Italy is about. Where can one find the most interesting sources to measure the relationship between History, Memory and Italian identity online then? It is websites, personal blogs and mainly the social networks that constitute the most interesting field of study to discover how Italian society narrates History and its

individual narratives...

A preliminary remark should be made before entering this area of study, that is, that one is entering the "mine field" of the so-called public use of History. Therefore History is not a subject of study but a tool to retrace, rewrite and create collective identity *ex novo*. History is read and remembered as an enormous collective biography inside of which one is to spot the traces of a group identity, no matter whether the latter is a national community, a political party or simply a group sharing a public interest. How and by whom is History narrated in the Internet, exploiting its digital potential?

There are numberless sites on the narration of History. In addition to the rich amount of information made available by Wikipedia, almost all the main events of contemporary history have a site dedicated to them: from World War One to the Cold War, the Leonardo chronologies to the portal of the concentration camps prisoners, the gathering of data and information prevails on the interpretation of facts. In this case as well there emerges a vision of the Internet more as a means to retrieve information rather than a place for a debate.

The approach of the few bloggers who deal with historiography online is completely different and is the main source of historical debate in the Internet. Their merit is to keep alive the memory of facts and historical events reputed to be interesting in the contemporary debate as they enable that connection between past and present which sees, in Benedetto Croce's terms, all historiography as contemporary history. Let us foreground the most interesting cases. The best known historiographical blog in Italy is Dino Messina's *La nostra storia* (Our History) which belongs to the Corriere della Sera cloud. Dino Messina is a journalist and a historian. He is a respected and good writer and his research included re-enactments of historical facts and characters and book reviews are all to be found in his blog. His attention to the great themes of contemporary Italy unravel his journalist approach to history whilst his solid background in historiography shows his expertise in the subject.

Stefano Azzarà, a researcher of the University of Urbino, is the author of a personal blog called *Materialismo storico* (historical materialism). Stefano Azzarà searches for the link between past and present and works on a daily basis on articles and book reviews. In turn, with his blog *Storia@ Mario Avagliano* is an intellectual who dwells between the dimensions of journalist and historian but whose expertise is very specific: militant anti-Fascism, the deportation during the Nazi occupation and the Resistenza.

From 2009 to 2011, *BlogStoria* has been active. It is a press review blog particularly concerned with the preparation and the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy. This is my blog in collaboration with Yuri Guaiana and we are two young scholars affiliated to the University of Milan.

If one enters the difficult and almost unexplored field of social networking, Facebook is certainly the most used means to convey historical information. Conversely, Twitter has a larger potential, out of its structure which powerfully enables to link events, people and places, as demonstrated by the ambitious *Alwyb* collision project for World War Two. Indeed, according to Audiweb, Facebook has 20,9 millions of users against the 2 million using Twitter.

Where can one find History on Facebook then? In the first place, on the page dedicated to historical characters such as Garibaldi, Mazzini, Vittorio Emanuele II and Benito Mussolini. All the protagonists of Italian history have a page of Facebook. There emerges a representation of History as if it were made by few great men, known to all Italians. These men are metaphorically acknowledged as symbols of a page of Italian history. This results in a “pop” reading of Italian history, turned into a simple-minded, mythical representation of individual characters in place of an analysis of roles and events. On the other hand, choosing a Social Network like Facebook over Twitter to discuss History entails a communication based on the identification with a historical character or event and not on the exchange of knowledge and interpretation. The ensuing debate cannot be but sterile, un-historical and politically biased where the reading of History is subordinate to political brawls.

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A typical mechanism of social networking and of Facebook in particular is the content sharing, perhaps the most suggestive device made available to the public. Mark Zuckerberg's Social Network is based on the logic of identification. Indeed, Facebook does not favour a dialectical exchange of ideas, but it fosters the logic of mutual identification and, even, its opposite: examples range from thumbs up and content sharing on one's wall to the refusal of "friendship" with people who have different interests and passions. Consequently, one does not talk of History on Facebook, rather one shares contents, especially images and slogans such as "Yes, I like it, I see it in this way, this is the history page in which I can identify!".

The 150th anniversary of the Italian Unification has been the first celebration to privilege these new media over the traditional ones, also because the institutions have been reluctant to monopolise the debate, giving space to the voice of historians and society. Internet has not only made this possible but it has also amplified its effects: bloggers, scholars and "citizen-journalists" have commented on events, reviewed books and suggested interpretations of historical events. Through Facebook, key characters and events have been selected in order to be remembered and reinterpreted in the light of contemporary society's demands. A couple of examples are necessary. To begin with, the undying Social, National, Popular and Revolutionary understanding of Giuseppe Garibaldi demonstrates that a good portion of Italian society expects a radical change coming from below, but more rooted in myth than in reality. Secondly, the rediscovery of a character mainly forgotten by society and the institutions, Carlo Cattaneo. The latter has become a recognisable symbol and the authoritative father of the federal State in Italy.

The celebrations along with the nature of the new media and the identification/contraposition mechanism furthered by Facebook have enabled the labeling of Risorgimento heroes onto characters far from the Italian Unification events. This original continuum has challenged spatio-temporal boundaries and the cause-effect logic typical of historical narrative, feeding on the semantic connections between historical facts and characters commonly seen as distant

from each other. For instance, during the 150th Unification anniversary, the struggle against the Mafia has assumed the status of a central public narrative as well as foregrounding Giovanni Falcone, Paolo Borsellino, and Peppino Impastato as the new heroes of the Unified Italy, placed at the same level, and even more popular, as the Fathers of the Nation.

Conversely, if on the one hand the 150th anniversary has been affected by a good portion of the world of politics and public opinion, especially in terms of a federal view of Italy and a somewhat hostile tone towards a Unified Italy, resulting in the division of Italians in two contraposed communities who have autonomously elaborated their own myths and symbols. The forced reading of Giovanni Falcone has become public opinion's major and most intelligible response to the complex issue of the process of national identification. Hence, historical characters and events are reduced to media function of symbols representing issues, thereby losing their complexity, the self-same complexity laboriously reconstructed in decades of historiographical classes. They have even been reduced to icons for an agiographic reading of the national history.

On the other hand, though strangers to the logic of scientific research, the Web has fulfilled the role of a litmus paper to read which thematic knots are left unsolved in contemporary Italian society and with which elements they are linked together. The semantic map that the Web builds each day between apparently distant elements is therefore a valuable tool for the historian wondering on the birth and development of national identities. Thus, it is not the reassuring pathway of a spatio-temporal reading of History that leads to the analysis of national identities in contemporary history, but it is the unlevelled road of a network of meanings circling around key words in a a-temporal and a-historical dimension. It is a most difficult pattern for the historian must carry on contributing as well as being wary of it, thereby offering updated interpretations of the past which are the aim and the beauty of historical research.

## Notes

\* Saul Andreotti's translation

(1) It should be noted that 2009 is the year when the case for the Unification "exploded" and that there were people who even opposed the idea of celebrating such an important event.



## VERNACULAR INTERVENTIONS IN POST-SOCIALIST DIGITAL MEDIA: HISTORICAL RE-PRESENCES AND DIVERSITIES FROM SLOVENIAN PERSPECTIVE

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**Keywords:** post-socialism, digital media ecology, vernacular digital memorials, vernacular archives and media archaeology

### Introduction

In this research I look from a post-socialist Slovenian perspective at several ways and approaches in which Slovenian history is represented, remediated, re-narrated, re-contextualised online, i.e. in digitally mediated environments. I focus on a selection of vernacular interventions on YouTube and blogs and interrogate the ways the past is re-purposed and how re-interpreted in the processes and practices of revision of the 20th century seminal events and periods. With this I primarily refer to the World War II, anti-fascism and resistance, perceptions of communist period/regime and the post-socialist transition, which feature as a recurring topic in many online interventions. These topics are approached here from a specific position significantly defined by the present European complexities, the legacies of the 20th century and the social, cultural, economic and political transition that was more or less successfully (self)imposed on the former Eastern European communist countries. In this regard, the post-socialist perspective is a crucial defining factor of the research as it engenders an approach to the European past(s) through processes and discourses of 'democratisation' 'returning to Europe,' 'belonging to Europe,' 'post-socialism,' 'freedom,' 'capitalism,' etc. all of which importantly shape contemporary discourses on European and EU pasts, presents and futures.

In the following I first delimit the research field and methodology: the vast research area as the digital media ecology (DME) is, an all-encompassing approach is not viable, particularly considering the ephemerality and scale of online communications and representations. True, large-scale analyses as for instance proposed by the software studies approach, i.e. to follow greater patterns based on massive quantities of data might reveal certain

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trends in ways people/users react to and make sense of events in digital environments (1). However, I propose an approach that, admittedly has its limitations, but one nevertheless still that focuses on a 'manageable crowd'; although it might skew the interpretative picture somewhat, it nevertheless gives much more room to see and qualify individual expression, affect and acknowledgement of singularity embedded in universality.

Therefore, in line with the principles of 'hovering attention,' (2) I interrogate in the second part a selection of YouTube videos and two blogs, that in their particular approaches deal with re-presencing (3) the Yugoslav socialist past with a view to articulate concerns about the present and future. This calls for a *multimodal discourse analysis* where the objects of analysis are seen as the loci of (vernacular) historiographical, but also socio-political, action which on the one hand co-creates, distributes individual/intimate audiovisions of the past, but on the other also mobilises, manages and deploys content and action in response to the present by re-presencing and re-interpreting the past.(4) This practice is underpinned by media archaeology (5) and the practice of vernacular digital archiving.

The results of the analysis are synthesised in the discussion on the prospects of negotiating the diverse/contested pasts and pluralities of their present interpretations online, with a view to their mobilisatory, emancipatory potential in view of the possible (European) futures.

When I was thinking how to approach the vast topic of history on the internet I realised it was in any case an overwhelming task. Mostly due to the ephemerality and perpetual ebb and flow of content washing up and retracting back into the depths of the non-existence (Page Not Found – Error 404). Therefore I decided to trace and investigate online activities related to Slovenian past and history through the lens of two events that importantly marked the 2012 *culturo-socio-political scene* in Slovenia: the celebration of the Statehood Day (26 June) and the Day of Restoration of the Primorska Region to the Motherland (15 September). As limiting as this may seem, it may nevertheless prove useful in the long run: this report

will provide a micro-slice of what topics mattered at a very specific time in a very specific place. And in very specific socio-cultural and political situation at the end of 2012.

In the time when many national enterprises (and I am not talking about business and economy here) are in danger of becoming fully privatised, the story of European past(s) and future(s) is often sidetracked by incessant obsession with saving the present. What is more, the interest in the past is often discarded as archaic, depressive endeavour unfitting the present moment. The lessons from the past and the driving force (mobilisatory and emancipatory potential) of the engagingly articulated possible futures are in such atmosphere easily forgotten. The logic of bare survival discards anything that has no imminent 'value,' which hardly gives room for a playful engagement with stuff historical, national, individual, European etc., outside the strictly cost-benefit scope.

When looking at the processes of Europeanisation, (re-)nationalisation, de-collectivisation, radical individualisation and disturbing atomisation and dis-empowerment of individuals and collectivities, one should bear in mind that a critical approach is on order, if a way is to be found out of the obvious economic, cultural and political impasse, if the ironies of history be transformed into the potential to vocalise, articulate, empower and (re)assert the human, human dignity, human rights and, yes, utopia of a better world. Alas, as Tony Judt said, we live in a time where imagining alternative futures collectively is almost impossible (or actively discouraged).

Now, at this point I propose to see the digital media ecology, social networks and online action as a tool, technology and practice that effectively enable externalisation of discontent and bypass the sanitising and sanctioned discursive spaces of 'classical' communications channels. Moreover, it is a tool that can often be regarded as one that enables the transformation along the silence-noise-voice line, i.e. its technological characteristics and cultural uses, in the ideal situation, enable transformation and articulation of individual, alternative, guerrilla initiatives, deliberations and interventions.

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With respect to the questions concerning the European divided pasts in relation to post-socialist presents and interpretations of socialist past, the digital media can and are used as a tool and a space where 'transgression' and contestation of official state-sponsored interpretations can be enacted.

Before moving on to explain the rationale of my research, an sketchy illustration is in order of a broader situation the post-socialist societies found themselves. The 1989 fall of the Berlin wall is today often seen as the one historical event (or rather a culmination of events) marking the end of the Cold War and having supposedly lifted the Iron Curtain and opened the path to freedom and democracy to the Easternites. As it has been made clear in the almost 25 years after the event, the symbolic wall still stands tall, firmly dividing the 'wild East' from the 'proper' Europe, democracy and freedom, market capitalism etc. Mostly in terms of 'maturity' for democracy: the East's capacity, readiness and capability to form a democratic political system and society is systematically questioned, if not outright denied. And this, it has to be noted, is a two-way process: in post-socialist catharsis the East readily denounces itself any democratic competence (6).

What is worse, the post-socialist societies, as Boris Buden argues, are victims of 'repressive infantilisation': 'people who in democratic revolutions of 1989/90 proved they are politically mature, were overnight turned into children ... people who themselves fought for their freedom must first learn how to truly enjoy their freedom.' (7) This condition is not entirely externally imposed, but is rather to a significant extent administered internally: adopted by political elites on a mission to exorcise their respective socialist pasts.

On these grounds, the Easternites are denied the freedom to fully exercise their newly acquired freedom. They live in the aftermath of a "'catch-up" revolution' where they 'are at the same time rendered immature and condemned to blind imitation of their caretakers, in ludicrous belief that this is the way to achieve autonomy,' (8) rather than accepting the complexities, dissonances, perplexities of their own, albeit socialist, past(s). This is all the more disturbing, if we see

the post-socialist condition through transitionality or transformation, concepts that cannot do justice to what is going on in post-socialism; in fact, these conceptualisations, which are most straightforward derivatives of mythology of transition, in this case overtheorised and over-emphasised, deny historicity and epochality to the post-1989 condition all over Eastern Europe (9).

This now brings me to the rationale and the set-up of the research. The post-socialist reality seen through this perspective calls for a critical re-evaluation, de-denigration and re-appraisal of certain aspects of the socialist past, for a recognition of values that may not have been fully realised (or not at all), but nevertheless stood prominent in the socialist emancipatory project (and seem to be painfully absent today). Analysing the cases of remediation of Yugoslav past in Slovenian post-socialist present I look through the perspective of two events that resonate throughout the latter half of 2012: Statehood Day celebration and Day of Restoration of Primorska. This perspective enables me to look at the practices, processes and (political and vernacular) discourses of democratisation, de-totalitarianisation and 'independentalisation,' and at the same time also discern the politics of emotion apparent in dealing with the past online. All these discourses are decidedly marked by radical reinterpretation of the (1941-) 1945-1991 past.

### **Setting the research field**

Before going into this, however, I need to explain the research field parameters. The vast field as the DME is, the internet in particular, an all-encompassing approach is not viable. Therefore, according to the principles of 'hovering attention' I interrogate a selection of YouTube videos and two blogs. The 'genre approach' facilitates insight into the transience and migratoriness of content and at the same time also reveals different approaches and strategies engendered by different genre-technologies.

The initial selection of the cases was based on Google search by keywords: 'komunizem socializem slovenija evropa,' 'slovenija, evropa,' '26 junij, proslava,' '15 september.' The keywords were

chosen as entry search words and tags that might yield results related to the problematic. Clearly, the algorithmic nature of search engines and metadata searches cannot effectively filter out irrelevant results, but decidedly filters search results based on my previous searches. Quantification (word counts, frequency of phrases) was deliberately avoided as it seems more profitable, as explained above, to rather focus on the 'feel,' emotion and affect contained and conveyed in the analysed content; still, some quantification is nevertheless useful, i.e. number of views, comments, links, shares etc. as it gives some idea about the 'impact' of the content in question. Avoiding quantification, i.e. statistical analysis of frequency of certain phrases and words in my belief does not hinder relevance and credibility of the research.

**YouTube:** On YouTube I look mostly at videos (e.g. digital memorial videos) as vernacular interventions that through remediation of audiovisual and textual media content (original footage or digital born) co-create highly individual(ised) visions of the past. The analysis also entails some other videos, e.g. excerpts from TV programmes, but in this part pays particular attention to comments and other attributes that reveal affectivity. Multimodal discourse analysis, including audiovisual analysis and analysis of tags, video statistics, descriptions and comments will provide central analytical focus.

**Blogs:** In this part I look at a selection of blogs by several users who post about historical topics and also engage in political commentary. The nature of blog analysis is somewhat less dedicated to audiovisual and rather focuses on writing, style and content. At that I look at both the post and comments from where I trace the politics of emotion and engagement on the part of the blogger and commentators.

### **Multimodal discourse analysis**

The three distinctly individual, yet also significantly interrelated medialities, indeed vernacular remediations and renarrativisations of the socialist past in post-socialist presents, essentially a result of a co-creative action undertaken by individual users, are approached as

cases of digital storytelling (10). As such the analysed objects establish the core subject of analysis: multimodal mobile media objects (4MO): objects that may be shared, embedded, circulated among users and machines (11). In this respect, particular attention is paid to the ways vernacular memory practices utilise digital technology and hence the 4MOs, with a view to the migratory nature of online content.

Digital storytelling is crucially enabled and conditioned by technological implications of DME and is importantly characterised by a) mobility of media objects and b) on-the-fly co-creative impetus (12). This makes the investigated 4MOs the matter of co-creation and incessant permeability. To an important degree digital storytelling and digital narrativity retain continuity with 'classic' storytelling. The cases in digital storytelling (and memorials) are thus analysed qualitatively in the manner that can usefully be subsumed into the multimodal discourse analysis, as elaborated by Kay O'Halloran, who sees it as 'concerned with theory and analysis of semiotic resources and the semantic expansions which occur as semiotic choices combined in multimodal phenomena.' (13) This enables to see the objects of study as non-hierarchical active parts in the production of meaning and hence 'equal' elements of the DME renarrativisations and remediations of the (socialist) past.

This approach relies on discourse analysis and entails analysis of audiovisual and textual elements which are investigated in terms of 'technical' utilisation of audiovision and text (the 'what' and 'how'). In this view, the various ways in which content is mediated and remediated feature as an important aspect of analysis. The data are seen as 'representations not of physical events, but of texts, images, and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on their meanings, and must therefore be analysed with such uses in mind.' (14) Moreover, the analysis also takes into consideration the very 'migratory' characteristic of representations and hence tracks the practice of co-creation as an additional aspect of content production and distribution. The analysis furthermore relies on 'commentary textual analysis' spliced with audiovisual

discourse analysis. This approach facilitates insight into how the past is co-created (mediated/mediatised/renarrated) in DME.

### **A peek into the historical background**

To give the reader a very general idea of where the research is situated spatially and temporally, let me briefly provide a general outline of the Slovenian history of the 20th century, a complex assortment of shifts and changes, ideological, symbolical and geo-political. A part of Habsburg Monarchy inhabitants of what is today Slovenia entered the Great War on the side of Austro-Hungary and Germany, whose defeat against the entente left Slovene territory without about a third of territory and population. The 1920s saw the rise of fascism in Italy, which had considerable consequences for the territory that under the provisions of the 1915 London Memorandum became part of Italian Kingdom. The rise of Mussolini and his racist politics led to ethnic engineering in the Primorska region, where fascist authorities banned public use of Slovenian language, changed names and went as far as chiselling Italianised names onto Slovenian tombstones. At the beginning of WWII, Italy occupied Ljubljana (the Province of Ljubljana), while Nazi Germany occupied north and northeast, and Hungary northeastern-most part of what is now Slovenia.

This period is particularly important for conceptualisation of Slovenian post-WWII interpretation of the interwar period and the WWII, not least because during the war and anti-fascist resistance, civil war was unravelling between resistance formations (led by the Communists) and units that swore allegiance to occupation authorities. This ideological rift can be traced back to the rift between liberals and conservatives that has dominated Slovenian politics since the formation of first Slovenian political parties in mid-19th century.

The socialist historiography, in line with the message of the Nuremberg trials which clearly detected the guilty party in and for the war, initiated a construction of history, which explicitly understood liberation as a result of the resistance, and condemned the collaboration, ideologically and physically (in the aftermath of the war



Yugoslav authorities were responsible for extra-judicial killings of members of collaborative units). Moreover, the entire post-WWII Yugoslav ideology rested on perpetuation of the socialist revolution, which was fuelled by Yugoslav geo-political positioning on the side of 'winners,' but was effectively carving out a space in between East and West.

This unique position enabled the country to actually follow a different form of socialism which brought modernisation, industrialisation, women emancipation, promoted literacy, established a system of public education and health service. On the other hand, the country was clearly totalitarian in that it restricted the freedom of speech, prohibited political opposition...

Now, 20 years after into the independent state the above mentioned events reveal developments, which show worrying signs of re-nationalisation, re-territorialisation and effective closing off of the public spaces for articulating dissent, alternatives or opposition. Of course, nationalism and historical revisionism in political and media discourses can be detected throughout the period and even before 1991 (across Europe). But at the same time, these processes unexpectedly provoked strongly articulated nostalgic practices and also a more critical, reflexive look upon the contested past and its absence in contemporary conceptualisation of the role of Slovenia, internally and externally.

Finally, 2012 was the year that saw another escalation of ideological treatment of the past and present. This was most obvious in the two events mentioned above that profess a high degree of ideologisation of contemporary Slovenian politics and society. At that it has to be said that to a significant extent this is corollary of interventions of two political parties forming the ideological core of the coalition. Nevertheless the fact that these events occurred, people's reactions and continual attention, ab/use in the media say a great deal about the relevance and importance of the 'inproper,' unresolved past. This is why the media reverberations of these ideological interventions spur might prove the critical (if dangerously transient) repository of emotion and affect.

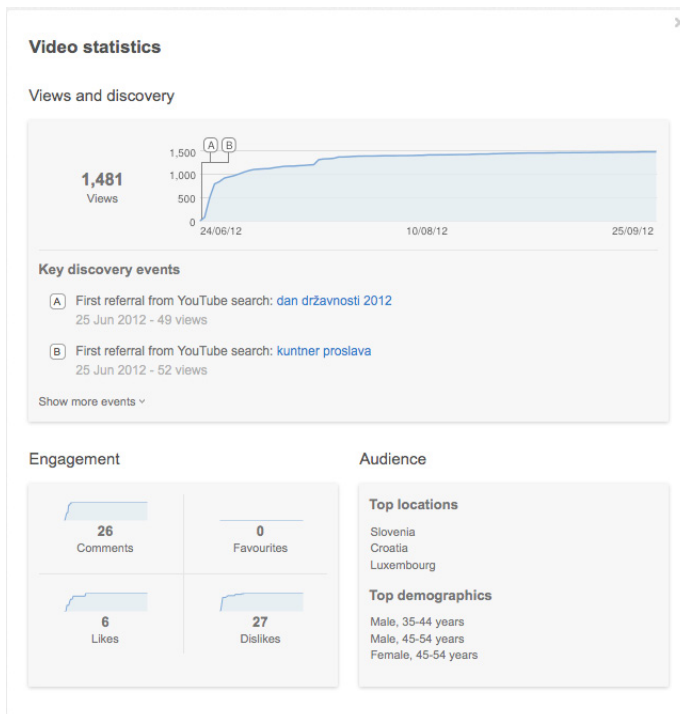
In the following I look at intriguing re-emergence of Slovenian socialist past online and interrogate the ways the past (particularly WWII and the post-war, socialist period) is dealt with today and to what purposes these events, directly or indirectly linked to the entire 20th century, serve. These cases prove fascinating spectacles through which the past is 'translated' into the present.

### **Vernacular digital memorials and other interventions on YouTube**

A platform for publishing videos and at that also a platform for discussion, YouTube is a digital media environment that hosts a wide selection of audiovisual material. Cases interesting for this discussion can very well be termed digital 'vernacular video memorials' as they successfully exist at the interstices of a memorial in the classical sense and individual initiative. This is unique to DME and represents a crucial element in how the past is dealt with and represented online. The individual intervention in memorial landscapes could not have found a more present and diffusible medium. And it is for this reason alone that investigations of such videos prove revealing research objects.

Despite the heated debates that the Statehood Day celebration, the preparations for the event, the formal addresses by the host and President of RS spurred in the media, very little can in fact be found on YouTube. Search term "dan državnosti 2012" yields several results, spanning footage from the event, from other events in Slovenia and several events in Serbia and Croatia. Despite the fact that there are literally no vernacular interventions, the footage nevertheless proves a trigger for people engaging in commenting, bringing into discussion the disdain of the way the ceremony was executed.

See: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8jhg\\_egnPY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8jhg_egnPY)



## Slovenia

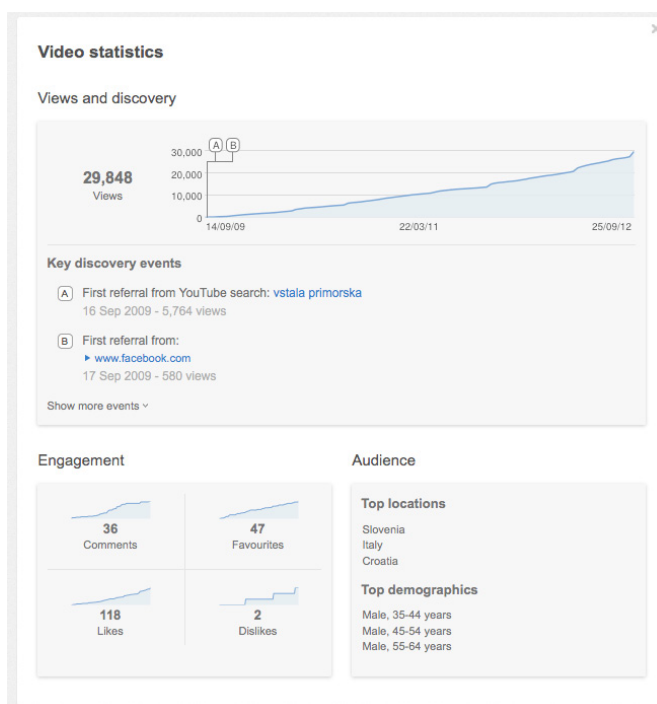


The 2012 ceremony was the first ceremony in over 20-year Slovenian history that was 'cleansed' of representatives of the League of Association of Combatants (Zveza borcev). Until 2012 they were seen as constitutive element in the mosaic of the Slovenian independence project. In the media and the public this has stirred heated response, as it was seen as revision of history and unjustified sanitisation of Slovenian history. Interestingly, this video seems to have elicited little response (at the time of writing, December 2012, last recorded comments are 5 months old). While it has been seen over 1,500 times, only 26 people have engaged in commenting, while 6 people liked the video and 27 disliked it. As unrepresentative as this sample may be, it nevertheless reveals a sentiment of disagreement with the way

the ceremony was organised and the message it has given. With this I refer to excluding an important part of Slovenian history and reinterpreting the role of the liberation struggle: by 'ousting the red star' from the ceremony, the organiser (the government) effectively eradicated a constituent part of Slovenian history, while at the same time managed to revive and reinvigorate interest in both symbols and messages conveyed by the 'red star.'

Similarly, there is not much activity recorded on YouTube related to the 2012 Day of Restoration of the Primorska Region to the Motherland Primorska celebration which was organised by the Koper municipality, apart from a selection of short clips featuring interviews. One clip explicitly related to the ceremony is from 2009, featuring a take from the official state celebration.

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agVaFXih8Vk&feature=related>



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The past is far from dead and much less so in an environment dominated by discourses of austerity and uncertainty. Then re-turning to the past comes as no surprise, and indeed, it seems that YouTube offers much more content that is not explicitly related to present-day affairs in terms of content, but proves as a site of emotionally engaged commentary of the present-day affairs. Videos abound, made by the principles of media archaeology (15), that declaratively comment on the past, but in fact offer much more elaborate affective commentaries about the present.

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rN0IEwytpw&feature=related>

This video (vernacular memorial video), for instance features as a good example of digital storytelling and also as a case complying with the multimodal mobile media objects definition.

**HEJ TOVARIŠI (ww2 in slovenia)**

SloRevolucionar 2 videos

DA SE NEBI POZABILO  
KDO SE JE RES BORIL  
ZA SLOVENIJO IN  
NJENE LJUDI!  
  
SMRT FAŠIZMU  
SVOBODA NARODU!

0:04 / 2:08

Like Add to 14,208

Uploaded by SloRevolucionar on 29 Mar 2010

MOJ 1. VIDEO NAREJEN UPAM DA VAM BO VŠEČ,GOVORI PA O BOJU PRAVIH DOMOLJUBOV IN PATRIOTOV

71 likes, 6 dislikes

SF/SN

**Category:**  
[Non-profits & Activism](#)

**Licence:**  
Standard YouTube Licence

Show fewer

**Translation:** So we don't forget who really fought for Slovenia and its people! Death to fascism, freedom to the people!

## Slovenia



**HEJ TOVARIŠI (ww2 in slovenia)**

SloRevolucionar · 2 videos 19,720

 44 100 6

[Like](#) [About](#) [Share](#) [Add to](#) [i/i](#) [i/i](#)

Uploaded on 29 Mar 2010  
MOJ 1. VIDEO NAREJEN UPAM DA VAM BO VŠEČ, GOVORI PA  
O BOJU PRAVIH DOMOLJUBOV IN PATRIOTOV

SF/SN

**Category** Non-profits & Activism  
**Licence** Standard YouTube Licence

[Show fewer](#)

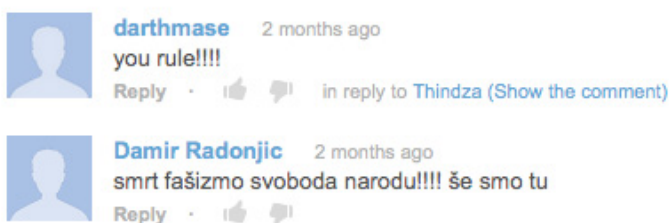
The author, SloRevolucionar, uses a popular song sang by the fighters during the war. The song became an important audio-marker of the war period after the war when it became the repertoire of partisan choirs. Later on it was even covered by several rock bands.

In this case, SloRevolucionar has used to song to dub a selection of photographs and images. Such renarrativisation plays mostly on audiovisual convergence through which a marching song becomes 'inhabited' by faces and images. Using also photographs showing 'ordinary' people in ordinary situations during the war endows the



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the video with a certain degree of affectivity: the song and the images open a path into a different time, which seen from today's perspective appears bereft of the everyday difficulties faced by people in the present. Despite the fact that the portrayed individuals were knee-deep in war, they are here seen as actors in the course of history. Retrospectively, their historical role is interpreted as part of an emancipatory project, which as the SloRevolucionar goes on to say that the country's leader 'ensured peace, normal life and jobs!'. Particularly 'normal life and jobs' are common reference that when uttered explicitly express a statement about the present which clearly seems to be lacking normality and jobs. The video has so far been viewed 15.963 times (14.208 in early October, 19.720 in late December 2012) and has 30 recorded comments, which rarely go beyond expressions of dis/approval (for instance:



Heftier in terms of response, both in terms of quantity and content is for instance the following video 'Partizanska pesem: Kdo pa so ti mladi fantje.'

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFNqd3LMXBg&feature=related>

Made by GOBA23, this vernacular video memorial likewise uses audiovisual convergence, whereas the song is another once famous partisan song, "Kdo pa so ti mladi fantje" (Who are these young lads?). Again the multimodal mobile media object proves a site and trigger of affective response, and also provides some insight into the way the past is remediated, renarrated with reference to the present condition:

## Slovenia

Smrt klerofasizmu, svoboda narodu!

Myriam, strinjam se! Ponosen na naše partizane in na rdečo barvo. Trenutno sicer razočaran nad vsem ampak z upanjem, če ne zdaj pa jutri. Počasi je dovolj neoliberalizma (ekonomskega).

1969rainmaker in reply to MyriamSlo (Show the comment) 1 year ago 24 👍

@1969rainmaker

Tako je rainmaker, kljub sedajšnjem stanju upanje na lepsi jutri nikoli ne sme zbledeti! Vse mlade (in njihove potomce) pa naj vedno spremljata predanost svoji domovini in zar visoke narodne zavesti in ljubezni, tako kot so jo v svojih srcih nosili nasi se zivi in padli tovarisi in tovarisice v tezkih casih NOB-a!

MyriamSlo in reply to 1969rainmaker 1 year ago

**Translation:** Death to cleric-fascism, freedom to the people! Myriam, I agree! Proud of our partisans and red. Currently disappointed with everything but still hoping for the best, if not today, tomorrow. We are getting sick of neoliberalism (economic).

@1969rainmaker

That's right, Rainmaker, despite the present state, may the hope of a better tomorrow never fade! All young people (and their descendants) should always be accompanied by commitment to their homeland and the spirit of high national consciousness and love, as were our fallen comrades in their hearts and lives to in difficult times NLS [national liberation struggle]!

The most intriguing, however, are new uses of the past in DME that rely predominantly on referencing the past and introducing in the process an ironic stance. In many cases the users engage in reflecting on the past while making very clear the position from which they intervene. This entails making videos using popular music (as opposed to revolutionary, partisan songs), which immediately positions the memorial, its content and message into the realm of popular culture and mass consumption. Importantly, for this writing as well, such interventions feature as triggers of Yugonostalgia, because they most explicitly refer to a particular period and radially address a past that has no present. It does have presence, precisely

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through such interventions and in the lives of people who were brought up to the sounds of Yugoslav popular music.

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge7KoJxSgSc&feature=related> (Računajte na nas (Count on us))

The video uses a cover version of a popular song 'Count on us' written by Đorđe Balašević, a Yugoslavian/Serbian singer-songwriter and released in 1978. The cover was recorded in 1998 by a Slovenian band Zaklonišče prepeva and became a hit and a flagship song of Slovenian Yugonostalgic 'movement.'(16) Visually, the user relies heavily on Che Guevara imagery, thus placing the narrative within a popular referential framework of international socialism. Photographs are interspersed with text (captions), which are transcripts of Guevara's speeches, Fidel Castro's admiration of Che and user's own thoughts:

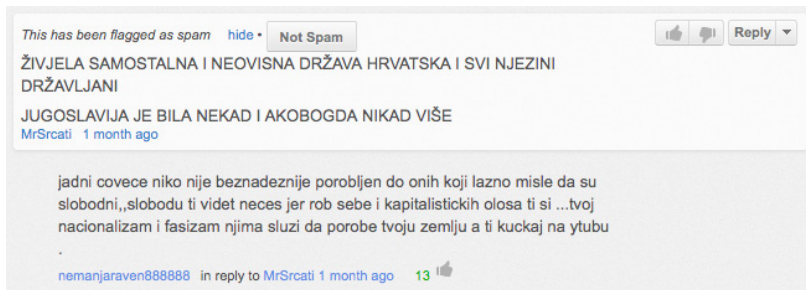


**Translation:** Ps. We'll tear you apart like beasts. It won't be difficult to do it again.

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Visually and textually, the video is not a too great achievement. Regardless, since 2007 when it was first put up, it has been seen nearly 2 million times and has scored 8.372 comments (by October 2012), which says a lot about the place of this song in post-Yugoslav cultural memory and also about the emotions this cover version stirs in the post-Yugoslav debate about the past, present and future.

The comments section proves a 'goldmine' of affective responses (commenting activity can be detected throughout the video online period; at the time I watched it the most recent comment was 21 seconds old):



**Translation:** MRScрати LONG LIVE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA AND ALL ITS CITIZENS

YUGOSLAVIA WAS ONCE AND IF GOD SO WISHES, NEVER AGAIN

Nemanjaraven888888 in reply to MRScрати

you are pathetic, no one is more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe that they are free,,freedom you don't want to see cause you're the slave of yourself and capitalist basterds, you are ...your nationalism and fascism serve them to enslave your country but you just go ahead type away on youtube

Here a historical antagonism surfaces which was to an important extent part of the 1980s nationalisation and radicalisation of the situation in Yugoslavia. The socialist past, WWII and the resistance was exposed to a significant questioning. In the process of rising national sentiments, across Yugoslavia topics emerged related to rehabilitation of WWII collaboration. These topics remain present ever since and importantly shape national politics, most decidedly in Slovenia and Croatia. In this case we can see reference to the Independent State of Croatia, which was a Nazi sponsored state shortly before and during WWII, its officials responsible for some of the cruellest crimes in the territory of former Yugoslavia. The respondent exposes another issue present in dealing with Yugoslav past related to country's historical position in the world; nemanja-raven888888 alludes to concepts of freedom, nationalism, capitalism, enslavement aiming to disclose the present situation as far from more free or democratic as was the Yugoslav. This falls into the category of one of the more common tropes, i.e. that of conceptualising Yugoslavia as a country that at least on some level ensured greater freedom.

It can be argued that such vernacular memorials fail to translate their active potential into 'real' action. Often it all stops at posted video and commenting, while any further action cannot easily be traced and followed. This however, may not be an issue, as it is clear that such interventions do in fact arouse substantial response, if only digital. But the thing is that even such response has impact on users and viewers in terms of 'presence.' Number of views, comments, likes/dislikes all allude to the 'impact' of the video and even if these numbers are low, the very 'presence' of the content is not to be underrated.

The case below reveals that the 'provenance' of the vernacular memorial video not necessarily plays any role in its reception. Be it a guerrilla statement or a commercial enterprise bears little or no consequence on the politics of emotion that develop in the comments section. The case of Rock Partyzani is a revealing one.

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See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQzqV-6-4do> (Yugo – Rock Partyzani)



Here (this is the band's official video) we can see explicit referencing and re-evaluating the Yugoslav, socialist past, including its political and popular aspects. The video features emblematic images from the period of Yugoslavia (Yugo, the Yugoslav car, mountains, commercials, excerpts from football matches etc.), which determines historical, popcultural and ideological limits of the video. The name of the band stresses this is a rock band while making reference also to the WWII partisan resistance. At the same time, the band introduces a word play, exchanging "i" for "y" this turning the partisans into entertainment.

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On the level of the band name they make reference to two important pop-cultural/historical phenomena: rock music, which in Yugoslavia played an important role particularly from late 1970s to end of 1980s, and the legacy of resistance. However, wrapping all this in entertainment they deliberately establish distance from these legacies. This is particularly relevant with a view to the fact that the main protagonist of this band was the key figure in another Slovenian pop-rock band Agropop, which in the late 1980s and early 1990s happily sailed the wave of nationalist emotions in the then de-Yugoslavising Slovenia. Thus it is difficult not to see a clear commercial aspect and commercial 'exploitation' of the sentiment and disappointment over the present-day situation through uncritical and not too inventive referencing the past.

The responses to the song (it has over 500.000 views and over 700 comments), however, prove that when it comes to triggering emotions and evoking youth, such deliberations are useless:



**nadalina53nja** 8 months ago

Rodila sam se kao Jugoslovenka...u tinejderskim danima pocinje rat-i postajem hrvatica.-sad me strah da ne umrem kao nesto trece-...R.I.P moja Jugice ;(

Reply · 22 👍 🗨️



**azamemnius** 3 weeks ago

rodia san se ka Hrvat i umrit cu ka Hrvat i Dalmatinac, al da ga jebes rodia san se u Jugi i svi su narodi Juge moja braca, i da umrem u nekoj novoj Jugi ne bi se žalia.

Reply · 6 👍 🗨️ in reply to [nadalina53nja](#)

## Translation

nadalina53nja: I was born as a Yugoslav... when I was a teenager, the war began and I became a Croat.-now I'm afraid I'll die something the third-...R.I.P my little Yugoslavia;(

azamemnius in reply to nadalina53nja

I was born a Croat and I'll die a Croat and a Dalmatian, but fuck it, I was born in Yugoslavia and all nations of Yugoslavia are my brothers, and to die in some other Yugoslavia, I wouldn't complain.

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Apart from many cases that use music as the backbone of their narrative, there are several other cases that are not strictly YouTube content, but deserve special mention because of their treatment of the WWII topic.

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gox2tEvwG-8&feature=related> (Partisans, trailer)

This is a low budget production by an amateur production group Pristava Pictures. It involves just a few actors playing Partisans and Germans and is a 'story' about two bravehearts caught in the war in 1941. The trailer is meant as a parody of the period as it tries to portray humorously two partisans left with no ammunition and running helplessly through the woods. The Nazis are just as derogatorily portrayed as a disorganised bunch, marked by oversized swastikas on their helmets and the heavily Slavic accented German.

Another case, made by director Žiga Virč is a trailer for the film Battle at Vojsko.

In this case the author undertakes a more elaborate approach including more elaborate editing, mis-en-scene, costumes...

See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVCu4TBg-hM&feature=related>

(Bitka na Vojskem, trailer)

In this case considerably more attention is paid to the detail (weapons, trucks, uniforms, people). Now, the interesting part about this, apart from the comments that I will look at below, is the fact this trailer was made for a very specific event: re-enactment of an actual battle that took place in 1944 in Vojsko, Slovenia (see <http://zbiralci.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=7626>) organised annually by the Culture-Historical Association Triglav. What is intriguing in this case is that the trailer actually supports a real (re)event, which is in all manners of its execution, a film. The trailer and the re-enactment taken together reveal a continual presence of interest in WWII that goes beyond merely ideological aspects, but is itself also very material; the uniforms and weapons used are all original.



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Vsak clovek ima lastno voljo. Ni fora komunizma da je clovek brez lastne volje in zasebne lastnine, ampak da ima vsak pravico do necesa. Seveda mora za to tudi prispevati druzbi. V komunizmu je vsak svoboden in ima vsak pravico do zasebnega, le da zaradi enakopravnosti en clovek ne sme imeti vsega, drug clovek pa nicesar. Ce ima kmet 100 hektarov zemlje, jo ima lahko tudi drugi kmet. Vsak clovek lahko svoj talent prispeva k druzbi v komunizmu.

[bibimir](#) in reply to [GBWallace](#) (Show the comment) 1 year ago

V kapitalizmu ima vsak pravico do vsega, če si to zasluži. V komunizmu se pa more enim jemati, da se da drugim. temu se reče porazdeljevanje bogastva. In glede na to, da nekdo, ki je pravično priboril določeno zasebno lastnino, to težko da iz rok, torej mu more nekdo vzeti. In ko mu vzameš del zasebne lastnine, mu vzameš del svobode. Ko daš drugemu ta del zasebne lastnine, drugemu odvzameš svobodo in ga narediš odvisnega. V imenu enakopravnosti oba izgubita svobodo, ti pa dobiš kontrolo.

[GBWallace](#) in reply to [bibimir](#) 1 year ago

### Translation:

**bibimir:** Everyone has his own will. It is not the point of communism that everyone is without his own will and private property, but that everyone has a right to something. Of course, everyone should also contribute to this society. In communism everyone is free and everyone has the right to property, but because of the principle of equality one cannot have everything, and another nothing. If a farmer owns 100 hectares of land, so can another farmer. Everyone person can contribute their talents to society under communism.

**GBWallace in reply to bibimir:** In capitalism, everyone has a right to everything, if one deserves it. In communism, one has to take from someone to give to the other. This is called the distribution of wealth. And given the fact that someone who has just won certain private property, it is difficult to just give it away, so it has to be taken. And when you take a part of private property, you take away a piece of freedom. When you put this piece of private property to someone else, you take away his freedom as well and make him dependent. Thus, in the name of the equality both lose freedom and you gain control.

This exchange reveals a basic controversy in contemporary post-socialist understanding of socialism as ideology and also alludes to the way socialist period is understood and perceived in post-socialist Slovenia.

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Conceptualising socialism as ideology most often spans uncritical adoration and just as uncritical condemnation, as a rule giving little room to its more nuanced interpretations that could fruitfully be used in understanding the present condition and conceptualising potentialities of the future. The voices of bibimir and GBWallace, both individual interventions into the digital media ecology, but due to media presence nevertheless relevant, significantly contribute to the conflation of complexity and inflation of simplification. As difficult as it is to embrace wholeheartedly the failed ideology of socialism, it is just as difficult to discard it entirely. Precisely in the time when crucial tenets of socialist ideology, as more or less successfully enacted in socialist Yugoslavia, e.g. solidarity, freedom, etc. are severely threatened by the present crisis and seeing everything through financial viability.

It is through this prism that much debate ignited through such and similar videos/vernacular digital memorials unravels online and is then further extrapolated to include contemporary cultural, political and economic situation in post-socialist Slovenia, and elsewhere. Juxtaposing the socialist present and the post-socialist, transitional present reveals a great deal of disappointment and unease both in understanding the past, as it does in making sense of the present. Thus such juxtapositions feature as indicators of present-day Slovenian culture-political divisions along the lines related to the interpretation of WWII and the role of socialism in Slovenian history.

### **Blogging as a practice and source of memory and remembering**

As opposed to videos and memories and debates triggered through them, blogging is a more 'traditional' approach in the sense that it relies predominantly on the written word. Blogging is in a way the most straightforward continuation of dairies and commonplace books in terms of individuality of content presentation. Yet, it is also an activity that revels in the advantages of commenting and embedding audiovisuals.

In the case of 'history on blogs' I look at a selection of blog posts by authors who responded to the two events. Through their interven-

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-tion I trace debates and hence collective interventions into public space.

First I look at a blog by Don Marko M who posts regularly on various topics related to Slovenian daily politics and focus on his post related to the celebration of the restoration of Primorska to the motherland.

See: <http://markom.watoc.org/2012/09/17/primorska-zavedno-z-redeco-zvezdo-foto/> (all citations from this address)

## Primorska (ZA)vedno – v srcu in z rdečo zvezdo (foto)

17. september 2012 by [Don Marko M](#)

Tovarištvo, Moč in Ljubezen, vse v imenu Spomina večnosti določenega obdobja upora in bojevanja naših edinih pravih osvoboditeljev, je v soboto okupiralo Koper. Preko 70 tisoč Primorcev in tistih, ki imajo radi Primorsko smo poskrbeli, da je Koper pokal po šivih v najbolj obiskani eno dnevni prireditvi zadnjih 25 let. Slavili smo 65. rojstni dan Primorske. Nepozabno. Kot ostaja nepozabna zahvala našim borcem, partizanom, zaradi katerih lahko to sploh praznujemo. Mi se zavedamo – brez vas, spoštovane tovarišice in tovariši, ne bi bilo niti nas.....

### Translation:

Primorska (FOR)ever – in the heart and with the red star (photo)

Camaraderie, strength and love, all in the name Memory eternity specified period of resistance and fighting our only real liberators, on Saturday okupiralo Koper. Over 70 thousand Primorska and those who like Primorsko we make sure that the Koper Cup at the seams in the most visited one day event for 25 years. We celebrated the 65th birthday Primorska. Memorable. As remains unforgettable thanks to our fighters, partisans, which can all celebrate. We are aware - without you, dear companions and comrades, there would be no us .....

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In his post from 17 September 2012, two days after the celebration of the Day of Restoration of the Primorska Region to the Motherland, Don Marko M gives a very engaged account about the event and its Slovenian historical and present-day political dimensions.

Proslava v Kopru je bila obenem tudi lep prikaz združevanja generacij vseh starosti, od najmlajših do najstarejših, od borcev, partizanov do praporščakov in njih potomcev, ki gojimo in ne damo spomina na njih junaška dejanja. Poleg centralne proslave so se prireditve odvijale praktično na vsakem cm mestne površine.

Na vsakem koraku rdeča zvezda, pesem otroških glasilk, borčevskih pesmi, tovarištvo, ljubezen in rock'n'roll. Vse to je rock'n'roll in zato ga imamo nepozabno zvesto radi. Borci, partizani so začeli, mi nadaljujemo.

**Translation:** Celebration in Koper was also a beautiful display of generations of all ages coming together, from the youngest to the oldest, from the fighters, partisans and to banner carriers and their young, who cherish and will not forget their heroic acts. Apart from the central celebration virtually every inch of the city area was a sight of festivity.

At every step, the red star, children singing, fighters songs, camaraderie, love and rock'n'roll. All this is rock'n'roll and therefore we love it unforgettably. What the fighters, the partisans have begun, we continue.

Contextualisation of the event into the post-socialist and antifascist tradition is very overt and presents a crucial aspect of Don Marko M's blogging engagement. Likewise, the urge to fight the revision of history and annihilation of the specific part of Slovenian past, one related to WWII and post-socialist period, is just as persisting:

Preživeli smo torej nepozaben dan v tovarištvu, ljubezni in slogi, torej povsem običajen Primorski dan, le da je ta imel nabož spomina več. Naboj, ki nikoli ne bo ugasnil.

Tovarišice in tovariši, hvala Vam ! Hvala, da za vašo srčno borbo za domovino in zmagoslavje, zaradi katerega danes, tudi po 65 letih, živimo svobodno na svoji zemlji. Hvala za pogum, za srce, za ljubezen do bodočih rodov – hvala za Primorsko. Vse to bomo vaši potomci skrbno negovali. Spoštujemo in ohranjamo našo borčevsko, partizansko preteklost in korakamo v nove zmage prihodnosti. Čas je za korenite spremembe. Čas je za odcepitev Primorske od matične domovine....

Smrt fašizmu, svoboda narodu !

Tovariš Don Marko M

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**Translation:** So we spent an unforgettable day in camaraderie, love and harmony, that is completely normal day in Primorska, but this one had more memory charge. A bullet that will never be extinguished.

Companions and comrades, thank you! Thank you for your hearty fighting for this country and for the triumph, because of which today, even 65 years later, we live freely on our land. Thank you for your courage, for your heart, for the love of future generations - thanks for the Primorska. All this we will carefully cherish. We respect and preserve our Partisan past and march in victorious future. It is time for radical change. It is time for separation of Primorska from the motherland ...

Death to fascism, freedom to the people!

Comrade Don Marko M

This rather lengthy post ends with the above wording, clearly replicating the socialist (liberation struggle) ideologised political rhetoric, which is 'extended' into the post-socialist period. It is this use of that specific rhetoric that in a way gives credit to the struggle. In fact, Don Marko M's style of writing clearly shows great devotion not only to the legacies of socialism in relation to Primorska (liberation, restoration). In the same vein the author clearly builds on the 'revolutionary rhetoric' when talking about the future, which for him is unimaginable outside the continuity with the national liberations struggle tradition. Simultaneously, through the recognition of values equated with socialism (but not necessarily socialist in origin) the author re-fits the socialist past with historical meaning and relevance. What is more, doing so he effectively defies the historical cut of 1991 and the ensuing revisionism and establishes a continuity with socialist 'heroic past.' Thus he effectively re-endows the present with a sense of epochality.

Another point worth mentioning and that bears consequences also for the wider argument, is what the author explicates in the debate with one of the readers stating:

Robert Kaše says:

19. september 2012 at 16:45

Mogoče celo pridem. Moj stari oče je bil menda med prvimi partizani, ki so prišli v Trst. Spomnim se, da mi je govoril o uličnih bojih ...

Kakorkoli ... v Kopru me res da ni bilo, vendar so zvezde in titove slike pač logotipi komunizma in prav nič drugega in na tej proslavi je to, sodeč po tvojih slikah izpadlo izjemno, naravnost kričeče poudarjeno. Bolj kot na proslavah druga leta. In to je provokacija. To ni naključje. To ima svoje sporočilo, ki smo ga verjetno prav razumeli.

Vlada je naredila pametno potezo ker ni šla v Koper – s tem se je izognila ponižanju, ki ga je že prej doživela v Bazovici in vsi so vedeli naprej, da v Kopru ne bo nič drugače, glede na zagreto atmosfero pa bi se morda lahko še slabše končalo.

Dejstvo je, da je to legitimna vlada države Slovenije in če se predsednik države ponosno udeležuje proslav na katerih se pod krinko državnih interesov javno žali zakonito oblast ter provocira državljane, ki si drznejo meniti, da je povečevanje komunističnih simbolov in voditeljev žalitev tistih, ki so zaradi teh trpeli, potem imamo očitno problem, ki ga pa na takšen način gotovo ne bomo rešili.

Državlјanska vojna v Sloveniji preprosto še ni končana in enačenje osvoboditve izpod fašizma s komunistično revolucijo je zgolj njeno nadaljevanje.

**Translation (second paragraph):** Anyway ... I wasn't in Koper [on the 15], but the stars and Tito's image are logos of communism and nothing else, and this celebration was, judging by your pictures, most exceptionally highlighted. More so than at previous celebrations. And this is a provocation. And this is no coincidence. It has its own message, which was also probably understand.

Don Marko M says:

19. september 2012 at 20:08

pa da še to razčistiva o komunističnih simbolih.....nihče na tem svetu, ponavljam nihče, še ni obsodil simbolov borecev, partizanov NOB in jih niti po pomoti ni nihče, niti EU, ni uvrstila med totalitarne simbole, ker je to enostavno nemogoče narediti....borci, partizani pod rdečo zvezdo v NOB so namreč ljudstvo osvobodili totalitarnih sovražnih okupatorjev....zato pa rdeča zvezda ne bo nikoli uradno obsojena, kljub temu, da bi nekateri dali vse, da bi se to zgodilo.....

problem rdeče zvezde, ki je dokazano osvobajala naše ljudstvo, tudi Primorsko, torej nikakor ni in ne more biti problem....tisti, ki pač ne marajo rdeče zvezde imajo neke svoje probleme povsem neke drugje.....zgodovinsko dejstvo je pač, da "pedigrejskim" Slovincem nikoli ni bila povšeči sloga slovenskega naroda in Primorska ZAvedno je bila klasičen primer sloge....vem ja, vsaka vlada se boji sloge ljudstva.....

no, vsaka primerjava našega Primorskega praznika z neko komunistično revolucijo se mi zdi itak nesmiselna....hja, na tem prazniku je ni bilo....pa tudi če bo spet kdaj, ne bo komunistična, ker komunistov pri nas pač ni, vsaj tistih v pravem pomenu pojma ne....mi smo tokrat enostavno praznovali spomin na zmagovalce NOB v spoštljivosti njih žrtvovanja za naš lepši danes, sicer na svoj poseben, retro sodoben, a očitno zmagovalen način....za jutri bomo pač morali poskrbeti sami....in to je to....Primorska ZAvedno pač....

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**Translation:** (...) and let's get the communist symbols straight .... no one in this world, I repeat no one, has condemned the symbols of the fighters, NOB [national liberation struggle] partisans not even by mistake, nobody, not even the EU, defines them as totalitarian symbols, because it is simply impossible to do so .... the fighters, partisans who fought under the red star in the NOB have in fact liberated people from the occupying totalitarian enemy .... so the red star will never be officially condemned, although some would give everything for that to happen .....

the problem of the red star, which has liberated our people, and Primorska region, therefore is and cannot be a problem .... those who do not like the red star have problems somewhere else completely..... but it is a historical fact that 'pedigree' Slovenians have never been too fond of the unity of the Slovenian nation ... and Primorska Forever (Primorska ZAVedno) is a classic example of unity .... yeah I know, every government fears the people unity .....

Well, any comparison of our holiday with a communist revolution seems pointless anyway .... Well, at this event there was nothing as such.... and even if there will ever be again, it will not be communist, because there are no communists here, at least not those in the straight sense of the term.... this time we just celebrated the memory of the winners of the National Liberation Struggle in respect of their sacrifice for our better today, true in its unique, retro-modern, and obviously winning way .... we'll just have to take care of tomorrow ourselves .... and that's it... Primorska forever ....

The references the collocutors make in their debate to communism and the red star as its symbol are indicative of the post-socialist situation as they express a basic 'dis-understanding' about the strategies of 'translating' the 'totalitarian' past into a 'democratic' present. Robert Kaše explicitly links the red star with communism (predominantly its totalitarian aspects), which corresponds to generally detectable strategies in post-socialist countries (and Slovenia in particular) of wholesale discrediting of the socialist period through its equalisation with dictatorship, and comparing it to fascism and Nazism.

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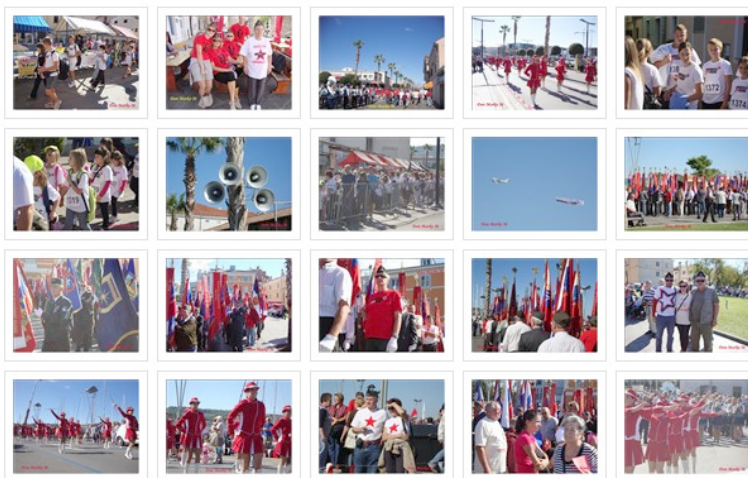
Such understanding neglects or actively downplays the emancipatory potential (which in many socialist countries was realised to a significant extent) that the socialist project had and fascism and Nazism never did. With emancipatory potential I refer to investment in and development of public education, public health, emancipation of women (for instance, socialist Yugoslavia enforced universal suffrage in 1946, while for instance Switzerland in 1971), workers rights, etc.

Don Marko M on the other hand sees the red star not as a symbol of communism, but as a symbol of liberation, particularly of his native Primorska region. Explicitly differentiating the red star from communism (which in many respects is indeed difficult to do), Don Marko M in fact recognises the emancipatory potential of the liberation struggle and the period that followed, while acknowledging the problematic aspects of communism in general and also the specific situation in Yugoslavia and Slovenia.

Unlike Don Marko M, who defends the emancipatory legacy of resistance and socialism, the author of *Jože Bartolj – zapisi; Aktivno beležim* (*Jože Bartolj – Notes; Actively recording*) blog takes a very different stance, condemning the period and ideology in question altogether.



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See: <http://jozeb.blog.si/ol.net/2012/09/16/%C2%BBprimorska-za-vedno%C2%AB/>

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This is clear from the very ending of his post related to the 15 September celebration, a photo of the Prague Museum of Communism advert:



Such simplified understanding of the complexities (also present at the Prague Museum) of the past swiftly deals away with any opposing views, tends to recognise no alternatives and see nothing else but 'grey' past.

### »Primorska za vedno«

Zapisano pod: [politika](#) — 16.09.2012 @ 22:48

Ne vem, zakaj je bilo treba izpostavljati, da na koprski proslavi ni bilo vladnih predstavnikov. Glede na ikonografijo, ki so jo organizatorji tam ubrali, vladne predstavnike čisto razumem (celo Erjavca). Že Bazovica je pred dnevi nakazala, kako žvižgajoče nekateri razumejo udeležbo predstavnikov vlade. V Kopru pa se je dogajalo še vse kaj drugega.

Najprej bi bilo dobro, če bi organizatorji pojasnili, ali so imeli v mislih poosamosvojitveno slovesnost, ali eno tistih iz sedemdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja. Nedopustno je namreč, da so tam plapolale totalitarne zastave. Kako je mogoče, da so vihrale zastave s peterokrako zvezdo, glede na to, da smo se pred dvajsetimi leti odločili, da bomo totalitarizem zavrgli? Totalitarizem s tajnimi službami, delovnimi taborišči, političnimi zaporniki, privilegiranim partijskim aparatom, komisarsko milico, spolitizirano vojsko, okostnjaki v omarah in vseh vrst samoupravnimi pravljicami? Si lahko predstavljate, da bi na nemški državni praznik v enem izmed večjih nemških mest, tam vihrale zastave s kljukastim križem? Jaz si zelo težko. Pri nas pa se slavnostni govornik, ki je bil celo predsednik republike od tega ni distanciral. Zato pa je obračunaval z aktualno, sebi nenaklonjeno, vlado.

Poleg tega so bili na proslavi tudi transparenti, ki so poveličevali vlogo največjega vojnega zločinca nekdanje socialistične države.

**Translation:** I do not know why it had to be emphasised that no government representatives were present at the Koper celebration. According to the iconography, government officials can be understood (even Erjavec). [...]

First, it would be good if the organisers explained whether they had in mind a post-independence ceremony, or one from the 1970s. It is unacceptable that totalitarian flags fluttered. How is it possible that flags with the five-pointed star were there, given that twenty years ago we decided to dispose of totalitarianism? Totalitarianism with its secret services, labour camps, political prisoners, privileged party apparatus, committee militia, politicised army, skeletons in the closet and all kinds of self-management fairy tales? Can you imagine a German national holiday in one of the major German cities, where flags with the swastika would flutter? I find it very difficult. And here the keynote speaker, the President of the Republic has not distanced himself from it. Therefore, he has confronted the current government.


In addition, at the celebrate banners fluttered hailing the role of the biggest war criminal of the former socialist country.

In his writing, the author perpetuates one of the most popular fallacies, i.e. that of conflating Nazism and socialism through the perspective of 1991. True, in 1991 Slovenia renounced its Yugoslav past (and future), the related symbols, ideology etc. as symbols of totalitarianism. However, the political operation that backboneed the independence project failed to translate the complexities of both WWII and the post-war/socialist period into a meaningful, wholesome, national, culturally and politically sound narrative of the past. Instead, the independent political elites opted for a full-on obliteration of the socialist past, discarding with it also the above mentioned emancipatory, social, cultural and political achievements.

Interesting in this respect is the following: 'Apart from this, present at the celebration were also banners glorifying the role of the greatest war criminal of the socialist state.' What can be read from this statement semantically is that it suggests that people carrying banners saying (S Titom v srcu smo nerazdružljivi in nepremagljivi/With

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Tito in our hearts we are undividable and undefeatable) were glorifying the Josip Broz's role in the post-war mass extra-judicial killings. Rather, what these banners suggest is that, as one commentator argues, it is not about unreflected defence of the system but 'appreciating in it what was good.'

7. Tomaž Majer: 

17.09.2012 @ 13:09

@jože,

tudi v vipavski dolini so, vsaj do pred kratkim, imeli podoben napis tito, kot je na sabotinu. je pa res, da se te stvari z novimi generacijami seveda spreminjajo, ker mladih te zadeve bolj kot ne niti ne brigajo več, da se veda niti ne govorim o tem, da gre v tvojim primeru za ljudi, ki so zagotovo v večini podporniki SDS in glede na propagando, ki jo ta zganja, to niti ni čudno. lahko se pa vprašaš, zakaj minister za obrambo ni preimenoval tudi vipavske vojašnice, ki ima tudi ime po partizanu.

tudi ne razumem, kako ti je tako težko razumeti tega, da pač ljudje pri titu, socializmu ter NOB cenimo tisto, kar je bilo dobro in ne kar vsega počez. nihče ne podpira niti medvojnih niti povojnih zločinov, podpiramo in slavimo tisto, ker je bilo dobro. in osvoboditev izpod okupatorja je zagotovo bilo častno dejanje, na katerega smo lahko ponosni. na tvojo žalost so nas pač osvobodili partizani s svojimi simboli, tako da ni mi jasno, kako si ti predsvajjaš da bi lahko slavili nekaj, brez simbolov, ki to predstavljajo.

**Translation:** @jože, In Vipava valley, at least until recently, they had a similar inscription tito, such as the one on Sabotin. but it is true that these things are changing with new generations; young people more often than not do not care about these things, not to say anything about your case, where it's mostly people who are definitely mostly the supporters of SDS [Slovenian Democratic Party; currently in power] and their propaganda. [...]

I also do not understand why it is so hard to understand that the people in Tito and NOB and socialism appreciate what was good and not just everything. No one supports the war and post-war crimes, we support and celebrate what was good. And liberation from the occupier was

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certainly an honourable thing of which we can be proud. Unfortunately for you, we were liberated by the partisans and their symbols, so it's not clear to me how do you imagine to celebrate something without the symbols that represent this.

13. *Nataša:*

[19.09.2012 @ 07:49](#)

Antiklump, Ciril Zlobec je lepo povedal: "Druga stran naše zgodovine čuti, da je vseeno, če ne bi bilo Primorske, samo da ne bi bilo komunizma. In kateri svoj zgodovinski dosežek lahko oni postavijo za praznik? Prisego Hitlerju. Tega pa v Evropi nikjer ne praznujejo."

14. *antiklump:*

[20.09.2012 @ 23:39](#)

Ciril Zlobec je v političnih vprašanjih močno "okužen". Škoda, da ni ostal samo pesnik, ker to pa je dober.

Brez komunizma bi Primorska obsegala še Gorico in Trst. Nasilnim častilcem Stalina, hujšim od njega, pa se je bilo nemogoče postaviti po robu, ker so brezobzirni. Žal se njihova brezčutnost kaže še danes. Sistem, ki je zgodovinsko pogrnil po dobrih sedemdesetih letih, pri nas pa že po petinštiridesetih, sistem grajen na laži, prevari in nasilju.

Draga duša, na tak način ne boš razrešila svojih frustracij. Začasno je vest pomirjena, trajati pa tako ne more.

15. *Nataša:*

[21.09.2012 @ 07:51](#)

Potemtakem bi bilo smiselno uvesti državni praznik na dan, ko so domobranci prisegli Hitlerju in ga poimenovali, recimo, dan upora proti okupatorju? Antiklump, nikar s tako predvidljivo desničarsko floskulo o frustracijah, no...

**Translation:** Natasa: Antiklump, Ciril Zlobec said it best: "The other side of our history feels that it does not matter if there was no Primorska, as long as there would be no communism. And which historic achievement can they set for a public holiday? Oath to Hitler. No one in Europe celebrates this."

Antiklump:

Ciril Zlobec in political terms is strongly "contaminated." Too bad he did not remain a poet, because he was good.

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Without communism Primorska would include Gorizia and Trieste. Violent worshipers of Stalin, worse than him, were impossible to stand up against, because they were ruthless. Unfortunately, their ruthlessness shows today. The system, which has historically flunked after some seventy years, and here already after after forty-five, a system built on lies, deceit and violence.

My dear, in such a way you will not solve your frustrations. Temporarily your consciousness is soothed, last this will not last.

Nataša: Then it would make sense to introduce a state celebration of the day the Homeguards swore oath to Hitler and name it day of resistance against the occupator? Antiklump, go easy on the transparent right-wing platitudes on frustrations...

The above exchange illustrates another common operation related to the concepts of Slovenianness, patriotism, national interest..., i.e. the post-1991 sanitisation of Slovenian past and present. In political and media discourses, predominantly those 'nationally burdened,' it is fairly common to adopt the discrediting strategies based on 'marking' a stance and/or the utterer as 'ideologically contaminated.' This effectively prevents any meaningful debate and in essence proves that the so-much-desired standards of free debate, expressing opposing opinions and argumentatively contesting opinions are wilfully discarded as soon as debate hits the delicate area of the national and the newly democratic. Sadly, rather than an argument about content we get an argument about allegiances, which invariably leads to impasse in any potentially fruitful debate. Instead of official censorship we get self-imposed censorship which emanates from precisely such unproductive contamination of debate.

The content or a problem is thus rarely discussed despite the potentialities of the medium. Rather such posts become triggers for emotional re-working of the past-via-present: audiovisual and/or textual statements are labelled as contaminated if the utterer's past/background is seen 'inadequate,' if the statement might too positively reinterpret, renarrate, remediate the Yugoslav past.

Thus the past in terms of factual accuracy becomes temporally conflated and radically simplified. On the other hand, such individual interventions might also be seen precisely (or firstly) as 'provocations,' as triggers that set off individual memories and (socio-politico-cultural) engagement. A reaction to a post is usually emotively laden, it is radically motivated by personal relation to the topic, to the period in question.

### **Conclusion**

As stated in the beginning, this is not a definitive or all-encompassing overview of the historical representations in DME related to Slovenian history. In fact, the scope is deliberately limited to the post-socialist condition and only a selection of cases. This was a decision based on the importance of understanding the socialist experience in Slovenian context; and understanding the importance of understanding the role of socialism in as a significant part of Slovenian past and history, and also present-day discourses.

To better illustrate this I took as a starting point two pivotal events that marked the Slovenian political scene in 2012 and resonated quite loudly in digital media ecology as well. Purposely I did not look at newspapers but rather at bottom-up interventions. Not only because of scarcity of material I also took in consideration some material which is not explicitly connected to the two events, but that still remediate the topics which were renarrated in vernacular treatments of these events: the WWII (resistance, anti-fascism, collaboration) and the post-socialist period.

This of course does not mean that other historical topics are not present in Slovenian DME. Rather the dominance of WWII and post-socialist period is incredible. Understandably, this is to be attributed to the nature of Yugoslavia's demise, to the formation of new states and to the global trends in conceptualising and managing liberal-democratic/capitalist states and affairs. The multimodal discourse analysis of the selected content (media objects) through the perspective of the two cases shows that the past in Slovenia is far from commonly shared, and is interpreted in a radically bi-polar



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manner. It is clear that on an astonishingly small territory that Slovenia is two very strong narratives coexist about what in a democratic state the meaning and role of WWII and its ensuing interpretations should be. It is astonishing that in very specific interpretations (speaking in European terms) of the WWII, anti-fascist resistance and the post-socialist period, the relevance of the socialist past and its role in the former Yugoslav's histories is very easily discarded in its entirety.

Of course, uneasy questions arise as to how to accommodate a regime that is responsible for mass killings after the WWII with the obvious emancipatory effects that the introduction of socialism had for the Yugoslav countries. Discarding the entire socialist period is not particularly productive in attempts to define a long-term view of a country's development. Neither is it a particularly promising point of departure for conceptualising national history in the wider, European historical framework.

Sadly and worryingly, this seems to be the problem that underlies and defines the East-West relations in the EU today. The 'former' West seems very reluctant to renounce its victorious role (the German guilt for the WWII and the Holocaust being 'resolved' in Nuremberg), whereas the East is heavily traumatised by the legacies of Nazi occupation and to an important extent also Soviet occupation on the one hand, while on the other also by the present-day unacceptability of its socialist/communist past. Thus, in line with what Buden states (quoted above), regardless of internal differences (e.g. Yugoslav experience is radically different from Estonian) the East is in the position where they cannot rely on their 20th century as a source material for creating possible futures. Effectively, the East, and particularly the former Yugoslavs (Slovenians, Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians) are left without any long-lasting meaningful or heroic past. And the online interventions as described above are in many respects also an attempt to reassemble the historical and reattribute the past with a sense of normalcy, epochality and heroicity. Predominantly because of mediatisation and mediation of the quotidian (and with it memories and remembering), which has so distinctly marked the latter 20th century, it is the



mediated past (popularisation of the historical and historicisation of popular) that defines the audiovisions of the past most decidedly. And it is upon this excessive mediatisation of the past that the ideas of the future can be built. The East, however, in the process of de-sovietisation, de-totalitarianisation, de-Yugoslavisation, de-communistisation, etc. is left without 'useful' content that could legitimately be used in constructing the pasts and the futures. Caught in 'permanent transition' not only is the socialist past 'useless' for official, state-sponsored historiographies and but it is largely inappropriate for any kind of positive (re)evaluation. It can be, and it often is, selectively used for post-socialist, nationalistic self-purification, i.e. 'self-decompetentisation.' Thus the present becomes very difficult to trans-code into a 'myth,' into a narrative that would have stood the chance to succeed in constructing a post-socialist political, social or cultural tissue. This effectively means that the west retained the east as its 'other,' (or rather that the East retained its role as the West's other), only now it is no longer the 'communist' but the 'infantile' other.

Thus a way is needed indeed, and many of the analysed cases do exactly this, to reinterpret the 'inappropriate' socialist past into a meaningful past (this does not imply neglect of its negative chapters). Only then can former Easternites find their place in a common Europe and only then can a common Europe hope to arrive at a commonly accepted approximation of an idea of a common future.

## Notes

(1) Lev Manovich, *Software takes command*. Draft book, 2008. <http://lab.softwarestudies.com/2008/11/softbook.html>. Accessed 8 August 2011.

(2) With this term I denote the type of networked activity which involves an individual, a networked machine and the internet. Hovering attention implies distributed, fragmented attention dedicated to stuff going on online and is related to a filtering out 'interesting' content in the general inability to follow 'everything.'

(3) On re-presencing see Vivian Sobchack, 'Afterword: Media Archaeology and Re-Presencing the Past,' in Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (eds.), *Media Archaeology, Approaches, Applications and Implications*, Berkeley, Los Angeles London, California University Press, 2011, 323-334; see also Martin Pogačar, *Memonautica: Yugoslavia in Digital Memories, Memorials and Storytelling*, University of Nova Gorica, 2012 (PhD Dissertation).

(4) On multimodal discourse analysis see Kay L. O'Halloran, 'Multimodal Discourse Analysis,' in K. Hyland and B. Paltridge (eds.), *Companion to Discourse*, London and New York, Continuum, in press 2011.

(5) See Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology*, London, Polity Press, 2012.

(6) I use terms 'East,' 'Eastern' and 'Easternite' as symbolically laden terms and am aware of their essentialising capacity. I do, however, wish to emphasise the still existing division and also allude to 'self-easternisation' of the former socialist regimes.

(7) Boris Buden, *Zona prelaska, O kraju postkomunizma*, Fabrika knjiga, Beograd, 2012, 39, 42.

(8) *Ibid.*, 61

(9) *Ibid.*, 61.

(10) Knut Lundby (ed.) *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-representation in New Media*, New York, Peter Lang, 2008.

(11) Manovich, *Software takes command*.

Pogačar

(12) On the on-the-fly see Andrew Hoskins, 'The Digital Distribution of Memory,' available at [www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/.../hoskins-paper.pdf](http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/.../hoskins-paper.pdf), accessed 21 December 2012.

(13) O'Halloran, 'Multimodal Discourse Analysis.'

(14) Klaus Krippendorf, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2004, xiii.

(15) See Pogačar, *Memonautica*.

(16) On Yugonostalgia see Mitja Velikonja, *Titostalgia: A Study of Nostalgia for Josip Broz, Ljubljana, Mirovni inštitut, 2009*.

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## **DIFFUSION OF HISTORY IN THE SOCIAL NETWORKS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (1)**

María Antonia Paz and Julio Montero (Universidad Complutense de Madrid)

### **1. Introduction and state of the question**

As we stated in the conclusion to our first paper, this second stage will involve analysis of the information that popularisation of history websites contain about certain subjects. We chose to study the first page of Google results in each case. We also wanted to look into the possible differences that the various different language versions of one single informational tool – namely Wikipedia – offered on the same subjects.

The initial proposal focused on Google searches relating to Spanish subjects and events. We have changed the criteria and carried out searches in Spanish on topics which are more closely linked to Europe, and to the European Union in particular. However, the analysis protocol remains as originally proposed. The subjects we carried out searches on include: a historical process (history of the European Union); the biography of a figure who is linked to events and processes which involve several European countries (Willy Brandt), tracking a celebration which involves several European countries (commemoration of Europe day) and a specific event which, despite having taken place in Germany, is also associated with Europe as a whole: the fall of the Berlin Wall. Lastly, we analysed the differences in information provided by each language version of Wikipedia on the subject of the languages of the European Union.

In making our decision to analyse only those results offered on the first page of a Google search, we took into account the fact that 90% of people who search for information on a particular subject stick to one of the addresses from that selection. The criteria the search engine uses to make this classification (2) are largely based on the amount of links to the page from other sites. Google also takes “hypertext matching” into account, i.e. the number of times that

the search term (or terms) appear on the corresponding webpage. As a secondary consideration, it looks at the sources cited and its position and hierarchy. These details are of interest since they determine the actual contents of the results pages. To put it another way, the editors of these webpages strive to have their content appear elsewhere and will use key terms repeatedly throughout the text, focusing more on them than on explanation or historical development (which would involve references to other processes and terms and a consequent loss of visibility).

We realise that by choosing to consult only those websites offered on the first page of results, we are limiting ourselves not just to the most frequently consulted pages, but also to the perspectives and versions of the subject which have been read by the majority of the people who made the same searches. This implies that we are dealing with the most popular information, which would probably be of least interest to a historian seeking information for their research. We are aware of the limitations this implies for our analysis: we are only looking at the information obtained by non-specialists who are interested in an issue (probably driven by little more than momentary curiosity). This limitation becomes an advantage if we consider that what we are looking at is the most widely disseminated information on the net about this particular issue.

## 2. Material and methods

The first Google search of the study (conducted on August 31, 2012) was for "History of the European Union (3)". The second was for the biography of "Willy Brandt" (September 4, 2012). The third was for "Commemorations: Europe Day" (September 5, 2012). The fourth search, for "The fall of the Berlin Wall," was carried out on September 6, 2012. As we have mentioned, we analyse each one of the websites that appear on the first page of a Google search. Finally, Wikipedia searches for the term "European Union" in Castilian, Catalan, Galician, Basque, English, French and German were carried out on September 5, 2012.

Our analysis focused on the following points (detailed in Appendix I): type of page (official, unofficial, private), level of information, material offered and links provided (to check which subjects and materials the search terms is related to and assess the importance of the page(4) ). We have also covered the number of visits and the presence of advertising (which helps to assess the page's impact), among other aspects. Next, we studied the elements which define interactivity (characteristics of Web 2.0): user comments, accessibility, and most importantly, content, level of understanding and value of the materials offered. Finally, it is also of interest to know whether these pages simply present the facts or also provide explanations and interpretations. We believe that this set of indicators will help to assess not just the information itself but also the way in which it is provided, as well as the potential influence it may have.

In short, we intend to analyse some specific cases which offer clues for later research. We do not wish to account for the potential role of the internet in the historian's work in general, but rather the potential of some of the options arising from analysis of information about areas of recent European history, with specific reference to the process of creating the European Union.

### **3. Analysis and results**

#### **3.1. The model web page**

When you conduct a Google search for "History of the European Union," what appears at the top of the first page of results is an advertisement. This could be considered to interfere with the historian's work, but we must take into account the fact that we are working with a search tool – Google – which in addition to whatever aims we might think it has, there is another very obvious one: to generate profit. Advertising is one of way of achieving that aim, and is of interest to us because we cannot rule out the possibility that additional means of generating income might influence the information Google supplies. In this case, the ad is for a company

that offers online and classroom-based online courses on subjects such as the external relations of the EU and legal and administrative systems of the EU, among others.

Of the other nine entries on the list, two are videos which have been uploaded to YouTube and seven are web pages. Sites belonging to non-official organisations predominate (see Table 1). The order in which pages appear is significant, because third and fourth place on the list are taken up by websites aimed at students (the third place one is aimed at teachers as well). In its online incarnation, the press is represented by two newspapers (*El País* and *El diario montañés*) as a key source of information on the net, proving that its influence still lives on in the new era. The two YouTube videos confirm that the audiovisual medium has a pre-eminent place in today's society.

**Table 1. The first nine pages found via a Google search for “History of the European Union”.**

Name of the page	Type of organisation responsible
1. Europa.eu	Official organisation
2. Wikipedia	Unofficial organisation
3. HistoriassigloXX.org	Official organisation (CNICE)
4. El Rincón del Vago	Unofficial organisation
5. Enciclopedia Libre Universal en Español	Unofficial organisation
6. El País	Unofficial organisation
7. Cápsulas históricas. YouTube	Official organisation (Univ. Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil, Ecuador)
8. Vídeo Historia de la UE. YouTube	Private individual (Israel González)
9. El Diario montañés	Unofficial organisation



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The majority of these are aimed at the public in general. However, *el Rincón del Vago* (the page's name, which translates as 'Idler's corner', is not coincidental) and CNICE's page (part of the Spanish Ministry of Education), are targeted to students between 16 and 17 years old, who are studying *Primer de Bachillerato*. The official EU page has a special section for children (Kid's zone) and teachers.

Only *La Enciclopedia libre* and the YouTube videos display the number of views. The former states it has had 66,614 views, despite its poor content. *Cápsulas Históricas* attracted 16,297 and the second video (put together very simply by editing photos and text with music), gained 5,850. It is amazing to think that this content about the history of the European Union has reached such a high number of people.

Five of the sites offer links to other pages, usually within their own site (as is the case for European Union, Wikipedia, *Enciclopedia libre*, *El Rincón del Vago*) allowing the reader to expand content on proper names, countries, institutions and treaties. Only Wikipedia directs users to the European Union's official page, and only *HistoriasigloXX.org* provides links to materials which supplement its own information, which generally lead to newspaper articles (*El País*). In Wikipedia and the *Enciclopedia libre* the user can edit the text to broaden its scope or make changes, which makes these collaborative pieces of work.

There is advertising on both of the newspaper sites (though it is more extensive on the *El País* site than the *El diario montañés* site). *El Rincón del Vago* also carries advertising, which confirms that the site is regularly visited; and the video made by a private individual carries advertising for Banco Santander. Israel González's video is flagged as a "video highlight": a label which is difficult to understand once you have watched it. In general, the advertising is not aggressive. It is usually placed to one side of the text and does not interrupt or hinder the reader.

Apart from Wikipedia, none of the others offer a bibliography, but then users are not looking for one. They are normally trying to clear

up a particular doubt, and links are more practical for that purpose as they do not “interrupt” the process of documentation. This concept of ease is confirmed by the scarcity of forums - a tool typical of the new technologies which allows user interaction. Photographs are the most frequently used primary source. The official website of the European Union is the only one which features videos of politicians from different stages of the integration process. However, the videos are slow to load and are seen in a stuttering form. In short, the popularisation of history on the web disposes of the classic options for expansion – such as bibliography- yet nor does it make use of the tools which are inherent in the new technologies (multimedia, interactivity).

In the example analysed, the predominant model is of a web page which is promoted by an unofficial organisation, aimed at a non-specialist audience, and which has achieved a high number of views. The only means of expanding the information is through the links offered. The pages are not multimedia: they combine text with a few photographs. They do not carry advertising. In terms of content, facts predominate, in the form of chronologies and lists (of institutions for example), rather than explanations. The simple, brief and clear option is chosen rather than the elaborate account.

### **3.2. What they tell us: historical accounts on the web**

There is little difference between the information on these websites and traditional historical accounts. Interactive resources are rare. Only the official website of the European Union stands out in this regard. For example, it offers an interactive visit to the living room of a home which allows the user to discover how daily life has changed since the country entered the European Union. When we click on the different objects (such as a purse), a dialogue box appears, telling us that “in the wake of monetary chaos, the EU approved the single currency...” If we click on the magazines, it tells us about gender equality policies, etc.

Another interactive element commonly found on other pages is the opportunity to rate the information. This is normally limited to clicking on 'Like'(5) . Of our sample, comments are only enabled on the YouTube videos. On *Cápsulas Históricas*, there is one comment which has been marked as spam, and makes the following disturbing observation: "The European Union is Hitler's dream come true". More comments have been posted on the second video, suggesting improvements to it: "Lolita's song (Moi...lolita, by Alizee) is too much"; or "Good video. Just one thing. The Euro came into circulation in January 2002, not 2001". The author says thanks for the help and promises to make another video incorporating the suggestions. Other comments are so poorly phrased or spelt as to be incomprehensible.

All of the pages are highly accessible (6) , except the official site of the European Union. History is to be found in the section entitled "How the EU works" along with Basic information, Countries, Facts and figures, Institutions and bodies and Work for the EU. One would not normally relate 'History' with 'How something works'.

The pages which offer the most complete general information are the official EU site, Wikipedia and *Historiassiglo20*. The one which provides the most specialised content with regard to Spain is *El diario montañés*, since the information was compiled specially for the occasion of Spain's presidency of the European Union.

The official EU site has two main sections, one covering the founding fathers of the institution, and another which covers the stages of integration. These stages are divided into decades, with two levels of information given about each: an at-a-glance summary of the basics, and the option to obtain further information. According to the page itself, the most visited links are: 10 historic steps, key dates in the history of European integration, and EU symbols. This shows that the user prefers specific topics which highlight the most important things for him/her (just ten historic steps are enough) and that a timeline is sufficient to give us an idea of the whole process. The EU website is perfectly suited to these demands: there are

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no “explanations”(7) nor does it contextualise the facts. There are no criticisms, no negative aspects, no insurmountable problems. In fact, the last stage, which covers the present day, is entitled “A decade of opportunities and challenges”.

Wikipedia is also largely descriptive, but unlike the official website, it highlights decisive moments in the history of the European Union such as the budgetary crisis of 1999. It takes the form of an article, divided into sections. It offers more detail than the EU site, but the way it is written is often confusing, being neither clear nor precise. The only specific reference to Spain is a photo of Javier Solana, who was High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy at the time.

Historiassiglo20 developed a teaching unit for the bachillerato (8) modern history class. It has not been updated: its coverage ends in 2001 and does not explain the institutions of the European Union. The biographies of leading personalities are very brief, but include a few sentences or brief extracts of speeches. Unlike the previous pages, it does explain the European Constitution. Historiassiglo20's page comments on the most relevant facts and situates them chronologically. It pays particular attention to the concept of European citizenship established in the Maastricht Treaty, appreciating the rights and opportunities it confers, while critical of its inadequacies. It includes a glossary, texts and activities designed for pupils, in Castilian, English and Portuguese.

The two sites which offer the most inadequate information are El Rincón del Vago and La Enciclopedia Libre Universal en Español. The first is very limited. It settles the entire formation process of the European Union in a single paragraph. It lists the institutions, but does not explain them. Also, there is a list of admissions by year up until 2004. The photos do not have captions: it is not easy to identify events or protagonists.

The case of La Enciclopedia Libre Universal is more striking. It too is very schematic and does not mention any of the failed attempts at European integration. Its visual presentation is very poor: it only

contains two maps with the admissions, the flag and some tables with accession dates. This page also takes the form of an article. The last two sections (“Future expansion” and “Other possible expansions”) are based on the author’s own speculation.

The account in *El País* is also very limited: it consists of a chronology which goes backwards from 2003 (when it was written), to the antecedents, without any supporting material. Meanwhile, the report prepared by *El diario montañés* is more detailed. The story is presented in various tabs: The European Union, Spain in the EU, the fight against the crisis, a unique voice in the world, Europe for its citizens, the Lisbon Treaty, and a multimedia section where six current affairs videos are offered. The report reproduces the ‘ten historic steps’ content without mentioning that it comes from the official EU site. It contains no information about the politicians who led the process.

Of the two videos, the one produced by the Catholic University of Santiago de Guayaquil is the best. It uses archive images (the capture of Berlin by the allies, images of prisoners in concentration camps), photographs of the different stages of integration, and animated maps with flags. The editing is done well, there is a connection between the image and the voiceover, and we hear the anthem of the EU as a musical backdrop. Its contents explain the historic steps, though in this case just the first five. The video ends with the creation of the Euro in 1993 and its coming into force in 2002. The other video (by Israel González) is a simple Power Point presentation which alternates between text and photos, and contains some errors (9) . The music is out of place.

### 3.2.1. Different versions

Our analysis of the differing interpretations has focused on how they report on the origins of the European Union. Two of them (*El Rincón del Vago* and the video by Israel González) do not mention the origins at all, and *El País* barely does so, stating simply that: “The

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postwar period in Europe brought currents of unity to the countries of the old continent". At the opposite end of the spectrum is Wikipedia: it lists the empires established by force (the Roman Empire, Frankish Empire, Holy Roman Empire, First French Empire, Nazi Germany) and the dynastic unions as antecedents.

Of the rest, five pages trace the origins of the EU back to the Second World War. Avoiding another similar experience would seem to be the initial objective of European integration (according to the official website, *Cápsulas Históricas* and Wikipedia). *El Diario montañés* talks about the need to create a supportive and peaceful Europe (using current terminology and references) and Wikipedia notes that the European economy was in ruins and that the United States and the Soviet Union had greater economic and military power, implying that Europe wanted to regain power to match up to them. The *Enciclopedia Libre Universal* states that "the Cold War was the origin of political and economic union", while Wikipedia claims that "the Cold War put the brakes on the initiatives for a United Europe". The clearest, most complete and well-ordered explanation is offered by the secondary-school teaching unit.

The question arising from this is how does the user react when faced with these contradictory pieces of information? We do not know if the user consults several versions before choosing one, but if so, what criteria lead him to pick that particular option? It would be interesting to know if there are any criteria available on the net as regards selecting an account from the many offered by this type of basic search, and if so, whether these criteria differ and in regard to which variables.

In short, the webpages analysed offer not just a great deal of facts and chronologies, but also different interpretations. This diversity – and contradiction in several cases- is not backed up by primary and/or secondary sources. There do not appear to be any established codes on quotation (or plagiarism) and there is a possibility that any of them may lose their place on the first page of Google results after a few days.

### 3.3. Variations in the biographies

A search for “Biography of Willy Brandt” brings up two of the same websites as the previous search: Wikipedia and *HistoriassigloXX*. We could say that they are common references for this type of history-based Google search conducted from Spain. Four pages specialising in biographies of famous people (see Table 2) also appear on the list. Other results include the websites of a little-known online newspaper (*La Insignia*), a foundation created by an Argentine social-democratic politician, and the tourist office for Brandt’s birthplace (Lübeck).

**Table 2. Results of a Google search for “Biography of Willy Brandt”**

Name of the page	Type of organisation behind the page
Biografiasyvida	Unofficial organisation
Wikipedia	Unofficial organisation
Buscabiografias.com	Unofficial organisation
HistoriassigloXX.org	Official organisation. CNICE
Wikiquote	Unofficial organisation
Lainsignia.org	Unofficial organisation
Fundación Estevez Boero	Unofficial organisation
Biografias.es	Unofficial organisation
Busca-biografias.com	Unofficial organisation
Lübeck-turismo.de	Official organisation (Lübeck town hall)

In this list there is just one page specifically aimed at students (*HistoriassigloXX.org*). The number of links is significantly lower than in the first search, which is understandable since the search term “Biography of Willy Brandt” is of a more specific nature. Wikipedia and Wikiquote offer links to pages within their own site and to external ones, while *Biografias* only offers internal links. There are no stats on the number of visitors, except on *Biografiasyvida*, which

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specifies that 'Like' [Me gusta] has been clicked on 429,678 times. Willy Brandt's entry is not one of the most frequently visited. The most in-demand biographies on Biografiasyvida were in fact:

1. Fernando Alonso
2. Aristotle
3. Eminem
4. Albert Einstein
5. Galileo Galilei
6. Paris Hilton
7. Napoleon
8. Britney Spears

The range of eras, professions and importance of the personalities whose biographies are being searched for gives us an idea of the varied interests of internet users: in terms of demand, Fernando Alonso and Aristotle are on a par.

Apart from Wikipedia, none of them provide any bibliography or videos. The only visual accompaniments are photographs, but only half of the websites (five) use them. The most commonly repeated photo (which will become the image that users form of Willy Brandt, Photo 1), is a headshot taken in a studio. It shows a mature, smiling, affable man: there is no symbol or context to link him with a particular party or ideology.



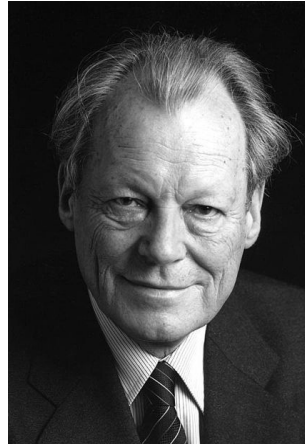


Photo 1. The most commonly used photo of Willy Brandt

Five sites carry advertising (Biografiasyvida, Buscabiografias, Biografias.es, Busca-biografias.com and LübeckTurismo). The variety of products and services advertised (low cost airlines, fashion, language courses for companies, travel search engines, etc.) do not point to any particular user audience.

In summary, a very similar webpage model to the previous one but with this case greater specialisation in this case (pages devoted to biographies), although this does not mean that the information provided is of greater quality. It is a little more detailed (rather than just simple timelines), but it is still very basic.

### **3.4. Peculiarities of the biographies: content analysis**

These web pages lack interactive elements. In contrast, on Wikipedia –where interactivity is part of the project’s general approach– users can rate the article in terms of how trustworthy, objective, complete and well-written it is. The ratings for the article on Willy Brandt are quite high, although very few people (three) have actually rated it. The article scores between three and four points out

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of a possible five. Accessibility is good. It offers the best information (the most detailed and complete). It is structured in chronological sections which span from Brandt's early years and his experience in the Second World War, up to his political career before, during and after his time as Chancellor. It even covers his family life (marriages, children), his death and the memorials to him. The text is illustrated with eight photographs.

The other pages are a distillation of that information. His escape from the Nazis in 1933 and his stay in Norway stand out due to their somewhat epic tone. There is a list of the positions he held, his defence of human rights, his role as a driving force in the process of European unity, and in the reduction of tensions with the Soviet Bloc. The discourse by Estévez, the Argentine politician, is the most moving. It draws a more human picture of the man. *La Insignia* includes an address entitled 'Democracy, liberty and socialism'. We do not know if it is by Willy Brandt himself or a member of the social-democrats. The address is written in the first person and sets out a broad political manifesto.

### 3.4.1. Not all of the sites agree

In order to assess the level of the content we have chosen to focus on one particular aspect of Brandt's life story: his participation in the Spanish Civil War. Most of the pages consulted deal with this subject in a certain amount of detail.

Four websites link Brandt to the Civil War. *Biografiasyvida* states that he fought on the Republican side. Wikipedia restricts his connection to a visit to Spain. According to the politician Estévez, Brandt took part as a journalist. *Biografias.es* is not very clear: "He becomes part of the German Socialist Workers' Party, SAPD, which allied itself to the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) in Spain during the Spanish Civil War in which he represented the party" (10). As we can see, the most consulted biography sites do not coincide on features of a certain importance, which suggests limited critical thinking was involved in drafting them. It seems that instead, a simple

task of selecting and merging pieces of information together from an initial text, in this case Wikipedia, was carried out.

### 3.5. Commemorations: Europe Day

Among the first results offered for the commemorations there are many which refer to official pages: those of the European Union, the Spanish government (Ministry of Education), a regional government (Junta de Andalucía) and a trade union (UGT). There are also more pages targeted to teachers than in the previous cases (Table 3). There is an obvious interest in promoting this celebration and reaching younger children (pre-school and primary education) in particular. The presence of newspaper sites (*La Razón* and *Ideal*) on the list confirm this.

**Table 3. Results of a Google search for “Europe Day”**

Name of the website	Type of organisation	Audience it is aimed at
Wikipedia	Unofficial organisation	General public
European Union	Official body	General public
European Commission. Spanish Representation	Official body	General public
Google Images	Unofficial organisation	General public
La vuelta a Europa con Wali	Official body (Government of Andalucía)	Teachers
lte.educación	Official body (Spanish Ministry of Education)	Teachers

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Ideal.es	Unofficial organisation	General public
aulainter-cultural	Official body (UGT, FETE Educación)	Teachers
Larazón	Unofficial organisation	General public
Scouts.es	Unofficial organisation	Young members
Profes.es	Unofficial organisation	Teachers

Source: Compiled by the authors

Google Images provides the broadest range of visual material – more than two million results including posters, photographs of countries, maps.... This figure is obviously beyond any comprehensive enquiry. No videos on the subject were found on the first page of Google results.

The desire to provide material for the classroom means there is an ample supply of links (both external and internal); the number is markedly higher than the links for historical processes (History of the European Union) and biographies (Willy Brandt). However, the medium -internet- continues to impose its own means of providing information: there is hardly any bibliography (again, just Wikipedia) and no opportunity to take part in a forum. Nor is there any information on the number of visitors to each website. Since they belong to institutions, the majority of the pages do not carry advertising. The only ones to feature adverts are the two newspapers. Four pages feature photographs which give an account of the celebrations in different countries and show promotional posters of Europe Day in previous years. One of the sites (Ite.educación) includes an extract from the Schuman Declaration, which is considered the origin for the creation of the European Union. Therefore, the main characteristics of the web page model we have seen for the previous searches are largely maintained.

### 3.6. What readers are told about Europe Day

These websites do not feature any multimedia or interactive elements. The teaching activities proposed for use in the classroom are traditional and unidirectional (draw a drawing, colour in the flags, a crossword puzzle, fill in a questionnaire, word games etc). We have not been able to evaluate user perception because, although the option of leaving a comment is provided on almost all of the sites, this opportunity is never taken up. The exception, once more, is the Wikipedia article: it scores 3.5 out of 5 in the rankings given by around 20 people.

In this case there are no great differences in the contents offered by each website. They all explain, briefly, the origins of the celebration (the Schuman Declaration), what it represents (it is a symbol of the EU, along with the flag, the anthem and the single currency) and the events which are usually arranged. Only Wikipedia points out that "in practice none of the member countries of the Union organises high level festivities like those that take place for the national celebrations of each state." The rest mention the celebrations without going into any assessment.

The most critical site is Profes.es, which points out the historic difficulties in the formation of the EU ("there were many meetings and disagreements between the different European countries, although little by little, the members of the Union have managed to form a sturdy organisation...") as well as the current problems related to nationalism ("However, many still consider the process of integration in this supranational organisation to be an attack on their identity as a people").

The newspapers depict the current situation: *Ideal* explains how Europe Day was celebrated on Twitter, and reproduces a series of tweets. *La Razón* briefly summarises the programme of events organised in different cities (talks, informative workshops, conferences, children's activities and the distribution of educational material). Finally, the ASDE-Scout España page highlights the values defended by the European Union and takes advantage of the commemora-

-tions to encourage its members to take part in activities on a European level with the aim of making contact with scouts from across Europe.

### 3.7. Investigating a particular event: “The fall of the wall”

The first Google results page features 11 websites. Two of them do not fit our purpose – one of them belongs to a foundation which raises funds for the fight against cancer (Fundación Fuseon). The other is a YouTube video which has been blocked by EMI because of its content. Wikipedia is first on the list once more. Among the media websites there are three newspapers: *Libertad digital*, *El Mundo* and *La Información* as well as a programme made by *Televisión Española* (*Informe semanal*). Three of the pages are aimed at students (see Table 4), while the rest are targeted to the general public.

In comparison with the previous searches and results we must highlight the use of audiovisual material to illustrate the information. It seems that the more recent the subject is, the more audiovisual material is available on the net. This would seem logical since there are more documents, which are of better quality and easier to access.

**Table 4. Search results for the term “The fall of the wall” listed on the first page of Google.**

Name of the website	Primary sources provided	Audience the site is designed for
Wikipedia	Photos	General public
Redescolar	1 Photo, map	Students
Imágenes	Photographs, maps, newspapers	General public
La información/especiales	Video	General public
El Historiador.com	–	Students

Monografias.com	–	Students
Informe semanal	Video	General public
YouTube	Video	General public
La caída del muro del cáncer	–	General public
Libertaddigital	Video	General public
Elmundo.es/especiales	Photos	General public

Source: Compiled by the authors

We do not have to add any exceptions to the web page model we have been using so far. Except on *Monografias.es* and *Informe Semanal*, visitor numbers are not provided. The former indicates that *Like [Me gusta]* has been clicked on 47 times. The *Informe semanal* video has been recommended 34 times. Three websites provide links, all of which are internal, except in the case of *Wikipedia*. Of the four sites which carry advertising, two are newspapers (*libertaddigital* and *lainformación.com*) and two are specialised sites (*El Historiador* and *Monografias.es*) which are targeted to students.

There is still no bibliography (except on *Wikipedia* which even provides a filmography), nor any forums: this confirms once more that this is not normal practice on this type of website.

### 3.8. The image of the fall of the wall on the internet

In this case, there are no interactive elements or comments from users either. The *Wikipedia* page has scored a rating of 4, and the remarkable feature is that some 390 people have voted, which is a clear sign of its primacy as first choice for information.

There is direct access to the information on all of the pages, but users can open different tabs on the *Redescolar* page as well as within the special reports by *El Mundo* and *La información*, enabling them to select what they are interested in and the order in which

they wish to access it.

In terms of the content, neither *El Historiador* nor *Libertad digital* provide information directly related to the search. The former reproduces an article from the daily newspaper *Arriba* which was published three days after construction of the wall began. *Libertad digital* reproduces an interview with Francisco Frutos, leader of *Izquierda Unida*, which talks about the fall of communism and is dated November 5, 2009.

In short, of the 11 webpages listed on the first screen of Google results, only seven contain information which is directly related to the search (or allow you to access that information). Four sites (*Wikipedia*, *Redescolar*, *La Información* and *El Mundo*) offer fairly complete information: the political situation which led to the construction of the wall is explained first, in order to move on to commentary of its fall. As in the previous examples, *Wikipedia* is the one that offers the most complete information: even including the detail of the press conference at which Schabowski announced the immediate application of the travel law, i.e. the opportunity to leave East Germany. However, *Monografias.es* explains the causes more fully, including both the background relating to German domestic politics and the international political context.

In terms of the audiovisual material, the montage by *La información* stands out because of the way it has been produced, as well as its clarity. There is no voiceover: the explanations are given in titles which allows the strength to lie in the image. It gathers the testimony of various (Spanish) journalists. *Informe semanal* reports on the events just a few days after they happened (the programme is from November 11, 1989). The narration therefore lacks the reflection and perspective that the subsequent course of events would have allowed. The majority of the photographs used by *El Mundo* come from agencies (such as Reuters, AP). Very little text is used and there is a particular focus on the emotional aspect of the events (see Photo 2):





Photo 2. Photograph included in El Mundo.es, “The wall that divided Europe”

REMEMBRANCE | The happiness could not be complete, however. For many Germans, November 9, 1989 came too late (AP)

### 3.9. Why did the wall come down?

The factors which contributed to the wall coming down are simple according to the internet. Wikipedia points out the demands for freedom from within East Germany: there were mass demonstrations against the government and there were constant escapes via the embassies of Czechoslovakia and Poland, and through the border between Hungary and Austria.

Redescolar attributes a leading role to Gorbachev and to international pressure (11). Monografias.es makes it clear that this event did not occur spontaneously: “On the contrary, it is rooted in countless events in German daily life as well as international politics.” It gives great importance to the opposition organisations within Germany, which the other websites do not mention.

As we have seen, within each of the searches we have found different versions of the events being analysed, with the exception of the commemoration of Europe Day.

#### **4. The European Union on Wikipedia. Elements for reflection (12)**

In this section our analysis focuses on comparing the information offered in various languages by Wikipedia, about a particular concept which is of continent-wide relevance: the European Union. The quantitative analysis has been limited to simple elements which are easy to find: length of the initial explanation and the extent of the broader information which comes later, measured in units of information (sections and subsections that appear in the index). We are aware that these elements are very basic, but they appear to be sufficient to enable us to come up with an initial approximation.

##### **4.1. The versions on Wikipedia**

Analysis focused on the information supplied in Castilian, French, English and German. Given the particular interest that it offers in the Spanish context, we also turned our attention to the corresponding versions in Catalan, Galician and Basque.

The first consideration is that the fullest and most detailed information – within the context of generality implied by this net-based encyclopaedia – is provided in the Castilian version. The introduction to the Castilian version contains 37 lines of information compared with 20 in the English version and 26 lines in the German and French versions. The German and English versions are very similar in terms of length and information. Perhaps this introduction is an indication of the differing importance that the European Union has for each country: for France and Germany, it is part of a continual process which they have been involved in from the very beginning. Spain had been pursuing membership of the European institutions for decades, and therefore accession was an essential and very long-awaited event; a real success. In contrast, it is not even clear whether Great Britain considers itself part of the European Union.

The scope and detail of the rest of the information is also uneven: we have measured it in units of information based on the index which

is given for each version: history, culture, territories, languages, institutions, treaties, demographics, etc. Once again, the Spanish version offers 54 units of information compared to lower numbers for Great Britain (38) and France (48), and a more similar amount for Germany (52). The German version offers the fullest and most detailed information on the EU itself, without digressing on to the details and peculiarities of Germany (whereas the other versions do focus on their own national cases). In other words, the German version is the most attentive to the EU.

Thus, it is interesting to note that in the text about languages, the Great Britain version dedicates a relatively long section to those which are not official languages of the EU, but are tolerated in that any citizens who speak them can correspond with the European institutions in that language. This does not occur in the Spanish, French or German versions.

It is also interesting to note that the English version offers a list of the most widely spoken official European languages, with statistics on the percentage of people who are native speakers as well as on the number of EU citizens who speak those languages. This is significant because although German is the most widespread native language, English is (by a long way) the most widely known and used by EU citizens.

Other information given about the EU also varies from version to version. For example, the Spanish version dedicates two paragraphs to the recognition of same-sex marriages in the EU and highlights the leading role played by Spanish legislation. The version for Great Britain merely points out that in the EU there is no discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The French text states only that human rights form the basis of law in the countries of the EU. The German version does not even mention the subject.

#### 4.2. Non official languages and domestic nationalisms

The differences between the versions which are offered in Catalan, Basque and Galician (the three co-official regional languages in Spain besides Castilian) contain some interesting novelties in comparison to the Castilian version, but that does not mean they are original. Firstly, the texts which precede the index in the Galician and the Catalan versions are of almost the same length and contain very similar ideas. What is interesting is that both of them clearly depend on the introduction given in the English version since they are of a similar length (Catalan version 20 lines, Galician 21 and English 20). The explanations which come later differ in length however: the English version is the most complete (38 units of information) compared to 25 and 22 in the Catalan and Galician versions respectively. The Basque version is extremely simplified: the introduction to the term 'EU' takes up 9 lines and the subsequent explanation consists of just 11 units of information.

As we had assumed, the greatest difference was to be found in the references to the languages of the EU: the Castilian version does not mention any of the co-official Spanish regional languages explicitly, although it does point out that there are 150 regional languages within the EU which do not hold official status. This takes relative importance away from Catalan, Galician and Basque, which do have a certain official status. The Catalan and Galician versions dedicate 4 paragraphs and 21 lines to their explanation of this aspect of the EU. What is of greater interest is that they are very similar to each other and both depend heavily on the text of the English version, which dedicates a similar amount of words to the subject. The English version mentions Welsh and Scottish Gaelic as languages which are not official in the EU but have a special status: people who speak them can correspond with the EU authorities in their own language. The same applies to Galician, Catalan and Basque, and for that reason these are mentioned explicitly in the English version as well as the Catalan and Galician versions. It is very likely that this is an agreed text with versions in each one of these languages (except in Basque). The English and Catalan versions point out that

although the programmes of the EU support these 'unofficial' languages, it is the member states who are assigned with the protection of linguistic rights in each country. The version in Basque simply presents a full list of the official languages of the EU and another of the non-official languages with around 20 entries: these include the six mentioned previously.

The Catalan version emphasises its interest in the Catalan language and desire for it to become established in the EU by adding two pieces of information. Firstly, it reproduces the list of 23 official languages featured in the British version, with the addition of Catalan. It also adds the fact that Catalan is the mother tongue of 1% of the European population (like Slovak) and that, furthermore, 2% of the population of the EU speak it as a second language (like Danish). This is a clear means of demonstrating that several of the official languages effectively have a smaller presence. There is one final and very significant piece of information. In the unit of information "Most important historical events," the Catalan version gives a list of five dates. The last is November 16, 2005, when the presidents of Catalonia and Valencia addressed the EU "Committee of the regions" in Catalan. An indication of the Catalan governments' determination to promote the use of their language on the net can be seen in the heading which appears at the top of each of the pages in Catalan on Wikipedia (13) .

In this section we have dealt with a few examples of how a source of information like Wikipedia can provide useful profiles for historians to use in their research. We could conduct very similar analysis of high circulation publications (for example text books for primary or secondary school pupils). Such publications and Wikipedia share an enormous potential to enable historians to evaluate processes and events. Firstly and quite simply, one could investigate whether these texts include or omit a particular term from their catalogue. Of course we should remember that on Wikipedia an omission or inclusion can always be corrected by any interested party. The length of the text devoted to each term could act as a second filter for the historian. In this case too, the initiative of an individual can

rectify oversights or omissions. The focus and selection of events and processes dealt with is another factor worthy of consideration. These questions are of most interest in relation to terms which describe broad historical processes or define institutions.

For those who consult Wikipedia regularly, it is of equal importance to consulting a printed encyclopedia in the past. If you are looking for a basic piece of information, the aspects described above usually go unnoticed, and therefore Wikipedia is equally important for historians as the printed versions were and continue to be, since it allows them to analyse the construction of the collective image, consolidated opinions, prejudices, myths and mind-sets.

## 5. Spanish history forums

Our analysis centres on two different Google searches. The first search carried out was for "Spanish history forums" (14) , and the second for "Forums about the Spanish Civil War." This fine tuning is key, since our emphasis on the first page of Google results leads us, by definition, to the most popular forums, and consequently to those which are of least interest to specialists in history, or even for specialists in a specific aspect of history, (in our case this specific aspect was the "Spanish Civil War").

We have excluded forums for professional historians from this analysis since they are completely different to the popular forums on historical matters which attract the most visitors. In terms of numbers of visits, the most popular forums for Spanish speaking professionals are probably the ones hosted on the *La Historia a Debate* (<http://www.h-debate.com/>) platform. However, they do not appear when you type 'history forums' into Google, even if you leaf through the first twelve pages of results, despite the fact that the aggregated user figures are astonishing.

The first screen of Google results for the term "Spanish history forums" offers seven links. Logically, each of them deals with a very specific aspect of history. Some of these links can be slotted into

conventional spaces of historiography (and the sphere of military history in particular). Others simply deal with the recent background of a topic which is currently in the news (from Formula 1 to video games, via football).

Participants in these forums are not professional historians, but rather amateurs and scholars who exchange information about their favourite subjects. However specific these participants' interests may be, we can include them in the broader group of history enthusiasts. On other forums, the sole aim is to gather information about a particular phenomenon, even if, as in one of the cases, users do not seem to have a very clear concept of what history is (15). Otherwise, these military history forums seem to be aware of the purpose they serve in reality, which is to satisfy the shared passions of their members (16).

As in many face to face conversations between people with shared interests, every now and then the subject moves far beyond the initially stated aim and the focus switches to another area of current affairs, as a group of people who share one hobby usually have others in common too. A typical example is offered by naval history forum *Todoavante*, on the subject of a website competition organised by the Spanish Ministry of Defence. Forum participants complain vociferously about the fact that they were not awarded the prize, and this subject takes up by far the most space as well as the most messages on the forum. It is easy to imagine a roomful of retired Navy sailors, proud of their knowledge and ability as a military and technical corps, with a shared project (building a webpage to win the competition) and their conversation eventually turning to the competition despite the fact they had met up to talk about other subjects. A similar example is provided by *Foro Militar General*, which is also home to fierce debates about current day politics. Since June 2006, topics have included the possibility of a referendum on the right to self-determination in Catalonia, opinions about the government, and the Chilean President's policies.

Perhaps those forums in which retired professionals take part could be considered virtual adaptations of traditional meetings.

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The virtual version can reach wider audiences because of the level of convenience it offers, even for users who may only have a basic knowledge of the tools required (going onto the net, sending and receiving messages, uploading and downloading text documents, photos and videos).

Military history dominates the forums about classic historical subjects. Although it appears to be less active than ones listed later, top of Google's list of suggestions is a forum about naval history (*Todoavante*). Its scope is not limited to battles (it includes information about the technical specifications of ships, biographies of illustrious mariners, photos, book reviews, links to other websites, etc.) but most of the contributions do refer to them. Participants seem to be naval officers, not historians. The site also features a blog which was started in February 2007 and is kept up to date.

The second entry for military history forums on the results page is the *Second World War*. Within this general subject there is discussion about biographies, espionage, uniforms and medals, theatres of operation, air, land and sea forces, political, economic and social subjects, etc., and supporting documents are provided. A broad, generalist section entitled *Miscellany* is the most popular with almost 40,000 messages. This volume makes it impossible to monitor. The specificity of its subject areas is curious. For example, there is a discussion of the pros and cons of the wheels in crawler tracks in German tanks. Some subjects are almost macabre. In a debate about Hitler's relationship with Eva Braun, a user comments that Hitler had halitosis. The statement raises questions, and proof and documentation are requested... other webpages are offered as sources. Discussions go on for around a month. The reader gets the impression that this is a competition as to who can unearth the most curious fact. A few book reviews are presented.

The third forum of a historical nature is 'The great Captain's forum, military history.(17)' It tackles a variety of thematic lines: ancient and medieval military history, modern and contemporary military history, the First World War, current military conflicts, special forces, militias and terrorists, etc. The section on general military history attracts



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the highest level of participation, featuring almost 700 subjects and 20,000 messages. Within that section, "Paintings, prints and images of the Second World War" contains the highest number of posts (some 3,000). The thread was started in March 2012 and remains open at the time of writing (September). What is surprising is that the majority of contributions are made by the same five authors - basically five enthusiasts who have collected images and made them available to others on the net.

The fourth active forum of this type which appears on the first page of Google results is entitled General Military Forum( 18) . More than 35,000 subjects have been covered since its creation and it receives almost 400 posts a day. These figures would suggest that it is a platform on which the opinions of the Spanish military world become apparent. It describes itself as being "a moderated forum for the civilised discussion of the air forces of the world, military history, soldiers and their weapons, defence and security". Historical subjects have less weight than on the other forums and political discussion appears to be one of the essential elements, as we have already pointed out. Its initial list of subjects offers: Armed forces of the World, Spain and Latin America.

The first page of Google results for the second search term- Spanish Civil War - provides interesting clues to begin with: the forums are non-academic in nature and are used by a massive number of enthusiasts who specialise in specific, often relatively minor, aspects of the conflict (the Northern Front, for example) (19) . This impression is confirmed by some of the other forums, including el Gran Capitán.

These forums about the Civil War are a meeting place for enthusiasts of the subject. They do not usually focus on general questions, but there is no shortage of very precise political viewpoints which can be seen as continuations of those held by the sides who fought in the conflict. Political condemnations are the order of the day in the rare disagreements which occur. It is not always thus. The subjects of conversation are specific, but, at times, the degree of specialisation is enormous. For example there are thousands of

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messages accompanied by photographs, plans, location maps and commentaries on the “archaeology” of the Civil War, particularly fortifications (parapets, bunkers, machine gun posts, etc.) The collection of information about these aspects – or in general about photographs, whether they belong to individuals or institutions, are widely known or previously unpublished- is vast. On one hand, these examples have the usual disadvantage of forums, which is that searching them is extremely difficult. On the other hand they also share their greatest advantage, by contributing documentation that would otherwise be lost.

As was the case for the previous group, there is hardly any academic presence on the forums about the Civil War. Interventions are commonly made by people who are experts on the more remote aspects, such as types of weapons, very specific military units, little-known personalities, fortifications etc., making use of this enormous knowledge. Conversations are normally driven by just a few individual users. Reading the content gives the impression that a very small number of amateur researchers and true experts are responsible for more than 75% of the contributions. This founding core rarely consists of more than a dozen people. For example, in a forum about the battle of Brunete there is little discussion on the wider significance of the battle, but there are hundreds of posts about specific episodes, photographs of the town and the ruins as they are today, some photos from before the battle, lists of the dead and injured on each side, etc. As always, the biggest problem is the critical use of the materials and access to those which could be of real interest to a researcher.

Lastly, what use do these forums have for historians? The first is the opportunity to access difficult-to-find material about a particular aspect. In the forums about the Spanish Civil War, one often finds references to books, scanned pages from books which cannot be found easily, and even reproductions of original documentation; not to mention the photos. Other times they can be of great use in outlining research. Several participants in the forum put people in contact with an author who was doing some very thorough

research into personal correspondence during the Civil War (20) . At times, without the selfless and enthusiastic collaboration of several participants on Civil War forums, the research would not have been possible. It is likely that other projects have received similar assistance. Though forums can never constitute a main source, they can help to fill in the more obscure or previously ignored aspects.

In summary, the specific forums used by professional historians are linked to networks which deal exclusively with that field. They play an unquestionable role in building research networks, and a leading role in strengthening them. We could say that they facilitate the processes of exchange and internationalisation of research results; though they may not have overtaken the old postal networks in qualitative terms. In another order of things, though still within the realm of the historian, we should not forget that there are several international publications which still require that originals are sent on paper for evaluation, and that the old procedures live on more than one might expect.

Another interesting point is the consideration of forums as a historical source in their own right. This would take us into another line of study, which would be similar – though of course not equal - to that of the use of the media as a historical source.

## **6. Discussion and conclusions**

Wikipedia's absolute dominance as the first choice source of information in the field of modern history has been confirmed, and could probably be extrapolated to history in general. Despite its limitations and the criticisms levelled at it by the academic world, it is important to point out that, among the results on the first page of a Google search, Wikipedia is often the most complete option from which to obtain initial information. Of course it is possible that Wikipedia is the first page Google offers by default. In any case, in a system of searches where the key criteria are highest number of views, quantity of links and relevance to the subject searched for, it is not surprising that Wikipedia consistently appears as the first

ranked option for information.

It is clear that the non-specialist user can contextualise and gain initial information about the event they are looking for through this service. What it offers is also of interest to the armchair historian: there are direct links which allow the expansion of particular aspects and it is the only website of those analysed to regularly offer a bibliography and even a filmography.

On the other hand, Wikipedia is open to abuse by interested parties as it is based on the concept of collaborative work. In theory, debate between the editors should filter out this activity. In practice, few individuals can compete with an institution which commissions the writing of very precise information in any Wikipedia articles it considers to be sensitive to its interests. The case of the non-official languages is just one example.

Another notable feature of this tour of the first page of Google search results is the presence of pages which are aimed at teachers, and designed to facilitate their search for teaching resources about specific subjects for younger pupils. This suggests that school teachers are the group of professionals who use the net most frequently in the course of their work. This is backed up by the fact that there are relatively plentiful resources and spaces dedicated specifically to them.

Since the school teachers' account focuses on the basics and lays down the facts, the differences in information provided to explain certain events are less important to them. Teachers are also the group which can most easily determine the quality of this information and choose what they deem to be most appropriate. Furthermore, their daily work does not demand monographs or great detail. Thus, the net is a very useful instrument for their ordinary, and even extraordinary, professional activity (for example talking about a civic celebration such as Europe Day, at the request of the education authority).

However, the majority of searches seem to be made by people who do not have any particular interest in education. The average user of

this type of search is a regular person, with a basic education, who just wants to access a piece of information which is interesting (or important) to them for some reason: from school questions asked by children and grandchildren, to names of people and events which have appeared in the media.

As we have seen, these searches direct the user firstly to Wikipedia, but it is interesting to point out that online versions of the news media feature on all of the first pages of Google results. In other words, the press maintains credibility as a source of information for the general public. The net facilitates these searches (at least for the time being and while they are free to access).

An internet search is usually referred to in terms which denote speed (*Navegar* in Spanish, *Browse* in English), and give the idea of flitting from one piece of information to another. The links provided are key to this, since they direct the user towards supplementary information which can range from original documents (not very often) to a more detailed explanation or contextualisation (more frequently). The latter are not always directly related with the initial search. In any case, the abundance of links facilitates quick and additional searches for a curious user who is looking to fill in any gaps in their knowledge quickly.

The fact that you do not have to leave the net, or carry out complex tasks (such as specialised searches in online libraries, databases or directories) is an enormous advantage for an audience with no specific education in history that simply wants to clear up a question, plan a trip or help their children with their homework.

The most tangible weakness of these first search results is the lack of interactivity and the poor multimedia offering. It is likely that the written tradition and the reference format still weighs heavily on the authors of these web pages (i.e. printed encyclopaedias influence Wikipedia for example). Furthermore the best quality, professional images are usually subject to copyright and only the institutions and the media can provide them. The amateur nature of many of the images which circulate on the web mean that authors

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are not keen to use them to illustrate or contextualise a piece of information (except in very rare cases) when they are looking to offer reassurance as to its veracity and reliability. Furthermore, a truly interactive website demands a level of attention and professional specialisation which not all institutions, media or general websites are in a position to dedicate. In this case, and as our results show, the best option is not to offer the opportunity for interaction.

In summary, general internet searches about history seem to share some limitations and advantages with sciences and other areas of academia. While the big advantage of internet searches is the enormous capacity to spread information, they also retain almost all of the disadvantages of traditional media in terms of informing and educating people. On the internet, these advantages and disadvantages are magnified given the easy access to the content.

## Notes

(1) The authors work in the Complutense Research Group History and Structure of Communication and Entertainment”

(2) <http://kico.es/los-200-criterios-que-usa-google-para-elegir-el-orden-de-las-paginas-web>. Consulted September 8, 2012

(3) Respective search terms in original Spanish: Historia de la Unión Europea, Willy Brandt, Conmemoraciones: el Día de Europa, La caída del muro de Berlín, Unión Europea

(4) In our view, a link from one page to another implies that the former is giving a vote of approval to the latter.

(5) Cápsulas históricas has 27 “Likes”; 2 “Dislikes”; the video about the History of the European Union by Israel González, 6 “Likes”; Rincón del Vago, 7 “Likes”.

(6) The lower the number of clicks required to obtain the desired information, the better the accessibility

(7) For example on October 26, 2004. It reads: “The President-designate, José Manuel Durão Barroso, withdraws his proposal for the new European Commission. It is hoped that he will present a new proposal to Parliament for approval in the following weeks”. There is no mention of why Barroso had to withdraw his proposal.

(8) Bachillerato is Spanish post-16 education, equivalent to A-Levels/Baccalaureate.

(9) By September 3, 2012, it no longer appeared on the first page of Google results.

(10) In April 1937 he arrived in Barcelona for a meeting of the International Bureau of Socialist Revolutionary Youth Movements. The meeting was interrupted by the barricades on May 3rd. Brandt managed to get out of Barcelona aboard a foreign boat. <http://www.fundanin.org/Labattalla1969R.htm> (consulted on September 5, 2012)

(11) [http://redescolar.ilce.edu.mx/redescolar/act\\_permanentes/historia/html/caida\\_del\\_muro/murodeberlin.htm](http://redescolar.ilce.edu.mx/redescolar/act_permanentes/historia/html/caida_del_muro/murodeberlin.htm), consulted September 7, 2012.

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(12) The entries consulted on September 6, 2012 were:

European Union (in Spanish) on Wikipedia: [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union\\_europea](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_europea)

Catalan: [http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uni%C3%B3\\_Europea](http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uni%C3%B3_Europea)

[http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/12002E/htm/C\\_2002325EN.003301.html#anArt150](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/12002E/htm/C_2002325EN.003301.html#anArt150)

Galician: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/12002E/htm/C\\_2002325EN.003301.html#anArt150](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/12002E/htm/C_2002325EN.003301.html#anArt150)

English: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union)

French: [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union\\_europ%C3%A9enne](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_europ%C3%A9enne)

Basque/Euskara: [http://eu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europar\\_Batasuna](http://eu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europar_Batasuna)

German: [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europ%C3%A4ische\\_Union](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europ%C3%A4ische_Union)

(13) Not surfed the net in Catalan yet? Discover how you can 'Catalanize' your computer

Original: 'Encara no navegueu en català? Vegeu com podeu catalanitzar el vostre ordinador.'

(14) Search terms in original Spanish: "Foros españoles de Historia" "Foros sobre la Guerra Civil Española".

(15) In a post on *Foro Punk* about the 10 best footballers in history, one of the participants asks if history refers to the last 15 years or more.

(16) A *Foro Militar General* user states in a post that his participation has to do with his "passion for history".

(17) Name in original Spanish *Foro El Gran Capitán. Historia militar*

(18) *Foro Militar General*

(19) <http://guerracivil.forumup.es/memberlist.php?mforum=guerracivil>

<http://www.militar.org.ua/foro/guerra-civil-espanola.html>

<http://www.elgrancapitan.org/foro/viewforum.php?f=7>



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<http://guerracivil.mundoforo.com/>

<http://www.gefrema.org/foro/viewforum.php?f=17>

<http://www.fotosmilitares.org/viewforum.php?f=31>

<http://forohistoria.creatuforo.com/armas-usadas-en-la-guerra-civil-espao-la-foro32.html>

[http://www.guerracivil1936.com/web/index.php?option=com\\_wrapper&Itemid=2](http://www.guerracivil1936.com/web/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=2)

<http://www.boards4.melodysoft.com/app?id-guerracivilnorte>

<http://www.foropolicia.es/foros/guerra-civil-espaola-t81736-165.html>

(20) Cervera Gil, Javier, Ya sabes mi paradero. La Guerra Civil a través de las cartas de los que la vivieron, Planeta, Barcelona 2005

## HISTORY ON WIKIPEDIA \*

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### Wikipedia as the Central Element of Public History

Wikipedia is a well-known 2001-born generalist encyclopedia. It has become the most used encyclopedia, placing itself amongst the first websites of the world as to what concerns the number of visitors. As a result of its popularity and the way its contents are produced, it has also become a fundamental element of Public History.

In the past year Wikipedia has welcomed more than 400 million unique visitors per month (1) and the English version of the Encyclopedia has in itself a figure of 270 million of webpages visited every day(2) . The Italian version of Wikipedia has a vast number of users, with more than 17 million webpages visited every day, considering that these data exclude the access from mobile devices (3) . In order to clarify these proportions, one can access Alexa.com where a comparison with other websites is available. The latter is specialised in the analysis of the access to websites and it confirms that Wikipedia is the seventh most visited website in Italy and in the United States, whereas it is the sixth one at a global level. Wikipedia comes after giants like Facebook, YouTube, Yahoo! and the provider portal of Libero.it, thus figuring in absolute terms as the most visited site that has no commercial purposes (4) .

The PageRank, which is the positioning of a given website in the results of research engines such as Google and Yahoo!, demonstrates that Wikipedia is more conspicuous in comparison with other websites. Wikipedia is usually amongst the first results of internet searches and consequently it has become one of the most consulted sources for those who look for information in the Web.

If one refers again to Alexa.com, one will notice that Wikipedia has mainly a young audience who refers to it a great deal during the education years (5) .

In eleven years of existence, one of the characteristics that has made of Wikipedia such an accessed and indexed site is that its contents are available at no extra cost and with no need of registration. Its encyclopedic format aims at complete, accurate and unbiased information, therefore resulting in its circulation. In turn, an analysis of the reasons why Wikipedia was capable of coping with progressive success with these objectives will be willingly left out.

Wikipedia represents, in absolute terms, the widest gathering of information as it evolved in more than 270 languages. The English version of Wikipedia is of course the most important one and has gained a dimension of 4 million articles. The linguistic variants that amount to at least 1 million articles are in the following languages: German, French and Dutch. With the Italian language project, which will reach soon this figure as it has currently 988,000 articles, there will be a group of 4 in total(6) .

In the light of such figures and importance, it is clear that as far as history is concerned, Wikipedia is one of the most important and consulted sources, not to mention that the way in which the Wikipedia articles are written foregrounds the birth of a history written by the common people. In this sense, Wikipedia should be regarded as one of the main intellectual intersections in which historical public debate develops. The contents of its articles have been provided by anonymous, common users that have discussed and joined in the development of articles which answer the general questions young people who look for information on line seek for.

From this data there emerges the importance to regard Wikipedia as an investigation source, encased in the analysis of historical public debate that takes place in the Internet. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand in the first place the specificities and the objectives of the Wikipedia project as the latter influence the contents and the method in which it is written. In the second place, the historian must be aware of the means to extricate such a great deal of information which would otherwise scarcely usable.

The ensuing discourse aims to provide some useful techniques for

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the historian who intends to explore the way the contents of a Wikipedia page have been developed in time. Furthermore, it offers food for thought as to what concerns the horizontal production of historical narrative typical of Wikipedia and similar projects.

### Characteristics of the Wikipedia project

As mentioned before, Wikipedia is a 2001-born online encyclopedia (7) whose definition is “free and collaborative” and whose subtitle is “that anyone can edit”(8) . The project aims to be a generalist encyclopedia whose horizontal structure is of primary concern both from the perspective of the accessibility (“free”) and for the way its contents are produced (“collaborative”). In subsequent years, Wikipedia has expanded through its different linguistic versions, not to mention that thanks to the founding of the Wikipedia Foundation, other collateral projects were born. The purpose of the latter is to pursue the ideal to gather collaboratively all human knowledge in every language of the world and make it accessible to all (9) .

The adjective “free” refers in the first place to the license through which its contents are released: they are free licenses that allow for the accessibility of the entirety of its data for any purposes, even including commercial ones. Considerations on the political value of the choice of these licenses will be willingly left out, what matters here is that the adoption of the latter entails the eventual reutilization of the data for guidebooks, handbooks, newspaper articles, thematic sites and so on. For the historian, this entails the possibility to reutilize the source and integrate it in his or her own research with no restraints imposed by traditional copyright(10) .

“Collaborative” is the other fundamental component of the self-definition of Wikipedia and is of primary importance if one is to understand the system through which its contents are created. A characteristic which has made Wikipedia unique in comparison with other publishing productions lies in the fact that anyone can contribute to its writing, correcting and expanding its contents, doing this directly online on the Internet site.

The term Wikipedia is a pun between the words encyclopedia and wiki, which is Hawaiian for fast (11) . The software at the root of the internet site makes the collaborative writing possible thanks to the fast changes to each page. Indeed, the HTML code which can be visualised when one surfs on a Wikipedia page is generated by using a simple text as contents of the page, changeable thanks to a special screen. This solution frees the user who is willing to participate from the knowledge of the HTML code because the contents of the individual pages is written in normal text and the symbols to generate the formatting (drafting paragraphs, lists, italics and bold, links to other pages on the site or external resources) are very simple and easy to master.

This kind of software has lent its name to a site genre, indeed called wiki, even if they share with the free encyclopedia only the technical solutions or the appearance.

The solution envisaged by Wikipedia is to let every user, even if non-registered in the site, to modify the pages, publishing the changes right after having clicked on "save", with no preemptive form of control but only subsequent ones.

This approach entails the risk to receive a great deal of faulty contributions, if not vandalistic ones, and yet it has contributed to the growth and spread of Wikipedia to the dimensions and relevance it has today. At the same time, such an approach turns Wikipedia into a mirror reflecting the popularity of many topics as well as foregrounding considerations such the highlighting of different perceptions between one linguistic community and the other or how the analysis of the public debate, such as in case of anniversaries, affects the elaboration of its contents.

The collaborative effort in the writing of the articles does not of course find space only in the change screen page of the articles themselves but the site, instead, makes sure that every page is linked to a talk page whose role is to link its debates to the main page. This page system connects users in every single situation where the contents are not shared or there are no fixed rules to follow in the

drafting of the articles.

The debate regarding the writing of an article can be either totally absent or very extensive, and this shows the kind of debate the community has felt the need to develop about this topic. Indeed, articles written by few solitary users are all but lacking, but its opposite is equally true for the most relevant topics. Evidence of the level of interest some of the articles arise can be found in very long talk pages. When one of them reaches a given length it is usually filed away, that is, it is moved from "talk: title" to "talk: archives" or similar names. In this way, one prevents pages from taking too long to be accessed and, at the same time, it keeps the history of all the past talks. Such relevant cases as the article by Barack Obama on the English-speaking version of Wikipedia can even go beyond 70 archive pages (12) and the historian can use these data on talks to have a preliminary idea of the relevance and the controversy of a topic.

People who participate in the drafting of the articles and their talks form a community which is a community represented by the specific project. Every Wikipedia project in every linguistic variant forms an autonomous community dealing with the project in all its aspects: from the writing of its contents to their organisation, from the definition of norms and editing standards to the problem-solving of controversies about its contents, the inclusion criteria and so on. Furthermore, the community verifies the contributions to the articles, it contrasts vandalism and looks after the quality of the project.

These proceedings are undertaken in a horizontal manner through the contribution of those who participate to the project in that moment and according to the method of the consensus, mediated to adapt it to the web proceedings (13).

Considering the linguistic and not a national partition, it is important to remember that the Italian-language version of Wikipedia is as a result written by Italian citizens. Projects like the Spanish one and, even more so, the English one receive contributions from transnational users. This implies some extreme examples, such as the case of Chinese and Uzbek, where the catchment area is or has been

mainly or almost exclusively made of people who migrated to other countries (14) .

Since every linguistic community formulates its own rules autonomously, each Wikipedia identifies specific solutions for the coordination of assignments on particular themes, for the selection criteria of the contributions and for the definition of what is acceptable for the Encyclopedia.

As a result, the differences between one linguistic version of Wikipedia and the other do not only relate to the contents, which only at times results from a translation from other languages and are principally written from scratch and thus reflecting specific interests and approaches. Instead, they relate to a far deeper level, that of the norms and the basic criteria. The historian that is to set on a comparative analysis between articles and subjects drawn from different linguistic version of Wikipedia will have to be very careful not only to an eventual translation or new writing of the contents, but primarily to the peculiarities and individual sensitivities-not always made clear- representative of each community. Furthermore, it is advisable to attain some familiarity with Wikipedia in order to access the community spirit and find the way amongst slang nouns(15) and habits which would otherwise poorly understandable.

Every linguistic variant of Wikipedia has five pillars in common. They function as the shared strong points, the basic elements of a great, international Wikipedia community(16) . The first two pillars are important for the description they give of the nature and the aims of the contents.

The first pillar relates to the definition of Wikipedia as an encyclopedia. This is what determines which subjects are suitable for Wikipedia, both about their appearance and about an important standard, merely suggested and whose practical definition is left to the community, namely the notability. The notability standard- "enciclopedicità" (17) in the Italian-language Wikipedia-is a fundamental element if one is to assess what should or what should not be present on Wikipedia, in itself a means to shape a variable

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selection from community to community. It is here appropriate to note that unlike the public debate that can take place in the Internet on personal websites, blogs and social networks, the objectives of Wikipedia are instead very different—at least in theory—as there are three principles which cannot be found anywhere else, namely the prohibition to present original research. The latter entails the obligation, which has grown more and more in the course of time, to quote bibliographical sources to support one's contributions, relying on secondary and tertiary sources and pursuing the goal to gather already solid and well-known data.

One more difference from the online public debate is illustrated by the second pillar of Wikipedia. This relates to the "neutral point of view". All the Wikipedia articles must follow this guideline and its definition entails a reference to all points of view, proportional to the relevance of each point and the quoting of the sources, hence relying on verifiability as a mitigating criterion (18). A corollary of the "neutral point of view" is the necessity to deal with topics in a non-locally limited view, which entails the avoidance of Italo-centric attitudes in the Italian-language encyclopedia.

A bird's eye view on the academic studies inside of the Wikipedia community is available in the English version of the Encyclopedia and it may be useful to extricate preliminary information about it (19).

### Research inside Wikipedia: the Tools

The positive thing for a researcher on Wikipedia is that every change leaves a trace whilst the negative side to it is that the Wikipedia database implies that, even for minor projects, such an amount of data is impossible to master.

MediaWiki is a software which causes the site to function and implements the collaborative effort. It is endowed with means that, if well-known to the user, help towards a deep examination of the project and the individual articles. The research must cope with



such means as trying them out he can understand how they can help simplify the elaboration of contents. Given that the tools are numerous, and some are external to the MediaWiki software- even if linked to the service pages-, I shall present here merely an overview of the main tools useful for the historian, who will unfortunately have to do interact with them personally.

Every website based on MediaWiki subdivides the pages in namespaces, so that every page is given the title with a namespace prefix placed before it. Only the main subject matter is devoid of such prefix (in this case it is called *main namespace*) (20) .

On Wikipedia the namespaces can vary according to the linguistic variant but generally beside the main namespace and the talks namespace there are “Wikimedia” namespaces for the guidelines, the talks and the technical pages, a “help” function which includes handbooks for the collaboration, a “Template” which hosts each model of the grid, navigation box and all other material devised to include more pages.

The inescapable element to study the genesis of the Wikipedia articles is the *history*, available in each page at the top-right corner. Every change made on a Wikipedia page creates a record with the last updated version. The MediaWiki *history* indicates the records with their date and time of saving, user who made the change and eventual commentary left by the alterer as well as further information which will not be further investigated here.

In this way, it is possible to view an article from its very first versions, going back to the last change and re-constructing how any authors have intervened having a detailed knowledge of the changes made by each author. The possibility to select two random versions and to compare them through the “compare selected revisions” function offers a quick tool to highlight the changes made by each author (21) .

The *history* helps understand, from time to time, whether the article has been written by one single author, with only formal corrections from other users, or if the article was subject to several

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contributions in its contents by many authors who may have joined in the drafting of various paragraphs or who may have worked at a later time even inserting radical changes to its contents. A precise reenactment of the history of an article may be nevertheless difficult taking into account that some articles have reached a higher number of revisions. For example, a controversial historical article like the “Foibe massacres” on the Italian-language Wikipedia has reached more than three thousand changes since 2003(22). There are a few tricks to hasten the research in the *history* page, for example looking at the number –green and red for the positive and negative values respectively- can be found in every record, and this points out to the increase or decrease of the letters of the text. Clearly, it can be useful but it may result quite misleading in case of textual distortions which would preserve the overall number of words unchanged. The *history* in the Italian-language Wikipedia presents further useful tools, in particular the statistics with the contributions per month and year and the most active users on the page, usable in every Wikimedia project(23) .

Another important remark to be made is about the way the authors are identified and the way to obtain information on them. In case a user is registered with the site, in the *history* one can find the link to one’s own user page, where the latter can possibly introduce themselves, and access several pages from here, including the chronology of all the self-same user’s contributions. And yet since one can intervene autonomously in Wikipedia, the *history* will present several numeric users, that is, the IP addresses of anonymous users which have been archived on legal grounds. In this case too it is necessary to take into account the very nature of the IP addresses behind which there can be multiple users who can most importantly change often making the appointment of the changes difficult, even in the case of more interventions made by the same person.

Other useful tools to obtain information about the authors are available in the toolbox on the left-hand column when using the standard interface. On this menu, in a user page, there is a link to the “user contributions” page with the title “Special: contributions/user

name". From this page it is possible to trace all the interventions made this user, filtering them through namespace and thus being able to examine, for instance, only the interventions by article or by date. In the same page, through the links available under the title, it is possible to reach the multimedia files directory and that is generically called "log" which includes page shifts and administration actions such as blocking pages or users.

Among the easiest tools for the first analysis of the contents- which will be willingly left out here-are the categories which gather each encyclopedia article whilst the indispensable tool for those who want to embark on comparative analysis between different linguistic projects is the language column with links from language to language on the same topic, not just for the encyclopedia articles but also for the coordination pages and so on.

In the toolbox the "Permanent link" function is available. It provides a link to the version of the page currently visited and it can be used to when inserting in a job a link to a paged visited on Wikipedia; in this way one can access the very page one has visited and not its updated version.

In turn, the "page information" function summarises a lot of information on the development of a page and lists data such as the number of users and changes to the creation, the creator, the latest editor and so on.

To conclude with the technical tools the "special pages" (24) should be mentioned. It is advisable to explore this page reachable through the toolbox in order to identify alternative ways to access data.

As mentioned before, the editing of the articles entails a vast debate amongst the authors. It is useful to remember that such debates, including the ones administered directly by Wikipedia, take place in many sites, thereby making it hard to identify them. Beside the aforementioned talk pages of the individual articles, there are talk pages for every single norm and rule on Wikipedia, talk pages devised to be addressed to the individual user (25) and, most importantly here, thematic talks pages. The latter are work projects on

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certain topics called *Wiki*projects, very important for the definition of standards and the solution of controversies on specific issues. This entails summary pages and thematic talk pages for history as well, identifiable in all versions of Wikipedia (26) .

A deep approach to such projects is indispensable to obtain new access keys to the articles (27) and also to understand the job the community is undertaking behind the scenes, even if such projects do not always have a concrete impact on it.

In order to conclude with this bird's eye view of the tools available for the historian, it is useful to present a page that sums up the aforementioned access and contributions statistics(28). This precious data, at times inaccurate or absent because of the excessive cost of their collation, is distributed among a multiplicity of collected data for the *Meta.wikimedia.org* project(29) , dedicated to the coordination between the various Wikimedia project in the various languages.

### **Wikipedia and History: a few Considerations**

In this paper, it would be important to make a few considerations on the system of production of historical discourse on Wikipedia, underlining some critical points characteristic of this tool.

The first consideration relates necessarily to the will of Wikipedia to provide a neutral point of view on the articles. Even if one interprets such neutrality as a representation of different schools of thought, supported by sources and related to their relevance, it is evident that when talking of historical articles this ideal is very far from reality. In particular for articles on non-shared issues and subject to a lively historiographical debate, like the aforementioned article on the "Foibe massacres" whose same title, if not the very existence of the article, cannot be neutral.

The second consideration relates to the concentration of knowledge because the enormous visibility of Wikipedia tends to overshadow each different reading of some phenomena, particularly if the

latter have no counterpart inside the encyclopedia or they are not supported by strong articles. The direct consequence of all this is the proliferation of internets in relation to the subject matter of the encyclopedia pages. It may be difficult to unmask such interests, also out of the possible anonymity of the users.

The third and last consideration is strictly linked with the above and relates to the dynamics that may take place in case of controversies in relation to the subject matter of an article. Indeed, users are identified inside the community only according to their contributions to the project, which form themselves a cv. Moreover, it should be added that during the years norms and inner rules have proliferated, thus strengthening the boundaries to access the encyclopedia. This entails that in case of controversies, experiences pays off, especially if compared with a newbie. And just like many other Internet experiences, time availability becomes an important discriminating factor for what is in all senses a platform for a permanent discussion.

From what has been said until now it appears to be evident that -if one is to take into account an Internet historical narrative coming from the common people-. That the dynamics of the Internet debates on Wikipedia are burdened by an excessive interest given by the visibility and by the solid advantage of those who are familiar with the inner norms of the community.

**Notes**

(\*) Saul Andreotti's translation

(1) Data taken from <http://reportcard.wmflabs.org/#core-graphs> accessed December 11th 2012.

(2) Data referring to November 2012, cf. <http://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/TablesPageViewsMonthly.htm> accessed December 11th 2012

(3) Ibidem.

(4) Cf. <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/IT> and <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/wikipedia.org> accessed December 11th 2012. One should take into account that the tracing system by third parties may be subject to lack of reliability.

(5) Cf. <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/wikipedia.org> accessed December 11th 2012, the aforementioned remarks are to be highlighted even more here.

(6) For a bird's eye view of the linguistic variants of Wikipedia, cf. [http://meta.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=List\\_of\\_Wikipedias&oldid=4545447](http://meta.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_Wikipedias&oldid=4545447) accessed December 11th 2012.

(7) Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History\\_of\\_Wikipedia&oldid=527038522#Historical\\_overview\\_by\\_year](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Wikipedia&oldid=527038522#Historical_overview_by_year) accessed December 11th 2012.

(8) Cf. the main Wikipedia pages in italian ([http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pagina\\_principale](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pagina_principale)) and English ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)), accessed December 14th 2012.

(9) Cf. <http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Home> accessed December 14th 2012.

(10) It is necessary to remind the reader that there still apply usage restraints, in particular the obligation to quote the authors and to quote the same license when publishing the material cf. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.it> accessed December 11th 2012.

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(11) Cf. Mary Kawena Pukui, Samuel H. Elbert, *Hawaiian dictionary: Hawaiian-English, English-Hawaiian*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986, quoted in <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia&oldid=527425652> accessed December 13th 2012.

(12) In December 13th 2012 the first talk page of the article “Barack Obama” has been archived 76 times, cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Barack\\_Obama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Barack_Obama)

(13) Cf. for the Italian <http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Consenso&oldid=53340634> and the English <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Consensus&oldid=527123505> accessed December 13th 2012

(14) Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Uzbek\\_Wikipedia&oldid=526141673](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Uzbek_Wikipedia&oldid=526141673) for the Uzbek case and [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Chinese\\_Wikipedia&oldid=524615102#Blocking\\_of\\_Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Chinese_Wikipedia&oldid=524615102#Blocking_of_Wikipedia) for the Chinese one, accessed December 14th 2012

(15) For the English and Italian glossaries refer to <http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Aiuto:Glossario&oldid=54354198> e <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Glossary&oldid=525135968> accessed December 13th 2012

(16) Cf. for the Italian [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Cinque\\_pilastri](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Cinque_pilastri) and the English [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five\\_pillars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars) versions, accessed December 13th 2012

(17) For the definition of «enciclopedicità» given by Italian-language Wikipedia refer to [http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Aiuto:Cosa\\_mettere\\_su\\_Wikipedia&oldid=53942219#Enciclopedicit.C3.A0](http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Aiuto:Cosa_mettere_su_Wikipedia&oldid=53942219#Enciclopedicit.C3.A0) accessed December 13th 2012

(18) Cf. [http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Punto\\_di\\_vista\\_neutrale&oldid=53072486](http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Punto_di_vista_neutrale&oldid=53072486) accessed December 13th 2012.

(19) Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Academic\\_studies\\_of\\_Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Academic_studies_of_Wikipedia), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic\\_studies\\_about\\_Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_studies_about_Wikipedia) e <http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Research:Index> accessed December 14th 2012.

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(20) Cf. <http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Aiuto:Namespace&oldid=53065381> accessed December 13th 2012.

(21) Cf. <http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Aiuto:Cronologia&oldid=53270789> accessed December 13th 2012.

(22) Cf. <http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Aiuto:Cronologia&oldid=53270789> accessed December 13th 2012.

(23) Cf. <http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Aiuto:Cronologia&oldid=53270789> accessed December 13th 2012.

(24) Cf. <http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speciale:PagineSpeciali> for the Italian and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:SpecialPages> for the English version; please note that to gain access to the special pages of each project it is possible to substitute the first part of the address with the appropriate one

(25) The talk pages of the individual users are normally used writing to the recipient, with the unpleasant consequence that a dialogue between two people in the respective pages will be broken and not easily rebuilt.

(26) Cf. <http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progetto:Storia> and [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categoria:Progetti\\_storia](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categoria:Progetti_storia) for the Italian version which has for the projects a specific namespace,; cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_History](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_History) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:History\\_WikiProjects](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:History_WikiProjects) for the English version; accessed December 13th 2012.

(27) Cf. <http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progetto:Storia> and [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categoria:Progetti\\_storia](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categoria:Progetti_storia) for the Italian version which has for the projects a specific namespace,; cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject\\_History](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_History) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:History\\_WikiProjects](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:History_WikiProjects) for the English version; accessed December 13th 2012.

(28) See footnotes 1, 2, 4 and 23.

(29) Cf. <http://meta.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Statistics&oldid=4316277>



## CONCLUSIONS

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Before starting our survey we got in touch with historians in twelve different countries and explained them what our aim was and how we thought it would be possible to carry it out. Everybody felt enthusiastic about the project but most added that theirs was a limited, very simple use of the web so that they felt unable to take part in our enterprise. "No handbooks are available, we would not know how to work" many said. They were right, there are no models or patterns from which we could draw inspiration, nobody has yet attempted to study the circulation of historical representations on the web throughout the European Union, but this is true for any investigation, the pioneers who open up a new field of research must devise their own tools. They make mistakes, leave out relevant issues, misinterpret essential points, but they have confidence in their successors who will correct the errors and complete the work. However partial they are, the results we present clear the way to future inquiries and map out a few itineraries.

Not surprisingly, any participant has adopted the method that suited their conception of the web and of web surfing. I have found four main approaches to the question, which are not mutually exclusive and in some papers are used simultaneously.

The first is a wide outlook over everything that may be labelled "history" on the web. A portal, generally Google, but also local portals existing in many countries, give an extensive list of websites. Since, mostly for commercial reasons, the sites are classified according to the number of visitors, it is easy to single out the most important ones. What is interesting in this operation is that it evidences the statistical importance and variety of subjects relating to the past that circulate on the web. Deciding whether what drives the visitors is a taste for strangeness, a vague curiosity or a desire to find some information is another problem and a further step in the investigation.

## Conclusions

A second process has consisted in choosing a few questions of much significance for the history of one's country, of Europe as a whole or of the entire world and to see how they are treated. The selection is arbitrary but what matters is the progression throughout the web thanks to the links mentioned in the different sites. The researcher, behaving like a relentless surfer, brings to light the internal logic of cross-references in internet, detects borrowing and copies, makes plain the contradictions and the biased interpretations. Such inquiry complements the first approach by setting out in concrete terms what makes possible the exponential development of historical sites.

The third procedure focuses on historical forums in which non professional but well-informed or at least passionate forumers upload individual contributions and take part in debates. Whereas the second process is concerned with the accuracy of the communicated knowledge and the circulation throughout the web, the third one does not care about exactness. Selecting the periods, problems and personalities that attract more surfers and above all more active participants, it inquires about the motivations of those who express themselves in forums and about their argumentation in order to see how Sunday historians interpret the past.

The last solution is based on commemorations, which implying a reminder of times gone by, give way to conflicting opinions and polemics. What people upload is not an unbiased survey of what happened but rather the spontaneous expression of support or disagreement provoked by the mediation of an event. In such instance the investigation must concentrate on immediate reactions such as those which come up in social networks such as Facebook, Twitter Dailymotion and above all You Tube. History in this case has nothing to do with curiosity, erudition or will to understand, it is made of remembrances, good or bad, impressions and political beliefs.

Following different tracks and resorting to various methods the participants have given a comprehensive review of the historical stuff that moves round on the web. The assessment is incomplete and even superficial in some of its parts, but nobody had ever presented

such an extended outlook of possible explorations right through the web.

The research has also brought to the fore several characteristics of the net, such as it functions at present. The main quality of the web 2.0 is interactivity. At the end of 2012 the interaction is effective but limited. The most enduring link with other media has to do with videogames and television. In a good many countries two important sectors of the net history specialise in military matters, battles, weaponry, uniforms, and also the evolution of police and policing. Those who spend time at these websites prove assiduous, fervent practitioners, a significant part of their dialogues turn on games like *World of Warcraft*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Doom*, *Counter-Strike* or, where the police is concerned, *Six Feet Under* or *The Wire*. On the web, the players compare different solutions, mock the inaccuracy of the games, contrive and offer for consideration novel sequences, the improvement of their military or police expertise and their skill at the games advance at the same pace.

History broadcasts make an impact on the web and are influenced by the reactions of the spectators. All channels open blogs connected with their best series, they receive remarks about the quality of the programmes and comments that signal in detail and with references the mistakes, anachronisms and false interpretations. Yet, the principal exchanges between television channels and the web take place on You Tube with numerous observations and above all small videos, clips of scenes that have impressed a surfer or original re-editing of some shots suggesting a different understanding of the broadcast.

Outside these sectors, interactivity is not well developed. Some websites claim thousands of visitors but these are quite exclusively passers-by, in a hurry or indifferent, who disappear without trace, very few of them bothering to state a judgment. Many surfers seem to regard the web as a space of consumption, not as a space of exchanges and communication More amazingly the sites or forums integrated in important portals, upon which people will automatically call, have seldom recourse to multi-mediation. They mention

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links with other sites, preferably those of the same portal, display a few photographs. However, having been devised by people accustomed to writing informative texts with footnotes and references to other texts, but unaware of the possibilities offered by the web, they do not include animated maps, films, oral documents, direct connections with television or radio channels. The limited involvement of the surfers goes together with the conventionality and un-inventiveness of those who manage the sites.

As a result lots of history websites offer a rather conventional information about the past which, in turn, is analysed and presented in long-established ways. It is true that the specialists will find a wealth of sources on the net. Public offices, archives, libraries, private companies have put online masses of documents. Instead of going round the libraries and submitting to awkward timetables, historians can work quietly and continuously in their study. They may find, in forums dedicated to a specific topic, original testimonies, drawings, sketches, photographs of which they would have been unaware previously. If they wish, they will be permanently in touch with colleagues in order to test their hypothesis or seek advice and they will be able to quickly circulate their findings instead of waiting an uncertain publication. The working conditions of historians have radically changed. Do such facilities, thanks to which a research may be more simply accomplished, will modify the questions specialists ask themselves or the answers they give? For the time being, possibly because the majority has not yet realized the huge prospects opened by the net, we observe no passing from the customary style of history writing to another form.

A novelty, interesting but of limited repercussion is the multiplication of didactic websites uploaded by public or private teaching institutions and by individual professors. The aim is to provide university students or secondary schools pupils with up-to-date, entertaining, easily assimilated knowledge. In which way such sites differ from textbooks? Are they likely to enthral the students and persuade them that history is not merely an academic subject?

The educational websites are no very busy; the young in search of information prefer thematic websites aimed at the general public, which provide shorter, more straightforwardly assimilated papers. Together with the scholars thousands of visitors, inquiring minds or idle individuals, frequent these sites. Provided it is diverting and within the reach of everyone, history attracts surfers who find on the web on the one hand a dictionary that allows them to check a date or a name, on the other hand glimpses at extinct or unfamiliar societies, narratives of stunning episodes and portrays of fascinating personalities. Such fluctuating curiosity about the strange, unattainable but fascinating territory called "the past" has not been created by the web, which, owing to its effortless accessibility and its countless ramifications, has simply made it easier to immerse oneself, for a short while, in a foregone epoch.

Apart from obvious facilities shall we say that the web has only marginally modified the customary conception and practice of history? For a large portion of the European population this is probably true, history falls into the curriculum, it is a subject matter learnt at school; later it is seen as a reservoir of diverting stories told in books or websites written by specialists. However, there are indications of a certain change. Postgraduate students who do not want to hopelessly try to publish their essays in a review and passionate amateurs open forums where they treat the themes that appeal to them and launch debates. While a majority of surfers is content with reading the texts and leaving, active forumers assert themselves in these websites. They bring documents, signal references, put forward the questions that bother them, at times address sharply the authors of the articles and give their own version of the problem in discussion. There is a risk; the forums can furnish a springboard for a revisionist version of past events, or for delirious or subversive talks. Besides some overrate the importance of the happenings in which they got involved and get lost in details. At the same time, the benefit is a new status for history, which instead of appearing a veracious discourse composed by specialists who have recourse to reliable pieces of evidence, becomes the expression of personal ideas based on feelings and life expe-

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-rience. For about three decades, historians have added to their material the recordings of oral testimonies. What is occurring in history forums is a further step in the widening of historical horizons; people are not content with relating what happened to them, they try to deliver an historical account, which, thanks to the web, will be read by many.

Those who make themselves heard in forums are often above forty of age. The young much prefer to come out on the social networks where they can talk about whatever topic and meet fellows prone to enter a discussion. Whereas arguments, on Facebook and Twitter, do not last long and often degenerate into jokes or parody, interesting controversies take place on You Tube. The videos uploaded on this network are often edited anyhow, with film shots taken at random, but the conjunction of pictures, music and a voice over arouses a personal concern and a will to interchange thoughts among the surfers: it must be acknowledged that images are, in our days, the leading vehicle of communication. Bygone events are commented in a contemporary prospect, as a burden that weighs on the present, or as a lesson for the future. History works always talk of the period in which they were written but this reference is seldom as apparent. You Tube posts wipe out the dream of objectivity and innermost comprehension of a foregone epoch claimed by historians, they mix what has been and what is happening now, and interpret the time gone by according to current preoccupations.

The history talks that circulate on the web defy professional historians. Academics and researchers will be able to shut themselves in some ivory tower but the teachers will have to face a double challenge. The students who employ actively a subjective, ageless reading in which foregone and immediate times are mixed up, will disagree with their masters' qualified, wary interpretations, while adults, armed with documents recently uploaded on the web will reproach them not to be up to date.

I willingly exaggerate to emphasize what is at stake here. History professors have long privileged long-range transformations and lasting practices at the expenses of short-lived occurrences, they try to

make people think over human evolution from parallel eases in the past. The history diffused on the web is less speculative, more careful of events and concrete data. Idle surfers, who pass but do not leave a mark like visiting websites that describe discoveries, archaeological excavations, restoration of monuments, clothe or objects. They are fond of details about daily habits in ancient civilisations, rules of succession in royal families, life of great people.

Forumers and bloggers have wider horizons, they are interested in causes or consequences. Yet, their queries relate to the motives and results of happenings chronologically well defined, war, crisis, revolution, change of political system and they refer to the national history. This might be the principle point of convergence between the different countries included in our sample. We encounter here a phenomenon that engages the attention. The chronological divisions of the national past and the main headings are extremely traditional. As was the rule in schools for decades the points of reference are the sovereigns or heads of state and the battles. Yet, this history is neither totally heroic, nor unblemished, there are in the texts, at the same time, a feeling of belonging to an heritage and a critical look at that legacy.

This is especially true where the 20th century is concerned. In fact, it is the contemporary world, with its social and military conflicts, that awakes more concern among forumers and bloggers. "Did the previous generations behaved well or were they mistaken?" is a recurrent query. Individual responsibilities are seldom mentioned, opinions are general, definite and aimed at the present state of affairs. Oddly enough, while the debated questions have to do almost exclusively with international relationships, the point of view of the others, allies, enemies, neutral or committed witnesses, is never considered, everything unfolds as if every country were an isolated island and as if external events had little impact on the domestic situation. In such instance, there is no room for an European prospect. The forums dealing with the European union signal that the "founding fathers" of an unified Europe were intent on avoiding a third world conflict by promoting a close economic

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cooperation between countries that a few years before were fighting each other, but the forums dedicated to WWII do not allude to such preoccupation.

Our appraisal of historical talks and dialogues moving round the web has clarified a noticeable series of issues. Each of us has tested a method of analysis but, put together, our different attempts represent a comprehensive approach to the discourses hold on the net. Be it only for that result, our investigation was worth being carried out. We have also shed light on the various concerns and behaviours of those who travel the web. Our conclusions, limited to a peculiar group of surfers, need to be completed, but previously little had been done to explain how people explore the net, ours is an important step forward for the study of the web audience. At last, we have identified some representations of the past such as they appear in the websites. It was spadework, the first digging made with an unrefined tool, but also the essential preliminaries to any future work on the topic. The way has been opened for deeper investigations.





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