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HOUSE OF  
EUROPEAN HISTORY



European Economic  
and Social Committee

# #HISTOLAB

## EUROPEAN INNOVATION DAYS IN HISTORY EDUCATION

# EVENT REPORT

## 8 - 10 MARCH 2023



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# #HistoryAtHeart

## Introduction

The first edition of the European Innovation Days in History Education was held on 8-10 March 2023 in the European Economic and Social Committee for the first two days, and the third day took place in the House of European History. More than thirty projects from both established history education associations and individual schools and teachers were featured over the course of the three days (please see annex 1 for the full list of projects). The programme of the event was developed based on the areas of history education that have experienced evolutions and innovation in the past years – regardless of their setting in classrooms, academia, museums, or other spaces of learning. The Innovation Days were organised with the support of its core partners, EuroClio, the FEDERation for European Education, the Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | Georg Eckert Institute, the House of European History, and the International Society for History Didactics. Each of the partners also presented particular projects from their organisations.

One of the highlights of the event was the ceremony for the first **HISTOLAB Award for Innovative School Projects in History Education**, which was presented to four schools:

- Olena Pchilka Lyceum from Kovel, Ukraine
- Municipal Establishment Lyceum "Maksymum" of Kropyvnytskyi City Council in Kropyvnytskyi, Ukraine.
- "Ivan Vazov" Secondary School from Mezdra, Bulgaria
- Osnovna Škola Gradac from Gradac, Croatia

The purpose of the HISTOLAB Award is to hear opinions and ideas from students themselves on their own experiences with learning history. By receiving their award and presenting their projects in the House of European History, they were not only empowered to share their work, but also to give the opportunity to speak publicly in a European Institution in front of an audience of over 100 history education professionals from across Europe and the world. Yevheniia Kravchuk, the Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe took the floor to congratulate the students and emphasise the importance of quality history education, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine where a manipulation of history was used by Russia as a justification for invading the country.

## Global co-operation and knowledge sharing

The goal for the first European Innovation Days in History Education was to bring together history educators, students, academics, and other practitioners to have debates on the innovative methods in teaching history today. Some of the core reasoning behind this goal was echoed during the opening panel made up of policymakers. MEP Sabine Verheyen highlighted the co-operation not only between European Union institutions, but also between the European Union and the Council of Europe. She particularly used the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe as a pertinent example of international co-operation on history education. The HISTOLAB joint project is the culmination of the drive for co-operation and knowledge sharing between these European institutions. According to the Director-General Themis Christophidou of the European Commission's DGEAC,

"I truly believe there is little more important than helping each other embrace the nitty gritty complexity of our world, without losing faith that we can reconcile different, sometimes opposite perspectives, agreeing on who we are and who we want to be as a community."

Beyond the European political structure, co-operation in history education is already taking place widely across professional and academic levels. Over thirty presentations were made showcasing the vast and varied ways in which innovation in history education is already being cultivated throughout Europe and further afield in countries such as the United States of America and Sri Lanka. In his moderation of the session on bridging the gap between academia and teaching, Raul Cârstocea noted the five key stakeholders in history-teaching as policymakers, academic historians with a focus on history education, academic historians without a specific focus on education, history teachers and students. Co-operation and knowledge sharing are necessary in order to advance both practices and policies related to history education.

Transnational co-operative approaches were evident in many projects including *Convoi 77* on teaching the Holocaust to students which has been launched in 20 countries, and *US and THEM, before us*, an ERASMUS+ funded project tackling Remembrance between Cyprus, North Macedonia, and Serbia. One of the most enduring transnational projects is the *Joint History Project* on history teaching and reconciliation in Southeast Europe which ran from 1999 to 2020. Speaking on the value of transnational history education projects, Professor Christina Koulouri stated:

"our approach is that bilateral projects actually increase bipolarity and reproduce conflict. What we need is regional projects where you have many players together, where the bilateral conflict becomes contextualised and not essentialised."

# Is there a rise in teaching approaches that integrate history with other subjects?

During the opening panel, the following question was asked : should history continue to be taught in its own right or should it be integrated in civic education? This question speaks to the experimental methods of combining school subjects or creating multidisciplinary approaches to teaching history. Does this increase the relevance of history across educational systems or is there a risk that the teaching of history is diminished the more it is integrated with other subjects and schools of thought?

Sabine Verheyen was of the opinion that integrative approaches to teaching history should not replace the teaching of history in general but be complementary. She gave the example of history and politics, that by explaining a historical event from a political perspective one could analyse the impacts of particular political events and power plays through a historical lens, and history through a political lens, in this way history could shed more light on current political strategies and choices made by governments.

Examples were given of how to integrate approaches from different disciplines in teaching history in order to showcase the benefits of connecting historical thinking with other subjects. *Detective Investigation* by the Primary school Jovan Dučić in Belgrade, Serbia connects history with literature, chemistry and math through research and problem solving as students solve puzzles by answering questions from each of these subjects. *Learning from the past, acting for the future* by the Olga Lengyel Institute for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights/ Intercultural Institute Timisoara pairs learning about history and remembrance with human rights and intercultural education, further highlighting the relevance of history and its contributions to modern democratic and intercultural societies.

## Strengthening critical thinking skills

The vision of HISTOLAB is one of hope for and confidence in the critical thinking and analysis skills of the next generation. 2023 is the European Commission's **European Year of Skills**. As previously stated by Vice President of the Commission Mr Margaritis Schinas

“Now, it is time to join hands and unlock a skills revolution, leaving nobody behind.”

Children and young people growing up today are constantly surrounded by information, and the phenomenon of disinformation is particularly rampant, and insidious online. It is a priority of both the European Union and the Council of Europe to develop tools that help people critically analyse information sources and identify disinformation and misinformation, as well as the manipulation of history. The European Commission presented the *Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting*

*digital literacy through education and training*, explaining how education can be used as a key tool in the fight against disinformation. HISTOLAB is currently developing a **toolkit to debunk fake news in history classes** which is complementary to Guidelines of the EU by focusing solely on combatting disinformation which stems from the manipulation of history.

Teresa Elena Ortega showcased the research done by the Stanford History Education Group in its *Reading Like a Historian* project. The goal is to provide students with the same historical analytical skills that are used by historians.

“Historians always attend to the source. There is a really big breach between how historians approach reading historical documents and how students did.”

History educators can and should provide their students with the critical thinking skills to decipher historical sources and prevent the circulation of harmful ideologies and rhetoric whose purpose is to cause division in our societies, and the erosion of democratic structures.

“The lack of critical thinking is the main anathema of those who are not able to fight against disinformation”, stated Ms Tatjana Babrauskienė, member of the European Economic and Social Committee.

One of the principal outcomes of the *HistoryLab for European Civic Engagement* was to provide the tools for evaluating historical sources and to combat manipulative propaganda. Other featured projects that focused highly on the development of critical thinking skills were the *Global task force against Holocaust distortion* from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, and the workshop by the House of European History on *Disinformation in the shape of a traveling exhibition*.

## Fair and inclusive representation in history lessons

The first day of the event took place on 8 March, International Women's Day. The etymology of the word history comes from an ancient Greek verb meaning “to know”. However, one would not be remiss for jumping to the conclusion that history refers to *his story*, the stories of the men who have dominated historical accounts, whether being the subject of or the writer/researcher of history and historical textbooks. As the moderator for the opening panel, Aurora Ailincăi drew attention to the need for more representation

“Hopefully we will be able in some years, in the close future I hope, to say that women are fairly and accurately represented in history. Like many other groups who need this work to become a full part of history”.

Minority communities are often 'othered', and history could play a very large role in preventing discrimination, sexism, and racism by showing the commonalities in the histories of different communities thereby showcasing what brings people together rather than divides them.

*History#5: toolkit for gender history* by the NGO Paradigma Foundation is taking on the task of ensuring better and more diverse representation of gender in history teaching in Armenia. They pointed out that the cultural norms need to evolve, but so do the materials being used by teachers.

"When the textbook writers are those who have learned the history of historicism in a sense, not anything further than that in terms of the philosophy of thought your textbooks are really quite old in their structure".

The concept of representation in history is not innovative in terms of progressive thinking and research. The innovative aspect is the action being taken by those working to create materials that include a wider variety of historical viewpoints and assisting teachers who wish to exercise their autonomy and introduce a more inclusive approach to teaching history.

The creation of new teaching materials are also the main outputs for *Roma history for children*, by NGO Cu Alte Cuvinte (in other words) and *Origins: a new global history* by Judith Perera. Both projects have culminated in the publication of more inclusive history books respectively for children in primary school and pre-teens. A quote from Roma activist, Ioanida Costache, encapsulates the reality of learning history for those from her community,

"Imagine being African American and learning about slavery at 24 or being Jewish and learning about the Holocaust after graduating from college. That could never happen, but it happens a lot when it comes to Roma history."

It is clear that in order to progress from the status quo of teaching history and to add more representation to the topics already provided in the prescribed curriculum, there is a need for general awareness of the place of marginalised and underrepresented communities in history. Once it is understood that history educators need to try to source additional learning materials (particularly those written and produced by minority communities themselves) they then need to be provided with a wide variety of supportive texts and tools to bring the histories of everyone to the forefront of their classes.

## Digital advancements, and limits

The imposed COVID-19 confinement acted as a magnifying glass for many social issues, inequalities, and shortcomings in the access to information the world over. The digitalisation of and access to educational materials, as well as the democratic questions and dilemmas that stem from rapid digital advancements, are key concerns for the Council of Europe. This is evidenced by the theme of the second annual forum of

the intergovernmental programme of the Council of Europe on history education: History Education in the Digital Age. This conference immediately preceded the European Innovation Days in History Education on 7 and 8 March 2023.

The Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | Georg Eckert Institute displayed two online platforms offering various ways of supporting innovative teaching methods for history education in school. These platforms are *Zwischentöne* and *EduSkills+*. The emphasis of using new digital methods to teach history were also found in the projects, *Digital storytelling – students as historians*, from Otaniemi Upper Secondary School, Espoo Finland guiding students as they create video narratives of their family history during war times. The podcast *Le moyen-âge dans tes oreilles* and the use of Storymaps in *Museums schools and maps: a new road to learning*, are examples of projects that use new digital media and tools to bring attention to histories of the distant past.

More key discussions centred on the use of historical videogames for teaching history, especially considering how exposed students are to these games in this day and age. Head of the Education Department of the Council of Europe, Villano Qiriaz, summed up the challenges these modern advancements pose for educators,

“Now the formal education system is faced with other big powers that build knowledge, and so there are now many thousands and millions of children and young people that play video games and through historical videogames they learn history probably not the same way and not the same history that we provide them in the formal education system”.

The pertinent questions to ask here are can and should formal education systems use videogames as a means to teach history? Two presentations focused on the use of videogames in teaching, these were: *History and war thunder: recreating military history through video games* and then *Sensitive issues, emotions, and games*. It is clear from the discussions that followed the presentations that the use of military historical videogames for the purposes of teaching history is a complex endeavour due to the difficulties in fostering historical consciousness through videogames. Students can become desensitised to not only the violence in games, but also the historical backgrounds that the games represent. Participants also questioned the ethics of using videogames with any level of violence in learning environments and were trepidatious of changing history by changing the outcomes of the game.

Videogames are an often-inescapable feature of modern life, especially for young people who spend time online and use these games as a means for connection and socialisation. Whether this means that videogames should be used in an educational setting remains to be seen. Students need to continue to develop and progress their critical thinking and analysis skills. Engagement with the subject of history cannot be the only goal, educators and policymakers must also ensure that students analyse the subject material using their historical consciousness developed through multiperspectivity and an understanding of democratic culture. Without this background based on information and understanding of the impact the

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historical events depicted in the videogames have had on our societies, there is a fear that the point of historical learning to better comprehend the world around us, could be lost in favour of the short-term interest sparked by using videogames in the classroom.





## Conclusion

Throughout the three days of intensive debate and discussion, those who presented their ideas and projects were able to benefit from the peer reviews offered by the questions and answers sessions that followed each of the presentations. One of the main highlights of having a diverse group of professionals from the field of history education, in terms of countries and work experience, was seeing how the concepts were perceived by the others in the room. A teacher from Serbia would analyse a suggested teaching method in a completely different manner to an academic historian from Germany for example. The vibrant discussions often highlighted the confusion surrounding the intention of the project, the pedagogy used or the learning experiences of the students. These clarifications not only added to the experience of the participants listening to each of the presentations, but also provided valuable feedback to the presenters about something that could be misconstrued from the showcase of their projects.

From the beginning, the purpose of HISTOLAB was to provide a tolerant and inclusive space for critical debate on innovative ways to teach history. As we can see, innovation can be found in many different ways, from more inclusive topics and new learning materials to experimentation of combining historical topics with other school subjects. It is clear that any new approaches to history must give students the tools to enter the world as active citizens, prepared to critically analyse sources of information they encounter online and offline. These skills of critical thinking and questioning of sources also need to be applied by those teaching history, to constantly revise and update approaches to ensure that history is taught in a way that reaches students, causes them to question the world around them, and enables them to be empathetic and understanding in an ever evolving and complex world.

## Annex: List of projects, workshops, and presentations

### Session 1 - WHERE HISTORY EDUCATION MEETS ITS FUTURE: WHY WE NEED INNOVATION

<a href="#">Paradigma Foundation</a>	“Where history education meets its future: why we need innovation” - History#5: toolkit for gender history
<a href="#">Convoi 77</a>	Teaching the Shoah to teenagers in a different way
<a href="#">Körber Stiftung</a>	EUSTORY

### Session 2 - INNOVATION IN THE CLASSROOM: TEACHING METHODS AND PRACTICES

<a href="#">Otaniemi Upper Secondary School, Espoo, Finland</a> (Erasmus + Project)	Digital storytelling – students as historians Us and them, before us
<a href="#">Olga Lengyel Institute for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights / Intercultural Institute Timisoara</a>	Learning from the past, acting for the future
<a href="#">Federation for Education in Europe (FEDE)</a>	What is the place of history teaching in vocational training programmes? Detective investigation
<a href="#">Euroclio</a>	Books not bombs – rebuilding education during war
<a href="#">European Network Remembrance and Solidarity</a>	Sound in the silence
<a href="#">Genesis College, Bucharest, Romania</a>	History and war thunder: recreating military history through video games
<a href="#">Cu Alte Cuvinte (In Other Words) – NGO</a>	Roma history for children
<a href="#">Stanford History Education Group</a>	Reading like a historian: a document- based, inquiry-driven curricular approach
<a href="#">Leibniz Institute for Educational Media   Georg Eckert Institute Digital Education Unit, European Commission - Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture</a>	Online platforms as a means of innovative teaching: the examples of “Zwischentöne” and “EduSkills+” Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training

### Session 3 - BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND TEACHING

<a href="#">British School in Colombo, Sri Lanka</a>	Origins: a new global history
<a href="#">University of Murcia, Spain</a>	Historylab for European civic engagement: open e-toolkit to train history teachers on digital teaching
<a href="#">International Society for History Didactics / Leibniz Institute for Educational Media   Georg Eckert Institute</a>	How to make history lessons more responsive to global challenges
<a href="#">Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens</a>	Le moyen-âge dans tes oreilles The joint history project (1999-2020): History teaching and reconciliation

### Session 4 - INNOVATIVE USE OF SITES OF REMEMBRANCE. HISTORICAL PLACES AND MUSEUMS

<a href="#">House of European History</a>	Disinformation in the shape of a traveling exhibition
<a href="#">House of European History</a>	Explore the multiperspectivity of Europe: a digital toolbox for history learning
<a href="#">Euroclio HIP BiH</a>	War(s) in photos – a pedagogical tool about teaching war conflicts in the area of former Yugoslavia
<a href="#">Confronting Memories</a>	Confronting memories Museums, schools, and maps: a new road to learning
<a href="#">University of Strasbourg</a>	Teaching history is not yet history Sensitive issues, emotions, and games

### Session 5 - FROM INSPIRATION TO INNOVATION: LEARNING FROM ONE ANOTHER

<a href="#">International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)</a>	Global task force against Holocaust distortion
<a href="#">War Childhood Museum Foundation</a>	Alternative approaches to peace and history education museums
<a href="#">Romanian Association of History Teachers – Clio</a>	How much innovation in history education?