

Interactions in the House of European History

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Abstract

The House of European History (HEH, 2017) emerges as potential aggregator of people, while aspiring to represent different communities in transnational categories, through the knowledge of a multiple but often diffuse whole. The first temporary exhibition seeks to cultivate the knowledge of the *other*. In the encounter that *Interactions* proposes, a discourse on Trading, Fighting, Negotiating and Learning is made to understand and debate how our identity is shaped.

In the light of a fragmented European community and having in mind the European policy of Europeanisation through cultural heritage, it is our aim to question what narrative of the history of a continent? Which territories of exclusion or (in) visibility can we delimit? How does the HEH participate in a broader cultural policy of Europeanisation of historical memory? And, by mapping the installation and museological content of *Interactions*: how can a museum contribute to the debate on the meaning of “being European”?

Keywords

House of European History, Interactions, Europeanisation, Memory and Museums

The House of European History

It was through a curators' competition promoted by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) in 2015 that we found in the project House of European History (HEH) an object of study that impressed by its ambitious objective: to be able to affirm itself as a museological pole of European history and simultaneously a symbol/vehicle of its identity.

The initial inauguration plan, scheduled for 2014, has suffered a significant delay. By postponing the new opening date for the end of 2016, the HEH would eventually open to the public on May 6, 2017, Europe's Day. The personal commitment of Hans-Gert Pöttering, the President of the European Parliament (January 2007-July 2009), is at the origin of the project. In 2007, the politician of German origin, elected by the Christian Democratic Union/European People's Party, justified the need for a pan-European history museum with the idea that the construction of a European identity would benefit from the diffusion and knowledge of the history of Europe:

I should like to create a locus for history and for the future where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow. I would like to suggest the founding of a “House of European History”. It should [be] a place where a memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union. (Committee of Experts, 2008: 4)

This was the first step towards a transnational project funded by the European Parliament and subordinated to it, with the expected budget being exceeded by several million euros - estimated at EUR 67 million and ending up in EUR 155 million (*Telegraph*, April 3, 2011).

In a brief methodological note, we will review the theoretical context, analyze the museological programs and

investigations carried out on the object of study, and at the same time analyze the content of the temporary exhibition, and the respective collection of qualitative and quantitative data, and explore the results obtained by applying a semi-structured, open-ended interview to Constanze Itzel, director of the HEH.

Museological Programs

In ten years between the Hans-Gert Pöttering's speech and the inauguration of the museum, its future location was discussed and two museological programs were conceived. For the design of the preliminary museological program, a Committee of Experts coordinated by Hans Walter Mutter (German historian, Chairman of the Foundation for the House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany) was appointed and composed of professionals of various nationalities and different disciplinary backgrounds who would introduce the *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History* (Committee of Experts, 2008). Divided in 116 points, the main orientation for the future museum was: (1) to identify a European memory and identity; (2) to democratise its content while making it freely available to anyone, regardless of the language; and (3) to create a collection and a documentation center with a chronologically oriented narrative. This museum collection was to start from what was identified as the 'higher culture' (Committee of Experts, 2008: 11), or the European Mediterranean roots, which were extended until the fall of the Roman Empire, the technical and cultural evolutions from the 17th and 18th centuries, the rivalries between States and Nations, the beginning of the Modern Age, and the expansions of the 19th century before focusing on the period that extends from the two great wars, when Europe collapsed socially and economically, until the rise of a new auspicious period of growth, prosperity, and integration.

A second document emerged in 2013, *Building a House of European History* (European Parliament, 2013), which was drafted by an Academic Project Team led by

the future Creative Director of the museum, the Slovenian historian, sociologist, and museum consultant, Taja Vovk van Gaal. The document was composed of the Museum's mission and tutelage, its location, the characteristics of the pre-existing building and ongoing rehabilitation, the previous studies conceived to evaluate audiences, the multilingual content of the permanent exhibition, the desired museographic and museological characteristics, and the ongoing elaboration of a collection and the particularities of project management:

The House of European History will be a resource open to the general and specialised public from across Europe and beyond. It will take its place at the heart of the visitor services policy of the European Parliament in Brussels. It will be located in an historic landscape on an important architectural site of the Belgian capital. Over time it will have a web presence, develop partnerships and cooperation, and build a cultural profile that will extend far beyond the physical boundaries of its actual location. (European Parliament, 2013: 4)

In contrast with the previous program, this document reinforced the intention of presenting 'multiple perspectives of history' (European Parliament, 2013: 24), seeking to ensure the representation of all Member States, communities, and the public. Nevertheless, there was also an attempt to decentralise and expand the area of intervention of the museum, in an intention not observed in the document prepared by the Committee of Experts. The content of the permanent exhibition, chronologically structured along the 4.800 m² of the exhibition area spread over six floors, was to be divided in six themes: (1) 'Shaping Europe' – with an introduction to the museum's objective and the identification of a common European heritage; (2) 'Europe Ascendant' – the development and progress of the 19th century and the ideas that arose from the French Revolution; (3) 'Europe Eclipsed' – the downward trajectory that would culminate in both the

World Wars; (4) 'A House Divided' – the reconstruction of a devastated and divided continent; (5) 'Breaking Boundaries' – the process of European integration; and, lastly, (6) 'Looking Ahead' – a final floor that seeks to place the visitor in the center of the discussion sphere by appealing to its reflection.

According to the two official documents, initial questions concerned the aim to be a supranational institution (Kaiser, 2014; Macdonald, 2013; Sierp, 2015) through the representation of diverse and geographically dispersed communities, the origin of the project, the particularity of the Museum's conception based on an idea rather than a collection, the little participation of the European communities (centrally and locally) and the absence of discussion, and, finally, the real content yet to be studied.

In a small glimpse of the materialization of this project and according to Andrea Mork, the HEH Content Coordinator, the formalisation of the museum particularly considered the main events and developments in European history, which have spread to various countries although in different ways. For the curator, the HEH thus aims to become a 'reservoir of European memory' in itself, a shared memory that often divided and congregated different communities:

To sum up, The House of European History will not be just a representation of the Multiplicity of national histories. It will be a "reservoir of European memory", containing experiences and interpretations in all their diversity, contrasts and contradictions. Its presentation of history will be ambivalent rather than homogeneous, critical rather than affirmative. (Mork, 2016: 221)

In the light of a fragmented European community, it is our aim to explore the representation of a European history, questioning the way this new transnational Museum transmits the knowledge of the history of a continent, its states, citizens and the so-called European Union. Which narratives and territories of exclusion or (in)visibility can

we delimit? Did *Interactions* succeed in bringing Europeans together? How does the HEH participate in a cultural policy of Europeanisation of the historical memory?

Theoretical Context

In order to deal with the unstable European context of the 1970s, where doubts were raised about economic prosperity and the need for new political references, the official speeches allude to a crisis of values and to a necessary search for a European identity, capable of giving the European project 'meaning that would go "beyond the economic, financial and material considerations"' (Calligaro, 2013: 85). It is in this context that the vast domain of cultural heritage begins to be explored symbolically and politically as a resource for renewed support of the European Union's political project and of the solidarity among Europeans. The institutionalisation of the action of the European institutions in the field of cultural heritage took place in the following decade, and, in 1984, the European Historical Monuments and Sites Fund was created. The 1990s and the Maastricht Treaty paved the way for a legal basis for cultural action within the Union, introducing community programs to promote a historical dimension of culture and artistic creation (Calligaro, 2013: 85).

It is in this context that we can refer to the Europeanisation of heritage. In the transition between the last two centuries, we have verified the concretization of cultural practices allied with the creation of supranational narratives, or meta-narratives (Remes, 2013; Rigney 2012), the materialization of a consistent policy of Europeanisation (Calligaro, 2013; Kaiser, 2014) aimed at strengthening the principles of the European Union integration. Europeanisation thus acquires a form of cultural practice that takes place in the economic and political context of the European Union, in a process generally produced by different actors in a very wide field that is called heritage. In order to promote the political involvement of citizens in favor of the European project, this heritage evolved as a pedagogical basis for a form of European education and, at the same time, a process of awakening

in Europe (Calligaro, 2013). Heritage is simultaneously presented as the form and substance of this specific Europe, in a process of political instrumentalization towards a wider integration (Bennett, 2007; Calligaro, 2013; Macdonald, 2003; Rigney, 2012; Shore, 2000).

Through the heritage context, recent projects such as *Europeana* (2005), *EuNaMus* (2010), or the *New Narrative for Europe* (2013) exemplify initiatives of a European dimension surrounding the memory of a common past and a narrative of post-chaos success. Europeanisation is therefore associated with initiatives promoted by the European institutions, which aim at transnational convergence and the testing of a collective memory in Europe (Kaiser, 2015). As in the constitution of nation-states in the 19th century, the production of an official narrative seeks to defend national integration (in this case, transnational) and state formation (the union of states), creating and structuring traditions, nationalizing collective memories to legitimise these states (now, the European Union), political systems, and external and internal policy goals (Kaiser, 2015). This means that memory takes place in the public debate as an effective form of personal and collective relationship with the past, placing the citizens in the centre of this debate, approaching identity and, in an opposite movement, distancing from history or, at least, from the history of great narratives (Rigney, 2012).

In the 1980s, there was an increase in the number of European museums as well as their centrality in the dissemination of this meta-narrative, in which 'identity factories' were tested (Kaiser, 2015) in a context of a sometimes diffused and disconnected European historical narrative. In this regard, and while working on the processes in which Europeanisation shapes heritage representations, Wolfram Kaiser argued:

We are interested in the extent to which processes of Europeanisation currently taking shape in different social spheres, and with different degrees of intensity, are reflected in exhibitions, influence the planning of new museums or transform their

collections; which objects are selected to represent which European history, and how these then circulate; what master narratives of the history of integration are developed and then compete for attention with each other and with existing national and regional narratives; and how the discursive and material boundaries of "Europe" are defined through museal representation. (Kaiser, 2014: 5)

Approaches to the HEH Through Its Museological Programs

From the beginning of the project, ten years passed until its inauguration. During this period, and in the absence of public debate, some studies were carried out within the academia. The first ones approached the HEH according to the document published in 2008 and elaborated on by the Commission of Experts. In her research, Anastasia Remes (2013) describes the historiographical, museological, and political context in which the HEH was conceived, while highlighting the economic and sovereign debt crisis and a European identity crisis. Remes emphasises the role that history has in this project, a reservoir in which contemporary identities are constructed, and concludes that the HEH project existed as a means to legitimise contemporary European policies. The study *Political Values in a European Museum* (Huistra, 2014), conducted by Pieter Huistra, Marijn Molema, and Daniel Wirt, is a part of this same group of investigations, in which the authors problematise the instrumentalisation of the HEH by scrutinizing values and political identities. Huistra, Molema, and Wirt characterise the museum according to its first program as a non-neutral territory, where the message is the medium between the museum and its audience. Hence, they question the place of the museum in the formation of national identity, comparing its existence to an ideological or propagandistic instrument. The authors conclude that a political ideology in favor of European integration exists in the museological program of the HEH through an idealization of a political product aiming to reproduce this normative

discourse, which is far from being objective due the selection of events and episodes. Thus, the authors consider that:

It is no wonder that the main focus of the first chapter of the Conceptual Basis is on culture. The notion of continuity rests on the stability of Europe. This stability is most easily found in some kind of a substrate underlying European history, namely European culture. (Huistra et al., 2014: 132)

While analyzing the contents of the 2008 program, the authors highlight the necessity of also considering migrations and colonization as integral and transforming aspects within the European Union, arguing that the HEH was designed as a legitimizing instrument for European integration, seeking to impose supranational narratives over national narratives, and where a common cultural identity is affirmed through the driving force of the triad: collapse, rebirth, and progress.

A second group of studies analysed both museological programs. In Veronica Settele (2015) work, given the political view that the sharing of a historical consciousness could forge a convergent European identity, She proposed checking whether the HEH introduces counter-narratives against the hegemonic narrative of integration as a success story. The author also recalls the lack of public debate surrounding the development of the project, opposing to one of the objectives of the museum: to promote greater involvement of citizens in political decisions, contributing to the construction of a more cohesive Europe. In the comparison of the two official documents, Settele additionally identifies a paradigm shift transmitted in the evolution of a full peace speech towards the emphasis on the change of borders and the oscillation between the center and periphery. As a result, in *Building a House of European History*, there is the intention to give visibility to various interpretations and multiple perspectives of history, without, though, changing their chronological presentation to the success and triumph of Europe. Thus, a timid inclusion of 'marginal voices' can be observed:

Summing up the analysis of the permanent exhibition being assembled by the HEH, I argue that regarding the Museum's representation of "marginal voices" in the context of migration and colonialism, there are substantial differences between the Conceptual Basis from 2008 and the revised concept from 2013, supplementary information on the latter being provided by the Academic Project Team. (Settele, 2015: 412)

In conclusion, Settele identifies in the HEH the attempt to create an identity factory programmed in a context of European fragmentation, a sovereign debt crisis, and the advent of the far-right nationalist parties. For the German researcher, this is done at the expense of the exclusion of those who generally have no voice, which is verified by the inexistence of counter-narratives for successful integration and generalised peace.

This second group of investigations also includes *Narrating Unity at the European Union's New History Museum* in which Tim Hilmar (2016) seeks to understand what paths exist for the construction of a cultural expression of European identity. To this end, the author uses a model of analysis that explains the formation of memory as a cultural process, an 'expressive and conceptually loosely-defined space' that '(...) enable memory agents to identify the transnational with the sacred and create an incentive to maintain a moral distance from its counterpart, the national' (Hilmar, 2016: 300). The HEH addresses the complicated relationship between the memories of Eastern Europe, which are especially traumatic in the twentieth century and placed within the centrality of the museological contents. Hilmar finds a moral principle of moderation through the permanent exhibition in this process, actively seeking to blur differences between the Nazi and Soviet regimes. In this case, Hilmar highlights the role of museography in the sense of avoiding, or alternatively putting in evidence, moral tensions that structure the framing of memory. Moreover, in Hilmar's study, the author identifies pressures for the abandonment of a conservative chronological

presentation in order to favour a narrative of integration:

Although the political independence of the two working teams is writ large in the project, there is some evidence of intervention on behalf of the politically appointed Board of Trustees with regard to diachronic consistency. The rationale of having a strictly chronological approach was dismissed “from above” to move towards a more thematic weighting, evidently in order to give the process of European integration more weight in the exhibition. (Hilmar, 2016: 317)

Ultimately, in the field of representativeness, despite the possibility of generating empathy and recognition within the objects of the collection, Hilmar (2016) points out the difference between the victims of Nazism and Stalinism, where the sense of belonging is identified in the former. Similarly, the author reports that the theme of Islam is only addressed in the last floor of the museum, an area considered to be outside the permanent exhibition. Hilmar thereby highlights the vague nature of the transnationality that is sought to represent the HEH project and the existence of a chronological line that clearly favours the thematic narrative of European integration while neglecting self-criticism and reflexivity towards colonialism and decolonization, the totalitarianism regimes other than Nazism or Communism, the relationship between Europeans and their counterparts, or the traumatic events of southern Europe. However, both authors seem to hypothesise the public’s reflection and the evolution into a conscious negotiation between centre/periphery, power/subalternity, and inclusion/exclusion upon the museum’s completion.

Interactions, the First Temporary Exhibition

The first temporary exhibition, where curators intended to explore trade, diplomatic relations, conflicts

and wars, travel, and cultural contacts, was organised into three main themes arranged in an 800 m² of exhibition area. The curators sought to invite the visitor to understand the contemporary reality ‘by engaging with the long history of cross-border contacts within Europe and the outside world’. ‘What links us to other places in Europe?’¹

The theme *Encounters* was distributed through floor -1 and addressed the concepts of trade, war, diplomacy, and knowledge. The idea that Europeans have been constantly moving and meeting across borders in order to exchange goods, fight wars, negotiate agreements, and share knowledge was developed in such a way to facilitate reflection on how and where these encounters happened, who were the actors involved and what were their experiences. In a permanent opposition of positive/dramatic aspects of European civilization, the curators narrated medieval trading networks, the Roman Empire, Greek colonization, trade routes to Asia and America, the use of money, and the first banking systems in ‘Trading’. In ‘Fighting’ they approached the Crusades at the same time as they illustrated the Turkish, the ‘30 years’ and the Napoleonic wars, not forgetting the two Great Wars, like in the permanent exhibition, and ending in the contemporary wars that raged within the Balkans in the 20th century. Concerning ‘Negotiating’ section, the curators elected the Congress of Vienna, the Peace of Westphalia, the Council of Ferrara-Florence, the League of Nations and the European Union. In ‘Learning’, the emphasis was placed on the universities, the great capitals of the arts in Rome and Paris, the European invention of the encyclopaedia in the 18th century, and the origins and creation of the museum as a place for conservation and presentation of heritage. This first sector featured the traditional disposition of written content, a lead supplemented by small texts and subtitles, audio-visuals, original objects and replicas, and interactive zones where we could find games or scenographic elements, such as a vehicle of war. The temporal and geographical hiatus verified in the narrative was extremely wide, ranging from the first five

¹ Excerpts from the introductory text to Temporary Exhibition, presented on floor -1, ‘Encounters’ nucleus. (Visited 21 April 2018)

centuries before Christ to present days, and from the Greco-Roman civilization to the wars that devastated central Europe. The second theme, *Connections*, displayed in the small exhibition area of floor 0 – the ground floor in front of the main entrance – tried to locate the visitor in the centre of the exhibition. Screens for individual use where very simple details of daily lives could be shared, such as birth or hometown, the geographical origins of the family or significant others, and preferences such as travels, music, sports clubs or food, were arranged in front of a large screen. Visitor-exhibition interaction resulted in connections between European Union countries but also outside the Union, visible on a map of Europe on a big screen. While still available online, ‘Tracking my Europe’ has resulted in an original project with immediate results that can still be validated and observed today. Yet, we are unable to realise how many participants there were up till today.

Lastly, on the first floor, we found the theme *Exchange* and the challenge ‘come on in and make yourself at home’, where we could face the recreation of the interiors of European homes of various periods with a profuse scenography of kitchens, dining rooms, and rest areas. In this area, the visitor was challenged to explore the concepts of: (1) ‘Flavors’ – through recipes and various ingredients as well as fauna and flora; (2) ‘Thoughts’ – through games, artistic techniques, travel literature, toys, dance, musical instruments and fashion; and (3) ‘Dreams’ – exploring tales and legends in the heart of private life. Given the description of the various origins of food, objects, and customs, often with origins outside the European continent, the question was posed: ‘Does not this make our everyday environment much more fascinating?’

The temporary exhibition, unlike the rest of the museum, presented written content with its objects and themes, making the use of a tablet or mobile device in contrast to its essential use for the understanding of the permanent exhibition. Furthermore, the content was presented in four

languages – English, French, Dutch and German – as opposed to the 24 languages available for the permanent exhibition. Having analysed the collection and objects presented in *Interactions* through the exhibition catalogue, we realised that the group of originals and replicas, 251 objects and documents, had very different origins. From the museum’s collection, which includes donations and acquisitions, we counted 25 objects and documents while 137 pieces came from only five countries (Belgium [56], Germany [32], Italy [19], France [16], and the United Kingdom [14]). The group of countries that loaned the pieces that illustrated the temporary exhibition also included Israel, with a total of 21 pieces, mainly in ‘Fighting’. At the other extreme, countries like Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia did not contribute any objects, whereas Bulgaria, Ireland, Latvia, and Portugal had one object each in presentation.

Shaping a European Identity?

Interactions was presented on three floors and through different narratives. On the one hand, *Encounters* presented a classic exhibition layout to portray countless and distant moments in European history, contrasting texts and subtitles to original objects and documents, and scenographic elements and moving images. In a complete alteration of the museological paradigm in *Exchange*, we found another type of exhibition, less concerned with historical rigor or classic narrative, placing the visitor in a kind of everyday life familiar to everyone. Constanze Itzel pointed out ‘The limited time available for the exhibition’s development (...) resulting in a limited possibility to carry through wide-scale academic consultations.’² Using a generous number of reproductions, including works of art or documents such as Jan Van Eyck’s ‘The Andolfini Portrait’ (1434) and the pilgrimages of Bernhard Von Breydenbach Speyer (1503), the curators showed the daily lives of many Europeans not free from stereotypes, underlining cultural exchanges at constant intersection

² Interview to the Director of the House of European History, Dr. Constanze Itzel on January 9, 2019.

and contamination. The significant use of objects and reproductions in this nucleus, such as plastic food, a canopy, wallpaper prints of flowers and others, in some way refer us to a place other than a museum, especially since, according to the ICOM definition adopted in Vienna on August 24th, 2007 (currently under review):

A museum is a non-profit (...) which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.³

The great majority of objects on display in this nucleus were not, all in all, original pieces of historical value. Thinking about replicas and reproductions not constituting a whole in relation to each other the exercise is identical. Especially in this last nucleus, one can point out the instrumentalisation of history and memory favouring, as Sharon Macdonald (2003) recalls, the sense of depoliticisation, loss of confrontation, mourning, or fear, that favours belonging. Moreover, the collection presented in the temporary exhibition was assembled to depict the narrative, to illustrate and validate the pre-conceived idea or concept and not otherwise.

Finally, let us think again about the intermediate nucleus that, connected to the virtual world, ensured a web presence and allowed interaction with the museum without a physical presence. A questionnaire disseminated to European citizens preceded this attempt to 'explore how Europeans represent the space they live in' (House of European History, 2017: 17) rehearsed in 'Tracking my Europe'. The curators sought to elaborate this interactive map to prove the effective blurring of borders between the various European countries and/or between Europe and the rest of the world.

In the same way, they intended to understand which centers and peripheries would be delimited through the answers. Effectively, the blurring of borders was verified in the interactive map, but the central European opposition vs. periphery was significantly accentuated as well. Analyzing the patterns of responses in May 2018, the HEH team concluded the existence of Eastern European orientation was '(...) probably influenced by the habits generated by the cold war decades.'⁴ Besides, as there was a strong connection between Europeans and Italian or Asian cuisine, the reference goes to 'migration and globalization as a phenomena'⁵ which seems a somewhat demanding association to us.

In 2008, the first museological program for the HEH made a brief reference to the development of temporary exhibitions without contemplating specific objectives. Five years later, as the ideas of the Academic Committee matured, a more concrete reference to the mission of temporary exhibitions was added to the new museum program:

The subject matter of the temporary exhibitions will be closely tied in to the main focus of the House of European History's mission and objectives. (...) The first phase of the building up of this collection, from 2012–14, will be focused on collecting material, on the basis of long and short-term loans, which will directly support the permanent and the first temporary exhibition: during this period, the focus will be on evidential research into relevant material in European collections (and where necessary into collections outside Europe), as well as on collecting the objects needed for the permanent and the temporary exhibition. (European Parliament, 2013: 20-42)

In the aftermath of the closing of the first temporary exhibition,

3 International Council of Museums museum definition adopted in Vienna, on August 24th, 2007. Available at: <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>. (Accessed 13 May 2015)

4 Excerpt from the video 'Results on Interactions – our 1st Temporary Exhibition'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYS521qKQdU>. (Accessed 20 February 2019)

5 *Ibid.*

we find that, to a large extent, Constanze Itzel, Director of the museum, recently stated in an interview that *Interactions* would give priority to the:

(...) opportunity to develop our audience and provide them with a varied offer. For example, a temporary exhibition (...) could be more immersive, interactive, art-based, or even tailored for just on one part of society, such as children. By using this variety of themes and content, we can appeal to a range of audiences, including people who may not usually consider visiting a museum. Temporary exhibitions complement the content of the permanent exhibition by, for example, going further back in history, or having a deeper exploration of certain topics.⁶

It is noted, however, that the first temporary exhibition contained mostly loans from only five countries. Regardless of the themes and geographies they cover, the collection presented might not be representative of the majority of communities in the European Union. In this sense, it is not easy to think of the enlargement of audiences, participation, and interaction of new audiences, that Itzel foresaw. In the same way, the effort not to neglect the 'marginal voices' can be questioned through the lack of diversity in the provenance of the objects. Finally, as Hilmar identified, here too, the thematic weight prevails against a clear chronological orientation, in favour of the narrative of evolution through the contact with the *other*.

After the presentation of the first temporary exhibition, we verified that the idea illustrates the purposes and mission of the HEH to 'explore the nature of cross-border interactions and encounters on the European continent over time' (House of European History, 2017: 8). The curators therefore programmed the permanent dichotomy between us/others to underline the constant contamination and

exchange of all kinds, from trade to culture. Eventually, one sees positioning in defense of the European development due to the *encounters* with the *other*, relieving, at the same time the pressure of the absence of certain themes in the permanent exhibition (e.g., European science, other European conflicts rather than the World Wars). Still, attention was given in depth to the peripheries.

At a time of rupture and European disaggregation, which may culminate in the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union or the rise of nationalism and anti-immigration movements throughout Europe, the mission of this exhibition is moving. It narrates the European development based on philosophical and scientific advances or great economies through exchanges. At the same time, it highlights negative aspects of the more or less remote European past but without underlining themes such as colonization or slave trade. It was, therefore, an exhibition attentive to the most recent museological debates concerning museum activism or the non-neutral place of the museum. Though, contrary to what Włodzimierz Borodziej published in the first pages of the *Interactions* catalogue, it was not so clear to us that the exhibition 'focuses on how our identity is shaped'. It is the Director of the museum who explains the antagonism: 'The HEH team does not subscribe to the objective of shaping one European identity as it conceives identity as something multiple and changing.'⁷

Therefore, this opposition seems to point to a closed debate between the program of the Committee of Experts and the museum program developed by the Academic Project Team or the museum itself, keeping in mind the absence of citizen and external participation or an apparent disinterest, certainly failing to discuss the meaning of *being European*. However, the HEH does have a place in the politics of remembrance and Europeanisation through heritage, namely, in the emphasis placed on enrichment/evolution through the permanent contamination between activities and customs as

⁶ House of European History online portal, <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/pt/node/666>. (Accessed 10 December 2017)

⁷ Interview to the Director of the House of European History, Dr. Constanze Itzel on January 9, 2019.

opposed to destruction caused by isolation/closure.

By mapping the installation and content of the first temporary exhibition, this communication intended to debate the European project for the musealisation of a transnational history and the Europeanisation of heritage. Ultimately, this article will also be of extremely importance in the development of a doctoral program that has a wider research in the HEH.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Constanze Itzel, House of European History; European Parliament; Professor Jan Baetens; Professor Raquel Henriques da Silva; Professor Susana Martins; Professor Tiago Lima Quintanilha.

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