

# History Making: The Historian as Consultant

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No one owns the past, and no one has a monopoly on how to study it, or, for that matter, how to study the relation between past and present... we are all historians today.<sup>1</sup>

The conditions of representing the past have been transformed in the early twenty-first century by 'web 2.0, including Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blogs and Wikis. The new kinds of expectations from and challenges to the historian created by the online world have been discussed by James Gardner in *Public History Review*. He argued that historians who take seriously their audience should 'not wait to see what the future holds... but rather try to shape that future.' Like many of his colleagues he is 'happy to share authority with the

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public', or adapt to 'user-generated content', but not ready to accept the demand to give up all authority.<sup>2</sup>

'If we want the public to value what we do', writes Gardner, 'we need to share the process of history'. In her introduction to a special issue of *Public History Review*, in which the contributors discuss going beyond bringing people to exhibitions or making historical knowledge 'accessible', Hilda Kean asserted that 'premises underpinning different forms of historical representation' must be opened up.<sup>3</sup> This article seeks to specify what this pattern of thought requires of the university-trained historian and starts from the new way of looking at the historical profession that is presented in my book *Making History: The Historian and Uses of the Past*.<sup>4</sup>

History is not just a genre of knowledge but also a basic feature of human life. Accounting for the past, or creating histories, to quote David Thelen, is 'as natural a part of life as eating or breathing'.<sup>5</sup> Casual references to what has taken place make up the vast majority of these accounts. But there are also a great number of deliberately created expositions of the past. They are produced in every field of society and by a wide variety of actors, from private persons to, for example, politicians and various media. The totality of them can be called *everyday history*. These accounts of the past serve present purposes – histories have innumerable functions and are of countless types. Divergent accounts also influence each other, and my suggestion is that their interaction be called the never-ending *social process of history-making*. History making, in other words, is not the preserve of academically-trained historians. They are experts but not outside observers. Scholarly historians are inescapably involved in the social process of history making. Their work goes beyond prevailing histories: they seek interpretations that make better sense of the past than the existing ones. Embedded in this effort is another constructivist function: they demonstrate ways to think about the past and how to use it. When demonstrating 'that's not how it was', historians at the same display 'how the presentation should have been constructed'. Even if they don't think of themselves as consultants on history making they act in this capacity.

In other words, historians are in two ways active agents in the social process of history-making. And since their inquiries are signified by the everyday history that surrounds them, trained historians should reflect on their profession in the first place as a cultural institution and only after that in terms of an academic discipline. The research done is directed by its culturally constructivist side even if embedded in it is

scholarly criticism of ill-founded and unjustified views of the past that results in the upgrading of prevalent knowledge.

When constructing a representation of the past trained historians aim at reconstruction.<sup>6</sup> Their effort is distinguished by an attempt to recreate the subjective world of the people studied: their goal is a fair interpretation of their actions and thoughts. That is to say, historians reconstruct the past by presenting the people studied *in their own terms*. However, this scholarly side of the undertaking does not constitute its rationale.

Historians aim at calling the audience's attention to particular past matters they have selected and arranged in order to demonstrate their present relevance. This cultural idea is the core of their endeavour and it summarises the historian's *message*. The message makes the objective concrete by displaying the study's significance; that is, it crystallises the fruitfulness of the new knowledge and the lesson embedded in it.

Thus, the specialist produces knowledge that is *sustainable*, both *meaningful* and *sound*. The idea of the dominant, cultural side of the undertaking is to demonstrate what makes the selected past matters significant, bring to light the meanings embedded in them. Still, this effort is justified only if the interpretation produced is sound; if it conveys a fair description of the people studied. In other words, trained historians serve as *cultural critics* who act simultaneously as *consultants on history-making* and as *referees in the usage of the past*.

While concentrating on consultancy, this article also discusses the ways in which the constructive and the critical sides of the historian's work are connected to each other. Acting constantly as the referee on one's own work is the crucial capacity required of a historian. Underlining this characteristic sounds odd to a trained historian since it refers to a self-evident aspect of the scholar's work. That is why asking 'what is the point of such a formulation?' is a justified reaction. The answer conveys the message of this article in a nutshell. Acting as a consultant on history making *also outside the academic world* is, when one pauses to think about it, a self-evident aspect of the scholarly historian's job. It is thinking about the meanings of this capacity rather than new practices that is called for.

The historians' traditional view of their fellow people has been articulated by Johan Huizinga, among others. History, he writes, differs from other disciplines in that its 'privilege and heavy responsibility is to remain comprehensible to all civilized people'. When the trained historian acts as a consultant on history making for their fellow people they take just one step further. The question is not only of showing how to think of past matters, but also of instructing the purposeful

production of histories. This article explores what follows when the expert thinks about this capacity that they have even if they deny it. What is implied in thinking about the study of history, as Hilda Kean puts it nicely, 'in the landscape of everyday life'?<sup>7</sup>

#### **THE CONTEXT OF THE HISTORIAN'S WORK**

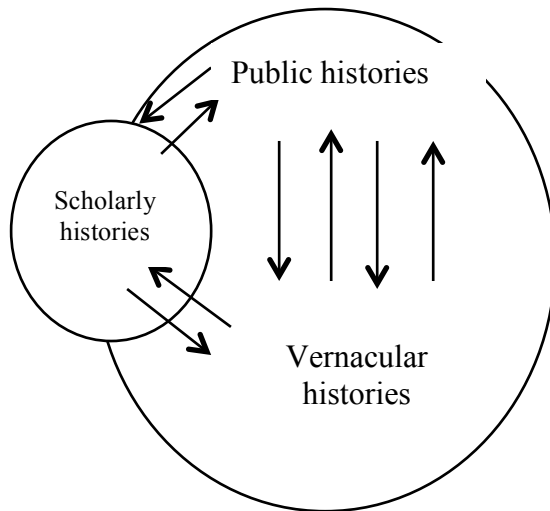
History in 'the landscape of everyday life' expresses the idea of public history from the vernacular perspective. As it has been defined by Hilda Kean public history denotes neither a distinct field of history nor an orientation in historical investigation. Public history refers, as she sensibly emphasises, to the processes by which history is constructed and to the practices 'involving people as well as nations and communities in the creation of their own histories'.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of public history – ambiguously defined earlier on – had for a long time similar status as the onetime 'new histories', orientations like oral history or history of sexuality. Until their breakthrough during the last third of the twentieth century all of these strands had led their lives on the margins of 'proper' history; they had been repressed by professional 'orthodoxy'. By allowing earlier heretics to enter the mainstream the profession questioned its received notions about the actors, themes and approaches of historical research. This was the first of two passages to the transformation of the parameters of historical research, the paradigmatic change. The second route was provided by the concurrent linguistic turn that was common to all fields in the study of society and culture.<sup>9</sup>

Being an integral part of the social process of history making is the key lesson taught to the historical profession by the paradigmatic change. Until the end of the twentieth century the majority of historians had been deceiving themselves in thinking that there was a vantage point outside the history they were studying. Figure 1 presents the scholarly historians' position in the social process of history making.<sup>10</sup>

The three elements of the figure bring to the fore history-in-society,<sup>11</sup> a whole constituted by three different kinds of accounts of the past with their interaction. This is the context in which any scholarly historian works. In spite of participating in the social process of history making they have a distinct identity even if trained historians have not always distanced themselves from public narratives. The dividing line was blurred in many countries by nation building during the nineteenth century and has often been unclear even after that due to the national bias common to many scholars.

Figure 1 The dynamics of the social process of history-making



Heritage illuminates the relation of public narratives<sup>12</sup> to vernacular histories<sup>13</sup> since no dividing line can be drawn between them. In spite of the ceaseless mutual influence there is a strong tendency of public narratives to dominate over popular histories. Scholarly historians function as consultant and referee in relation to accounts in both categories. However, as will be repeatedly argued below, their connection to vernacular history making should be dominated by constructive support while criticism should prevail in relation to public narratives.

When clarifying one's stance on the social context of the case at hand the consulting historian must keep in mind, first and foremost, that both public narratives and vernacular histories have their own rationales that are different from the logic of scholarly history – their idea is not to convey epistemologically warranted knowledge of the past. It is also useful to remember that these diverse accounts of the past originate, in metaphorical terms, respectively 'from above' and 'from below'. Their multifaceted roots notwithstanding, public narratives tend to serve as instruments in the use of power<sup>14</sup> while vernacular histories rather reflect people's intentions to mould their own life.

Memorialisation, for instance, may well result from people's collective appreciation or mourning rather than serve the use of power.<sup>15</sup> Still, museums and memorial sites reflect in many cases a hegemonic, often national master narrative. History education, an essential part of

public narratives, highlights the many aims and purposes that uses of the past can support. On the other hand, vernacular histories and memory work 'from below' often counteract views on the past that are supported by those in power. A case in point is the 'new histories' mentioned above since many of them gave a say to previously voiceless people. It is also good to remember that moral purposes and guidelines are more often than not the crucial element in vernacular histories. These accounts are usually sustained, as are public narratives, by strong mythical views on guilt and victimhood. Nor must it be forgotten that there is, both in public narratives and vernacular histories, the risk of disseminating, for example, racist views.<sup>16</sup>

Denouncing the setting provided by public narratives and vernacular histories, as many historians do, impedes disciplining the research work. Influences from the surrounding culture may divert the historian to describe the past people studied in terms of the present, instead of making sense, for instance, of their actions in their contemporary conditions. To avoid such risks the sensible historian recognises that the subject they intend to investigate implies an opinion on the social circumstances in which they work as well as that the finished study influences its audience. Thinking about the research process in terms of specifying one's message and increasing its sustainability is, in addition, a fruitful mode of organising the research work as *Making History* demonstrates in detail. But this present article focuses on trained historians as consultants on vernacular history making, a function that has become constantly more urgent from the end of the twentieth century due to the renegaded features of democracy, especially the minimal say of citizens in public affairs in all Western countries. I am agonised, to paraphrase Eliane Glaser, by 'a political system that protects elites and provides a mere illusion of democratic choice relying on a population enthralled' not just 'by the latest iPhone' but also by seemingly self-evident, yet unsound interpretations of the past coming 'from above'.<sup>17</sup>

The idea is to discuss the ways and conditions in which my profession can strengthen vernacular history making as a method of enhancing citizens' critical capabilities and contribute to the usage of their own past as a means of coping with the conditions that dominate their lives. In this sense the article carries on one of the main aims of *Making History* – searching for, creating and upholding a participatory historical culture and fostering social practices based on a collaborative relationship between trained/specialist and 'lay'/non-expert engagements with the past.

### THE NATURE OF VERNACULAR HISTORY MAKING

Creating a printed photographic book with pieces of text on the past – for example, about a family or group – is inexpensive nowadays. Producing these kinds of histories, most often addressed only to the people immediately concerned, is also quite an ordinary social practice today. The opening up, mainly thanks to internet, of access to the tools, artefacts and texts of historical inquiry has blurred the dividing line between historians and non-historians. The hopelessness of academic gate-keeping efforts regarding the study of the past is starkly illustrated by web 2.0. Justifying the continued existence of the history profession has to take place with reference to arguments that convince people enfranchised to create their own histories.<sup>18</sup>

When discussing vernacular history making it is good to keep in mind Raphael Samuel's basic point: 'if history was thought of as an activity rather than a profession, then the number of its practitioners would be legion'. Equally important is to remember another perspective emerging from Samuel's works: studies of past matters had been conducted for centuries before history was established as an academic discipline of professionals about two centuries ago.<sup>19</sup> A novelty of the late twentieth century is a change in the thinking of history scholars. Taking in the notion of history making as a basic social practice is one aspect of the paradigmatic change, albeit one that has only slowly made headway.

The normality of purposive vernacular history making illuminates the vastly enlarged potentials of public history and invites academically trained historians to reflect on the resulting histories. Indeed, the idea of consulting on history making outside the academic world has been transformed into a moral imperative to the history scholar.<sup>20</sup> Conferences on *Unofficial Histories* – held in May 2012 in London and June 2013 in Manchester – demonstrated that the past is constantly being represented by the most varying ways from different exhibitions to videogames and by people from many other walks of life.<sup>21</sup>

Analysing the current multitude of histories has also made it apparent that uninhibited commercial and political uses of the past characterise our globalised online world. A useful critical examination of these usages of the past has been produced by Jerome de Groot with his book *Consuming History*. My own *Making History*, in turn, opens a trained historian's perspective and is based on my own experiences from history making outside the academic world during the last three decades.<sup>22</sup>

When working in 1979–86 as the full-time commissioned historian of Paperiliitto – the trade union of workers in the Finnish paper and pulp industry – I directed a project the original idea of which was to give to the members a say in producing the union’s history. Fairly soon I had to acknowledge that a fundamental change had taken place: I was consulting more than 200 workers on doing research in what was, in their view, their own history. Having lectured in history for thirteen years at the University of Helsinki I had to admit that ‘ordinary people’ approached the meaning of the past in a way that was quite different from the professional mode that I had taught to my university students.<sup>23</sup>

As an academic I had also to settle on to distinctive feature of history making outside the university world: these activities are undertaken by ‘self-organised historians’, as Hilda Kean characterises them.<sup>24</sup> It has become crystal clear during the following decades that the consultant has to adapt to a situation where the research agenda has been determined before they became involved. What they can do is to help manage project already in progress. The experiences from Paperiliitto resulted in a new way of thinking about the trained historian in society – even if I coined the ‘consultant on history-making’ only after *Making History* had already been published.<sup>25</sup> Rather than just transmitting knowledge of the past it is our task also to encourage and support other people engaged with history making and to be available when assistance is requested.

Involvement with various projects of vernacular history-making since the Paperiliitto years has underlined four essential lessons taught to me during my time as a full-time consultant. It was, first, quite an experience for a scholar to learn that sly and wily are epithets often assigned to trained historians. The same thing was found by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen in their project on the popular uses of history in American life in the 1990s. One of the greatest obstacles to their efforts turned out to be people’s fear of ‘being manipulated by people who distort the past to meet their own needs – whether for commercial greed, political ambition, or cultural prejudice’.<sup>26</sup>

The second crucial lesson learned thirty years ago can be summarised as a piece of advice: beware of patronage. It was indubitable that the incentive to engage with the past was the workers’ own situation, not the history of their union or of some other formal institution. That the risk of patronage is a permanent one has also been demonstrated by Rosenzweig and Thelen. When people had the opportunity to approach the past on their own terms, that is, ‘not as a



classroom progress from election to election', they 'grounded historical inquiry in the present circumstances, perceptions, and needs'.<sup>27</sup>

The third lesson was that the basic demands on a trained historian are not alien to present-day common sense: what is required is taking seriously the deeds and thinking of past people and being fair to them.<sup>28</sup> The problem is that acquiring the necessary skills as well as learning to present the findings in a way that convinces the people addressed takes time without a trainer. This is also the reasonable perspective in which an expert should think about their role as consultant.

The most fundamental message was that neither the concept nor the substance of 'history' can be taken for granted. Consulting on vernacular history making has given me as a scholar countless incentives to explore how and why the past becomes history. In a more practical perspective, I have learned that the academically-trained historian must always detach themselves from disciplinary views in order to avoid imposing them upon their audience. The key to success is to find the balance between the consultant's two tasks: strengthening the motivation of people to be consulted while conveying the skills of a trained historian.

#### **FOCUSING ON THE IDEA OF THE PROJECT AT HAND**

Creating histories originates in the intuition that there is something to be gained from engagement with the past or, as I would specify this notion, from a metaphorical dialogue with people who have lived under different conditions.<sup>29</sup> Accepting this idea means that the consultant, if they want to avoid patronage, must start with finding out the incentive to launch the project at hand and then strengthen the initiators' motivation. In other words, conveying the trained historian's skills begins only after the consultant is familiar with the project's rationale.

A useful way of becoming aware of the initiators' ideas is to create conditions in which they collectively hone the idea of their project: Why have these particular past matters been chosen? What makes these very aspects of the past fruitful? Introducing these kinds of questions is a practical way for the consultant to give rise to a discussion about the significance of the anticipated findings. The concrete aim that directs these exchanges of views is refining the message the people involved have in mind, and in this way specifying the significance they have attached to the anticipated findings.

Priority given to the rationale of the project at hand is the foundation of the consultant's subsequent work. The aim is both to fine-tune the idea of the project and to ensure the fairness of critical remarks at the latter stages of the consultation. Helping the people involved in dealing with the agenda of the inquiry they have determined and in managing a

project already in progress also gives the consultant the opportunity to direct attention to two less obvious, but absolutely essential themes with regard to the project at hand. One is about the chances of historical inquiry in general and the other about the consequences of the results achieved.

The reason for raising discussion about the limits of historical knowledge is that the past is made knowable only by an active process of construction: the common belief in a solid past is misleading. In contrast to the tendency to think about stable and unambiguous past entities, the past is constituted by the interchanges of innumerable people's actions and thoughts in wildly variable locations. A simple way to demonstrate this characteristic of the past is to refer to the missing unanimity among the people involved in the project when they aim at explaining the reasons for a current event. What follows in the case of an historical inquiry is the imperative that reasons for focusing on the particular past affairs selected must be defined.

Another imperative to engagement with the past is making sure that the chosen matters will be approached fairly. This means, in practice, focusing on the connection to the people studied and paying attention to what is required in establishing the link with them. The point is that the virtual dialogue with these people makes sense only if they have been given a fair hearing and their world has been described adequately. What is called for is discovering the way they understood their reality, finding out their patterns of thought and aiming at the knowledge upon which they acted. The idea is that fairness is the criterion of sound knowledge in historical inquiry, a stand that requires learning to keep one's own views separate from those of the people studied.

To make, in one way or another, the people consulted aware of the limits on acquiring knowledge of the past is the consultant's responsibility. Presenting reservations must, however, be done in a way that strengthens their motivation instead of leading to defeatism. The key lies in finding the balance between two views that are ostensibly mutually contradictory. One is that an inquiry into the past does not result in reconstruction in the sense of presenting the past circumstances 'as they really were' since producing such a description is beyond the capability of even the best trained professional. What is within the bounds of possibility is intending to reach the subjective world of the people studied. Yet, this position does not undermine the idea of the project at hand. On the contrary, the very way of aiming at fairness towards the past people increases the awareness of our own thinking and enhances it as well as producing fruitful knowledge.

Introducing the paramount reservations about knowledge of the past is the most demanding part of the consultant's work and calls for careful planning. An express discussion of the issue is in all likelihood self-defeating; it is difficult to stimulate such an exchange of views even among university students of history. Proceeding in terms of condensing the fruitfulness of the research agenda is probably the best solution, especially since as a context this aim invites discussion also about the consequences of the anticipated results.

#### **CONNECTING TO THE PRESENT CONCERNS OF THOSE ADDRESSED**

Why do people engage with the past? What for? Their inquiries serve present purposes, and are based on ideas embedded in their present world. Here, it is pays to take on board Raphael Samuel's point: 'the past that inspires genealogists, local historians and collectors is not random' but connected to what is important for them.'

For many of the local trade union activists I trained in the 1980s, engagement with the past resulted from their political views. They were worried about the future of the working-class movement and wanted to restore its traditions. The means to that end was to explore their personal life experiences and to establish connections between these and those of earlier generations. In other words, the key to the purpose that the project at hand serves lies in the link to the people studied. It is the consultant's job to get the people involved to analyse their own situation in order to identify those current concerns. It goes without saying that the relevance of the past varies depending on the people being consulted.

Hilda Kean's description of British 'researchers of family, locality and place' illustrates the situation the consultant is confronted with. Some engaged with the past are looking 'in a vague way for a wider family', others for an 'educational hobby' and some 'for filling in gaps in family stories'. But there are also those who seek 'the fantasy of connection with someone in the past'.<sup>30</sup> Keeping in mind this multitude of potential concerns is worth the consultant's while when helping the people involved to specify the purpose/s that their engagement serves. A useful method of identifying the relevant present concerns is collective discussion about available knowledge. The question is now of an activity much broader than the usual scholarly analysis of previous research. What I refer to was, for instance, the spur for the non-academic projects of history making in practically all developed industrial countries in the late 1970s and 1980s. In Sweden, for example, the incentive was that many aspects of industrialization and the workers' past conditions were

unknown as Gunnar Sillén highlighted. Or, as Raphael Samuel put the unexplored, diverse past which inspired the History Workshop movement, one could see in industrial archaeology and the retrieval of oral memory, for instance, that it was a sense of cultural loss that animated the growth of popular enthusiasm for study of the past.

Another method of approaching the link to the past people studied is to think about the project in terms of its audience.<sup>31</sup> To whom do we want to demonstrate the relevance of the past matters we have selected? Why is this particular part of the past relevant for the people we have in mind? The consultant has to emphasise that answering these kinds of questions is crucial since in any society different people appreciate divergent aspects of the past and because one can overestimate the proficiency of one's own explanation. The initiators of the project have to learn two things. The first is that the message they are outlining may not be important for everyone. And the second, that instead of taking their own assumptions for granted they must constantly assess critically their beliefs.

Openness for various perspectives is one of the useful aspects of thinking in terms of the audience. Another profitable aspect to which the consultant should direct attention is that the people whom the project is addressing are not passive consumers of research results: they have their own ways of turning reminiscences and other fragments of the past into histories. For the purpose of making this point the expert has an ample means at their disposal, demonstrating to those advised that it is useful to think about the process of inquiry as a constant exchange of views with the audience. There comes always, for example, to light situations where looking at the alternatives from the audience's perspective offers new solutions.

This second metaphorical dialogue characteristic of historical inquiry gives insights both to the views of the people addressed and to their way of thinking; that is, one learns to take their world seriously. The point the consultant should emphasise is that getting the message across depends in part on the degree to which the performers have come to understand how the audience understands its reality. The more relevant the meanings in the findings and the lesson embedded in them are to the current concerns of those addressed the more readily they are accepted. One method to this end is to think about the implications and consequences of the expected findings from the perspective of those addressed. Furthermore, swaying the audience depends on the language spoken and on the mode in which the findings will be presented.

When those responsible for the project choose the mode of the final presentation a tricky situation arises for the consultant who is a trained historian. They should discard the academic way of thinking in terms of written texts. In Paperiliitto, by far the most popular way for my trainees to convey their findings was to put on an exhibition of captioned old photographs. They also conveyed the results of their inquiry in plays, processions, videos, music programmes and recitations as well as one long-playing record. Several books and dozens of articles also emerged but they did not have any privileged status. This is what took place in 1980s, well before the world of web 2.0.

The awkward questions about the modes of disseminating the findings a historical inquiry produces are, in a way, just the tip of the iceberg. The underlying, fundamental issue will be revealed when one thinks about assessing the results, not to speak of prioritising an exhibition, a poem or an article. It is possible to examine the soundness and meaningfulness of the findings but it is self evident that such a perspective is far too narrow. Vernacular history making cannot be assessed in the same way as scholarly research. And the difference does not arise only from the absence of the processes of reasoning in the end-product.

Analysing and comparing the divergent potential modes of final presentations arouses philosophical and theoretical problems that fall beyond my competence. Nor is this the place to deal with the essence or qualities typical of vernacular history making, still less to discuss the necessity or sense of such a definition. It suffices to condense the activities the consultant can and should perform while not trespassing on the nature of vernacular history making.

#### **CONVEYING THE SKILLS OF A TRAINED HISTORIAN**

As regards the academically trained historian, a key theme in orientation towards the role of a consultant has been provided by the linguistic turn. It is good to remember that one's own concept of reality and one's own expressions condition one's thinking about the past. This lesson was taught to me while working in Paperiliitto. The people whose research work I was advising shared the same mother tongue and were roughly of my generation. Yet it took more than one year's full-time work to feel I could get my points across in the way I had intended.

Creating trustworthiness is another important aspect of the consultant's work and takes more time than learning to avoid misunderstandings. On the other hand, it was quite an experience to discover eventually, being an openly social-democratic person, that I

was not suspected by the communists as having ulterior motives. During the years after Paperiliitto I have learned that it is in the trained historians' interest to take seriously even less extreme misgivings. The risk of scholars being regarded as patronising, and sometimes even arrogant, is a real one.

Giving respect is the positive way of inspiring confidence among those to be consulted. What is called for in general is taking seriously the agenda they have made up for the inquiry and to pay attention, when it is warranted, to such aspects of the agenda that are significant also for advancing historiography. This was a much simpler task three decades ago, before the breakthrough of the 'new histories'. But people's ingenuity has by no means disappeared and continues to strengthening their motivation.

To sum up: success in conveying the skills of a trained historian depends, first, on the self image the consultant creates. Acknowledging the key role of the trainees' disposition towards the expert demands an attitudinal change, detaching oneself from scholarly patterns of thought and identifying one's socially and culturally preconceived ideas. Secondly, the consultant is more successful if they are in touch with the current concerns of those being advised – with the reasons that led them to engage with the past. On the other hand, the consultant can create, based on their professional experience, a justified, sustainable position of authority. They need to establish a down-to-earth approach but not stifle enthusiasm; convey the necessity of finding the right balance between the aims and the resources; and raise the question of planning in general, the division of duties and the carrying out the work in distinct stages.

In Paperiliitto it turned out that an exhibition of photographs was a useful first intermediate target: it was not too difficult to realise and achieving it was a great boost to the next stage in the project. Regarding substance, the consultant's central message must be that anyone moving from passing everyday remarks on the past to the creation of histories faces the same problems that have given rise to the history profession. The crucial task is to discipline oneself and proceed fairly on the basis of evidence. One does, however, need to learn to tap the primary sources for all the fruitful information embedded in them instead of just assessing their reliability.<sup>32</sup> But fairness towards those advised, and especially taking seriously the rationale of their effort, does not mean taking their ideas at face value. It is an essential part of the trained historian's job to try to prevent people from relying on prejudiced, simplistic or outdated interpretations of the past and to demonstrate and

correct weaknesses in prevalent histories. Trained historians should develop and strengthen people's critical capabilities.

#### **INDEPENDENT THINKING AS THE FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY**

Learning to distance oneself from one's thinking is what historical inquiry can offer those who engage with the past with an open mind. This critical capacity embraces also the ability to relate one's interpretations of the past to existing knowledge. This is part of the consultant's tasks. Other goals are to get those advised to assess their intentions in terms of the prevailing interpretations, to bring to light silenced aspects of the past, question common explanations and to substitute hearsay for verifiable accounts or a combination of these this kinds of aims.

Divergent histories influence each other in the never-ending social process of history-making which highlights the dynamics embedded in the totality of accounts termed everyday history. It is easy to see that the interaction of the various histories cannot be peaceful because of the different interests behind them and to learn that, as a consequence, all historical knowledge is contested by its nature. This characteristic of history is the bread and butter of a scholarly historian and historians without formal training have to get accustomed to this.

The social process of history making is actually a battleground of rivalling interpretations – the field of the politics of history – and the project at hand must be located in this theatre. It is the consultant's job show to those responsible for a project that an inescapable involvement in current debates is the result of the message their undertaking seeks to convey. Being a participant in the politics of history is the way those engaged with a historical inquiry are connected to the surrounding society. This link has two sides: they are concurrently influenced by the present conditions and seek to have an impact on them.

Since the two-way connection to society is true of all histories, analysing this link displays the adequate method of evaluating the prevailing presentations of the past. In whose desire for knowledge do the interpretations criticised originate and to what kind of concerns they are connected? Who are the people that constitute the audience to which these views on the past have been addressed? And since history is an integral part of justifying all policies, analysing the references to the past in these policies is a useful means of learning also their aims which are not always manifest. It is also the consultant's responsibility to demonstrate that an interpretation that fails to meet the demand of fairness to those in the past being studies is problematical. At best, these

kinds of histories mislead both their creators and their audience because they strengthen existing preconceived ideas and prejudices and, at worst, are pieces of political propaganda. The consultant must persuade those involved in a project to distance themselves from their place in the politics of history. They have to dissociate themselves not only from the prevailing interpretations but also from their own alternative view. Performing this requirement of double detachment is the reasonable version of the same intention that is misleadingly called objectivity; it is possible to discipline one's feelings and opinions but not to get rid of them.

In Paperiliitto I experienced a dilemma connected to my identity. Having transcended the social and cultural gulf between an academic historian and industrial workers it became increasingly difficult to distance myself from the views of my collaborators. The dilemma is a general one and has been aptly characterized by Roy Rosenzweig: it really is not easy to be simultaneously 'a trusted insider and a dispassionate outside expert'.<sup>33</sup> The common cause suffers if the specialist loses their integrity.

The specialist takes part in discussions of the significance of particular aspects of the past studied, but their prime role is to act as a one who provides expert advice. Remembering this does not lead either to subordination of the needs and aspirations of the laypeople involved to academic protocols nor to sacrificing scholarly aims to non-disciplinary goals. The forms for a participatory historical culture along these lines can be positioned, for example, on a continuum with one end made up of common research projects and the other end by plays or other historical performances with trained historians as consultants in the wings. The new pattern of thought suggests a dynamic and reciprocal cooperation between professional and other historians, a collaboration in which both sides learn from each other.

Contributing to the emergence of the kinds of collaborative practices suggested above is the way in which trained historians have the opportunity to strengthen independent thinking as the key prerequisite of democracy. Considering the extent to which vernacular history making has grown, initiating a deliberately conceived participatory historical culture would also be a way of the history profession justifying its continued existence.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Hayden White, 'Afterword: manifesto time', in Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Alun Munslow (eds), *Manifestos for History*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, p231.
- <sup>2</sup> James B. Gardner, 'Trust, Risk and Public History: A View From the United States', *Public History Review*, vol 17, 2010, pp52-6.
- <sup>3</sup> Hilda Kean, 'Introduction', *Public History Review*, vol 18, 2011, pp1-11.
- <sup>4</sup> Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012.
- <sup>5</sup> 'A Participatory Historical Culture', in Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, p190.
- <sup>6</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time And Narrative, Volume 3*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1988, pp142-144. See also Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol 1, *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, London and New York, 1994, pp434-35.
- <sup>7</sup> Hilda Kean, 'Introduction', in Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (eds), *The Public History Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 2013, pxx.
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid*, ppxiii; xvi-xviii.
- <sup>9</sup> More comprehensively about the paradigmatic change, see Jorma Kalela, *Making History: The Historian and Uses of the Past*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012, chapter 1, especially pp3-5.
- <sup>10</sup> The first version of the figure was published in Jorma Kalela, *Historiantutkimus ja historia*, Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2000, p65. The idea of this book, the predecessor of *Making History*, is to criticise the conventional, restricted mode of reflecting on the historian's theoretical and methodological questions.
- <sup>11</sup> About the concept see Kalela, *Making History*, ppxii-xiii.
- <sup>12</sup> When referring to these accounts in *Making History*, as I did in Kalela, *Historiantutkimus ja historia*, I used the term 'public histories' instead of 'public narratives'. Reformulation is called for in order to avoid confusion with 'public history' in singular.
- <sup>13</sup> In *Making History* I used the term 'popular histories' instead of 'vernacular histories'. The former doesn't connote the similar kind of difference from public narratives that there is in architecture between 'domestic and functional rather than public buildings' (according to *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*).
- <sup>14</sup> This tendency has been strikingly demonstrated by Sirkka Ahonen in her study on coping with the past in three different countries that have experienced a civil war: Finland, South Africa and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Sirkka Ahonen, *Coming to Terms with a Dark Past: How Post-Conflict Societies Deal with History*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien, 2012.
- <sup>15</sup> Here see, for example, Paul Ashton, Paula Hamilton and Rose Searby, *Places of the Heart: Memorials in Australia*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2012.
- <sup>16</sup> The crucial role of arch-typical myths is one of the threads through Ahonen 2012.
- <sup>17</sup> Quotation from Glaser's article, 'We are just more subtle about our propaganda', *Guardian Weekly*, 24 May 2013. See also Kalela, *Making History*, p146.
- <sup>18</sup> To introduce this challenge is one way of putting the message of *Making History*. On 'enfranchising the historical consumer' see Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 2009.
- <sup>19</sup> Quotation from Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p17. Together with the posthumously published second volume *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain*, Verso, London and

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New York, 1998, this book should actually be compulsory reading for every history student.

- <sup>20</sup> The ensuing challenge has been met, in addition to *Public History Review*, vol 19, 2012, by Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (eds), *The Public History Reader*, Routledge, London, 2013.
- <sup>21</sup> About the conferences on unofficial histories, see <http://unofficialhistories.wordpress.com/>.
- <sup>22</sup> DeGroot, *Consuming History*; the chapter of *Making History* that presents conclusions based on these experiences – ‘The people addressed’ – has been republished in Kean and Martin, *The Public History Reader*, pp104-128.
- <sup>23</sup> A more comprehensive description of the fundamental change referred to here, see Kalela 2012, 54-57.
- <sup>24</sup> Kean, *The Public History Reader*, pxxi.
- <sup>25</sup> Included in the role of the ‘consult’ are elements of ‘mentor’ and ‘sparring partner’.
- <sup>26</sup> Kalela, *Making History*, p162; Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, pp12-13.
- <sup>27</sup> Thelen, ‘A Participatory Historical Culture’, p192. That vernacular history making opens a new perspective on traditional adult education was the theme of my unpublished paper at the 1991 World Conference on Comparative Adult Education, Ibadan, Nigeria, 7-10 October 1991, ‘Patronage as a problem of adult education. The significance of research done by ordinary people.’
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid*, p201.
- <sup>29</sup> More about the virtual dialogue with the people studied, see Kalela, *Making History*, p136.
- <sup>30</sup> Hilda Kean, *London Stories: Personal Lives, Public Histories*, Rivers Oram Press, London, Sydney and Chicago, 2004, pp12–15. See also Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, ‘At Home with the Past: Background and Initial Findings from the National Survey’, in Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton (eds), *Australians and the Past*, special issue of *Australian Cultural History*, vol 22, 2003, pp5–30.
- <sup>31</sup> Thinking in terms of the audience pays off also in cases where the initiators have only had their own group in mind. This approach, too, may even lead to an insight that the findings expected may interest outsiders.
- <sup>32</sup> More about the approach misleadingly termed by the professionals as source-criticism and about the transition from the primacy of ‘reliability’ to the priority of ‘fruitfulness’ in reading the sources, see Kalela, *Making History*, pp31-32.
- <sup>33</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, ‘Everyone a historian’, in Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, p184.