

## **“International Council on Public History? Bringing Global Public History Closer” Public History in Romania**

**Ioana Teodorescu**

Romania is an Eastern European country which was part of the Soviet-block during 1945-1989. Prior to this period, most of Romania's history relates rather separately to the three main provinces the country is made of, and which came together as a national state only in 1918: Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania. There are two main components in the present understanding of public history in Romania: one continues a 'classic' museum-type approach, while a more dynamic and recent trend builds around restoring the historical truth with regards to the falsified accounts of the communist years.

The first section includes:

- ethnographic museums: base their collections on rural tools and technical systems, as well as vernacular houses, transplanted and preserved in open-air locations throughout the country
- city museums: collect and display artefacts related to local history
- memorial houses: preserve and show some works and archives of writers, artists, historians, architects
- former communist prisons transformed into museums: collect artefacts and documents from the communist period; interested in partnerships with foreign institutions with expertise in similar restorations

The second sector is more complex and includes numerous varied initiatives such as institutions, working groups, journals and media. There has been thorough resistance at various political levels against reinstating accuracy of historical events and documents under the communist regime, mainly because the post-communist political class had been infiltrated by former Communist Party leaders and activists, as well as former members of the *Securitate* (the Romanian Secret Service similar to KGB in the Soviet Union). Some initiatives undertaken after 1990 are:

- Foundation Memoria ([www.revista.memoria.ro/](http://www.revista.memoria.ro/)) has a journal (started 1990) which publishes written and oral historical evidence related to communist prisons and political prisoners, most of whom were political figures or Orthodox/Catholic clerics-religious themes are often connected to national pathos
- The Institute for Investigation of the Communist Crimes in Romania ([www.crimelecomunismului.ro](http://www.crimelecomunismului.ro)) is a well-established and well-connected institution that: collects/displays communist archives online; organizes book launches, conferences and exhibitions; runs volunteer programs for students interested in recuperating/filing related documents; has established national and international partnerships with similar organizations in Poland and the Czech Republic (Portal of European Memory: [www.memoryofnation.eu](http://www.memoryofnation.eu))
- Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania: issued its detailed Final Report in 2006 (663 pages) which elaborates on all aspects of Romanian society during 1945-1989, and offers succinct biographies of Nomenklatura members (communists leaders and secret service agents). The document was coordinated by a large team headed by Professor Vladimir Tismaneanu (University of Maryland), leading expert in Stalinism and Romanian communist regime. Following the presentation of this report, Romanian president Traian Basescu issued a formal declaration which publicly condemned the communist regime.

**Future cooperation:** Romanian institutions can only benefit from launching additional international partnerships with Western associations with organizational experience in public history, as well as from former communist countries. Challenges include Westerners difficulty to grasp details of communist experience and all foreigners' access to Romanian websites and the massive body of

documents (no translation available yet) and a certain cultural difference in approach, written and/or oral discourse. Romanian organizations have different expectations which need to be addressed at point of contact.

International concerns: After tough censorship during communist years, Romania is very keen to be again part of the international community and welcomes re-connection with European countries, as well as North American contacts (traditionally, with countries where Romanian Diaspora is well-represented). A thorough presentation of historical themes in Western countries during same period 1945-1989 would help the Romanian public to discern between favourable models to import and problematic issues it should look upon with caution.

## **Utpal Kanti Dhar**

But, truly speaking, I am keenly following this process since it started. Let me introduce to you all first.

I am Utpal Kanti Dhar from Bangladesh. Though I have studied Chemistry in my academic life, I am always deeply interested in history, both past & contemporary. I was an eye witness of a history in the making, that is the freedom struggle of Bangladesh which culminated in the War of Liberation. I had the privilege of being an active participant of that glorious chapter of our history. For the last 3 years, I am in charge of two organizations, both with great historical significance. These two organizations are: Jamalpur Gandhi Ashram & Freedom Struggle Museum. These two organizations are engaged in various activities which uphold history and interpret it in a meaningful way in the context of contemporary history.

Jamesport Gandhi Ashram is itself a historic site of conscience and a marker in the history in the backdrop of the anti-colonial struggle of the people of the Indian subcontinent against the British rule. It has a glorious history of 75 years. We all know that historic sites have unique power to inspire social consciousness and action. Ashram has this power too. Ashram is now interpreting contemporary history and engaged in various programs that stimulate dialogues on pressing social issues and also share opportunities for people's involvement in issues raised in this historic site. Freedom Struggle Museum is working alongside the Ashram for the last 3 years in preserving the glorious history of our freedom struggle & busy in collecting documents, facts & mementos. The Museum is now conducting a village-wise survey in 6 districts of our country to identify killing fields & killing sites during our War of Liberation in 1971, collecting the names of perpetrators & collaborators of war crimes. Museum has set up a district-wise network comprising many freedom fighters & social activists as volunteers. It has already succeeded in unearthing several killing fields & killing sites in this area.

So, for obvious reasons, I have a deep interest in the Portland process and looking forward for a very positive outcome out of it.

## **Public History, Public Interest – Public History in the Canadian Civil Service Jean-Pierre Morin, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada**

When one considers the place of Public History in the Canadian Civil Service, first thoughts are always centered on Canada's national museums or the Historical Sites Board of Parks Canada, which manages Canada's extant historical heritage. While these groups do undertake important work of researching and disseminating the history of Canada to a broader public, there is a considerable amount of Public History undertaken in Canada which is, shall we say, not so very

“public”. Several different government departments employ historians and historical researchers to examine a wide range of issues internal to their operations, such as for litigation, policy development and claims against the Government. While this work is vital to the management of government operations, it goes largely unnoticed outside of the specific government body and is somewhat scorned by Academic Historians or those affiliated to Public History institutions such as museums. One specific criticism is that the historical research is biased and lacking objectivity, or not worthy of public consumption.

One such example would be the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, the federal body responsible for managing and addressing issues pertaining to Canada’s indigenous peoples as well as managing Canada’s northern territories. The Department undertakes historical research for 3 different purposes: research of claims made against the Government by indigenous groups; research as preparation for litigation against the Government; and research to broaden the basic awareness of departmental history, for one of the oldest continuous administrative body in Canadian History. While the first two categories are entirely for internal consumption and not for a wider general public, the Departmental History awareness category follows much of the same issues and approaches as found in the broad concepts of Public History.

There are 2 fundamental issues which arise when discussing the state of historical research (all of which is Public History as it is outside of the academic sphere) within the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Firstly, history is largely associated with the resolution of claims and litigation, and secondly, there is little appreciation of the impact of a broader understanding of the history of the Department could have on its work. There is, therefore, little to no resources allocated to Public History Awareness initiatives. Any research permitted must be done with existing resources, everything must be justified and approved before work may begin and attempts to bridge efforts with Academia are rebuffed by those academics for fear of being associated with a government body with a history of cultural oppression.

This reality is not unique to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, but to other Canadian departments attempting to raise awareness of their individual histories as well as their place within the Canadian historical Diaspora. These issues are also impacting the departments’ ability to both attract and retain historians on staff because of the perceived academic stigma of working for the “Feds”. At its core, public historians within the civil service of Canada face an uphill battle for recognition on two separate fronts: within their own government bodies who question the worth of undertaking historical research at all; and with the historical community as a whole who value their work as inferior or “biased” compared to “pure” academic research.

This perceived stigma is one which has been identified by the Canadian Historical Society’s Working Group on Public History as a stumbling block in attempts to improve the relationship between Public and Academic historians. As public historians continue to feel excluded from the larger historical community in Canada, despite the efforts of the Working Group, they are searching for new venues and forums where they may discuss their interests and needs with other historians undertaking similar work and facing similar challenges. As there is no such Canadian forum, they are looking for one in an international context. The creation of such an international forum could go a long way to assist civil servant historians in making their work more relevant to their departments and all Canadians. Specifically, by exploring how the government departments and ministries of other countries have grappled with these issues, what linkages can be made between similar institutions in other countries, and can Canada’s colonial, North American and British Empire heritage be used to better understand the historical evolution of Canadian Government policies and programs.

**Linda Norris**, Managing Partner, Riverhill and Fulbright Scholar to Ukraine

As a US Fulbright Scholar to Ukraine in 2009 and 2010, my observations on the practice of public history in Ukraine are informal ones, based both teaching a graduate level course in museum learning and working with a wide variety of museums throughout Ukraine. These observations about Ukraine may (or may not) have some relevance to other post-Soviet nations.

History, like all academic subjects in Ukraine, is considered the province of the academy. Museum workers—including historians-- think of their primary work as specialized research. Public outreach of any sort is rarely considered a part of an historian's work. Even today's graduate students are taught by Soviet-trained academics, so although the educational system has seen many changes, the approach to teaching and to the work of being a historian remains much the same. Because of the economic crisis and its effect on institutions of all types, the opportunities for emerging historians, with new ideas and approaches, are rare.

At the same time as the focus on specialized history within the academy continues, the public has been engaged in public history through a focus on subjects such as Holodomor (the Soviet forced famine of the 1930s in Ukraine), the 18<sup>th</sup> century Battle of Poltava, and the nuclear accident. Chernobyl. The presentation of these topics is framed by politicians, in political terms, and represents efforts both to gain political power and place blame.

A notable exception to either the strictly academic or political approaches to history is the Center for Urban History of East Central Europe, in Lviv (<http://www.lvivcenter.org/en/>). An NGO founded in 2004, their website describes their efforts,

“We strive to be a part of contemporary Lviv's urban society and public, open to diverse communities and in productive cooperation with public and cultural institutions. As an institute that not only researches the city of the past, but also lives and works in the city of the present, we want to go beyond academic activity and support cultural and other public initiatives, which we see as both valuable and seminal.”

My work in the US is with local and regional organizations, so I'm interested in the ways in which local and regional history can be expressed and connected to global issues. But importantly, my work in Ukraine has encouraged me to consider how public history can be a component of a civil society, particularly in nations with a long-suppressed civil society and no real tradition of citizen participation in understanding, sharing, documenting or otherwise using history in their lives.

### **Jon Hunner**

I am Jon Hunner, Director of the Public History Program at New Mexico State University. In January, I start serving as chair of the History Department here. In 2001, I conducted a fellowship at Vaxjo University in southern Sweden where I assisted with the development of a public history program. While in Sweden, I met some museum professionals from Kalmar Museum who direct an innovative living history program called Time Travels. In Time Travels, participants (mainly school students but also elderly people) role play living in a past time period. We all pretend to live in that past year, do activities from then, and don't know anything after that year. It is a way to experience history

directly. I teach a course in this at New Mexico State University. Since 2004, we have created an international organization for Time Travels called Bridging Ages of which I am vice president. We now have Time Travels events going on in Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Nicaragua, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, and the United States. Over 100,000 people have joined us time traveling around the world. We have a website at <http://www.bridgingages.com/>.

In addition to living history, we also develop international programs in Historic Environment Education—using local historical resources to engage the public in nearby heritage and nature. Using oral history and historic preservation in particular, we assist teachers and museums with finding the significant people, places, and events that shaped local history and showing how the local is intertwined with regional, national, and international history.

### **Andreas Etges**

I am professor of North American history at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies of the Free University of Berlin in Germany. I teach in the American Studies program and I also teach early modern and modern history.

A year ago, my history department started the first public history MA in Germany. We accept 20 new graduate students annually into our program.

In 2003 I curated a special exhibit on John F.

Kennedy at the German Historical Museum in Berlin

(<http://www.dhm.de/ausstellungen/kennedy/index.html>) which later was shown in Vienna

([http://www.wienmuseum.at/de/ausstellungen.html?tx\\_wxexhibition\\_pi1\[showUid\]=65&cHash=ab3e0d883](http://www.wienmuseum.at/de/ausstellungen.html?tx_wxexhibition_pi1[showUid]=65&cHash=ab3e0d883)) and in parts in Rome. I also curated the exhibit for the Museum The Kennedys which

opened in 2005 in Berlin close to the Brandenburg Gate (<http://www.thekennedys.de/>). I have consulted on other exhibits, TV documentaries etc. with a focus on Kennedy, American history and politics, and German-American relations.

Since last year I have been guiding a research project jointly done with Berlin's Ethnological Museum that focuses on the museum's famous collection of objects from the Pacific Northwest of North America. One of the goals is to develop a new exhibit which could be used as a model for other collections of the museum which will all move to downtown Berlin, where the rebuilt Prussian castle near museum island will be the new home for the collection.

<http://www.jfki.fu-berlin.de/v/uebersetzungsfunktionen/en/index.html>

I have taught several seminars on history and memory (Europe and the United States) and last June co-organized a conference on public history in Germany and the US, because I think we can learn a lot from each other. Our MA in public history is still in its early stages, but I hope we will be able to start some international cooperations in the coming years.

### **Jonathan Whalley**

I'm Jonathan Whalley, a recent MA graduate on a one year hiatus in Japan where my wife is teaching English through a sister city exchange program. I graduated with a master's in history with an emphasis in public history this last July. My thesis is titled /"Loving Our Pleasuring Grounds to Death": Exhibiting Nature in the National Park Service, 1945-1970. /I have always been interested in history education and decided to use my history teaching bachelor's degree in the public history realm in the middle of my graduate school career. I find post-World War II American cultural history to be my main area of interest, and to be a little more specific I enjoy environmental history and public perception of various ideas as they relate to that time period.

Despite feeling severely underqualified to be on this task force I am very appreciative of the invitation to join and know only good experience can come of it. I will be joining you in Portland since last year's conference in Providence was so beneficial to me. When I talked with Marty Blatt last year about NCPH's desires to possibly internationalize I didn't know very much about what my situation in Japan would be. Now that I have been here for five months I have a better hold on just how difficult it is getting an understanding of the place of public history in Japan, not to mention any desires for Japanese public historians to join an international family of practitioners. My Japanese language skills are mediocre at best for use at the grocery store or friendly conversation, so any kind of professional discussion is very difficult as vocabulary is not international (although speaking with a car mechanic is pretty much the same as it is in America). I have brought up our task force's mission with many people hoping someone could give me a lead. This includes professionals and non-professionals, foreigners and Japanese. One such person lives up the street from us and is the president of our prefecture's (state's) major university. He is a biochemist by trade and has spent a lot of time in America. When I brought up this subject with him he seemed to do all he could to breeze by it. The discussion moved on when he brought out a beautiful coffee table book he bought at a museum he had recently visited.

Retrospectively, I believe this instance is representative of how the public views public history. There is no doubt that the Japanese public enjoys preservation and being a part of their history, but it has been very difficult getting people to discuss it as a field. I'm not sure if the field of public history has much existence here. I am going to try to start a letter writing campaign of sorts to try to establish contact with some museum professionals in Japan since travel is not very feasible given where we live. Hopefully something will pan out from that.

I think something we should consider and that I haven't seen come up yet is an examination of public history programs at the university or graduate level around the world. It seems difficult discussing a field with language we know that others might not know in the same way. Most average citizens have no idea what "public history" even means. I would be curious to know how public historians are being trained in the earliest days of their careers. Perhaps an internationalization of public history education is a good stepping stone to internationalizing the field of professionals. American public history students are encouraged to explore organizations early on so if we can globalize those efforts, it only makes sense that globalization would be maintained at an institutional level.

**UNESCO World Heritage Centre**  
**Lisa Singleton**

Available Upon Request.

**Serge Noiret**

I'm the History Information specialist at the European University Institute in Florence Italy (link between the library and doctoral and post-doctoral program in History and Civilization see <http://www.eui.eu>). I have a Ph.D. in contemporary history but from more than ten years now I'm studying the impact of the new media (internet and the web) on the history workshop and historian's craft. My fields of interest are humanities computing, digital libraries, digital history, digital public history, digital images and photographs, use of violent pictures in the web, use of the new social media in history and librarianship. I have published many essays in Italian and French on the impact of the web on the history profession in Europe and the USA but recently I wrote an

essay in Italian called "Public History and "storia pubblica" nella rete" (means in the web) which is about the history of Public History from UK to US and back to continental Europe. I want to focus on the differences of experience in continental Europe and in Anglo-Saxon countries. The essay is announced here: <http://www.polistampa.com/asp/sl.asp?id=4976> and as soon as they send me a PDF file I'll forward to anybody interested and I'll load it in our DSpace repository at the EUI. I'm also ending -in French this time-, an essay on History 2.0, changes in the historian's craft which will be ready for the beginning of next year. I'm organizing conferences and panels about public history and digital history issues here in Europe. (my CV is available here [www.eui.eu/Personal/Staff/Noiret/noiret.html](http://www.eui.eu/Personal/Staff/Noiret/noiret.html)) and I'm part of a historian's cooperative which is promoting in Florence and Italy public history activities.

But enough about presenting myself, what I would like very much to do -and this is the reason of my request to join you in Portland, is to study better the "institutionalization" of the PH field when here, in Europe, if we want to create a reenactment like we will do in 2011 in Florence about WWII and the front dividing the city in August '44, we have no organization, no association and, often, not even the name "public history" or "histoire publique" or "storia pubblica" or "historia publica", etc.. but a concept used by academic historians -public use of history- which means the uses of history in the present to support political and ideological aims regarding the past. (Habermas and the Historikerstreit in Germany to summarize these issues)

### **Jim Gardner, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution**

Public historians in the United States tend to assume that the theory and practice of the field as we know it is universal, when it is actually grounded in the American experience and in the history of history in the United States. Without question, comparative, international perspectives on the field would enrich our practice.

That is not to say, however, that there are not existing opportunities for such exchange—the problem is that many are largely ad hoc, one-time opportunities for public historians to engage in a particular topic or idea. For example, I was an organizer of a conference in Italy in November sponsored by Monash University, the National Museum of Australia, the University of Technology Sydney, and the National Museum of American History on “National Museums in a Transnational Age,” a stimulating three-day discussion that will likely yield a book and possibly another conference in a few years. While conference participants certainly developed important new networks, there is no vehicle for sustained discussion within the community of national museums about the challenges of transnational experience to the invention and reinvention of identity and nation. Similarly, the Smithsonian and the House of Sweden sponsored a conference this past December bringing together representatives from European Union and American museums to discuss “The Globalized Museum: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”—touching on many of the same topics as the conference in Italy but not building on or really even acknowledging the other discussion. Over the past several years, I have been involved in a number of such gatherings, and each time I am struck by how few connections and continuities there are—each stands alone. We need some vehicle—perhaps not an organization but a coalition—that begins to link these initiatives to build an international community of knowledge and practice.

There are real challenges to such an agenda. A few thoughts or concerns:

- We have to recognize that the field is stronger and more mature in some nations than in others—it is not a level playing field financially or organizationally, and that poses a real challenge.
- In many cases, as the conversation moves from local to regional to national to international, the conversation actually becomes more specialized—as in the conference in Italy focusing

solely on the work on national museums. The broad conversations among public historians that we have at NCPH may be difficult to sustain at the international level.

- Communities of interest vary considerably and are not always obvious. While there are many exchanges between US, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand public historians regarding parallels and paradigms, I know of no broader engagement among postcolonial nations dealing with the tensions between indigenous peoples and settler societies. EU nations—including the former seats of empire—have different concerns and issues that reflect the changing political landscape in Europe and challenges to the idea of “nation.” That’s only the tip of the iceberg. Just as one size does not fit all, one approach or focus will not engage all.
- There are definitional issues—is the interest in comparative perspectives, global issues, transnational experience, or all three?
- The field of work that we are interested in is not always led by historians, public or otherwise—how do we deal with the different disciplines from which practitioners come and within which they work today? That isn’t always clear in the field in the US today, but it gets even murkier when we look globally.

My particular interest is transnational history at national museums—challenging the assumption of the nation state (or indeed of any geo-political borders) as the defining factor in our work. In talks I have given at the Organization of American Historians and elsewhere, I have provided examples from NMAH of how we have begun to address that through collecting, reinterpretation of collections, and development of inherently transitional exhibitions, most recently *Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program, 1942-1964*. Such efforts are not without challenges and risk. When national museums explore transnational experiences such as the bracero program, do we run the risk of a new form of imperialism—with the national museum’s narrative appropriating or drowning out the local voice? What is our responsibility to communities? On the other hand, do transnational perspectives weaken or undermine nation and citizenship? Do such projects distract from our larger civic responsibility to tell the narrative of nation? International perspectives are critical for museums like mine as we try to redefine roles and responsibilities in a global context.

### **Justin Champion**

I am a neophyte to the world of international public history.

I am currently head of department (History) at Royal Holloway, University of London. My research interests are in the area of early modern ideas (c1500-1800) with a specific focus on irreligion, enlightenment and blasphemy. Figures like Thomas Hobbes, John Toland and the commonwealthmen of the eighteenth century have been the subject of a variety of publications.

Alongside this research interest, I have been engaging with the nature of academic responsibility to the public for a number of years. This has taken a variety of forms. I have been involved in the production of a number of historical programmes in a variety of media (mainly TV and radio) – my research into the metropolitan experience of epidemic disease was translated into an award winning television programme (see the website at <http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/H/history/plague/index.html> ). The same research has informed a number of other programmes on the radio and TV (see *Voices of the Powerless* BBC

Radio 4 [http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/voices/voices\\_salisbury.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/voices/voices_salisbury.shtml) and another using the letters of John Allin <http://health.discovery.com/videos/secrets-of-the-great-plague-behind-the-scenes.html> ; a third 'Secrets of the dead' has been used for various teaching activities [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets/previous\\_seasons/lessons/lp\\_plague\\_videos.html#](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets/previous_seasons/lessons/lp_plague_videos.html#) ). Other significant broadcasts have in resulted in radio documentaries such as 'Killing the King' (on the execution of Charles I) and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and short series on Tudor and Stuart history.

At an institutional level this interest in historical communication and translating academic research into comprehensible forms has resulted in the launch of an MA in Public History (see link at [http://www.rhul.ac.uk/History/postgrad/grad\\_MA\\_public.html](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/History/postgrad/grad_MA_public.html) ) which builds on links with a variety of external institutions most notably the National Trust and the Surrey History Centre to produce an MA which trains postgraduates not only in the core research skills but also in a variety of media skills as well as introducing them to a range of practitioners in the various fields. The department also supports a fledgling website called 'doingpublichistory.org' which hopefully will become a resource for a range of activities – please feel free to make suggestions for this site – including using it to post up discussions or reviews of ongoing projects.