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(eds.)

Commercialised History: Popular History Magazines in Europe



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Preface

This volume is based on the EU project EHISTO – European History Crossroads as pathways to intercultural and media education – which started in November 2013 and lasts two years. The project responded to the increasing significance of a commercialised use of history within the public historical culture and challenged the fact that these representations do not always meet the didactic EU standards for history education in democratic, pluralistic, and multicultural societies. Nevertheless, these representations can have a lasting impact on the young generation's understanding of history. The rationale of the EHISTO project on the one hand was to explore how history in mass media can be critically reflected in history teaching in schools, in the education of history teachers, and in the continuing professional development of teachers in order to enhance the media literacy of young people. On the other hand, the EHISTO project explored how the transnational comparison of different national approaches to history in mass media can contribute to a better understanding of European history (unity in diversity) and strengthen the intercultural competences in history education within and outside of school.

This was to be achieved in particular by creating interactive online modules (Learning Objects) for schools whose aim is to further the development of intercultural and media-critical competences of young people in dealing with the commercial representations of history which they encounter outside of the history classroom. Accordingly, the idea of democratic citizenship and lifelong learning is at the core of the project.

In order to examine the representation of history in mass media in school the EHISTO project particularly focused on the phenomenon of popular history magazines, which have become increasingly popular and available across EU countries. Further reasons why especially history magazines provided a good working basis for the project were that they are subject to commercial conditions, they represent a medium which both pupils and teachers consume, and they feature a curriculum-compatible mediality. Regarding the content, previous studies have shown that on the one hand popular history magazines from different countries in Europe are – in contrast to other

commercially characterised media products – strongly focused on national markets, but on the other hand have many topics in common. However, the common topics naturally take more or less varying perspectives. These features of history magazines were especially important for the project since the analysis of national perspectives on historical topics debated throughout Europe (European History Crossroads) was to be a decisive basis for the Learning Objects.

In this volume the first article gives an account of the EHISTO project and its results as well as especially the Learning Objects for history teaching in the classroom, which have been developed during the project. The other contributions, however, are supposed to reach beyond the framework of these Learning Objects, since the aim of the project was not only to design teaching material for schools: another important objective was to integrate the topics of media literacy, intercultural competences, and the use of history in commercial mass media into the initial and in-service teacher training. Following this general aim, the 13 contributions in this volume are conceptualised as basic information for interested teachers, students of teaching, educators, researchers, policy makers and stakeholders who want to deepen their knowledge about this topic. Thereby, we are especially interested in teacher training: we have come to the conclusion – not least due to evaluations during the course of the project – that the sustainability of the project can be best achieved if the project results are integrated into the education of teachers. Accordingly, it is necessary to provide study material, which shall be supplied by this volume.

Thereby, a double-track approach is pursued in the further course of the book: the first seven articles try to provide basic information from an interdisciplinary point of view. First of all Susanne Popp evaluates the phenomenon of popular history magazines from the point of view of German history didactics and tries to define the very thin line between knowledge and entertainment, which is a determining factor for every history magazine that wants to be successful on the market. Subsequently, the cultural scientist Fabio Crivellari uses a media science approach in his contribution to especially reflect the mediality of popular history magazines and the way of presenting history. He discusses the theoretical findings by drawing on examples from the presentation of the First World War in popular history

magazines. A particularly interesting perspective is offered by the linguist Stephan Jaeger, who especially acknowledges the way in which history magazines ‘tell a story’ and the methods recognizable behind this. A media scientific problem is also discussed by the media expert Susanne Kinnebrock, who asks how history magazines manage to engage today’s readers in the past even though topicality is a central news factor. Manuela Glaser, on the contrary, deals with the effects which popular history magazines can have on the reader and in this way her contribution adds a media psychological point of view to the volume. With pictures being a very important momentum for the popular mediacy of history, the contribution by the history educator Michael Wobring is devoted to some methodological considerations how the use of images in popular media can be evaluated empirically in future research. The first part of the volume concludes with the contribution by the historian Marianne Sjöland, who gives a theoretical introduction to analysing the use of history based on popular history magazines in Sweden and England.

In the second part of the volume, six empirical analyses offer further insight into some European countries and their market of popular history magazines thereby focusing on the topics which are given priority treatment in the magazines. Country-specific studies of this kind are provided by Claudius Springkart (Germany), Terry Haydn (UK) and Monika Vinterek (Sweden). Katja Gorbahn especially focuses on Danish history magazines and the question which point of view they take in dealing with National Socialism and the German occupation of Denmark. Miriam Hannig’s research work is also focused on Germany and provides a study on the consumers’ expectations in regard to their attitudes towards history magazines. The volume is concluded with a further contribution by Terry Haydn that links back to the primary objectives of the EHISTO project and presents a case study on the use of popular history magazines in history teaching in England.

In that way, the 13 contributions provide a broad range of basic analyses and European perspectives on a field that has so far not been taken into consideration by research. The editors hope that this broad approach may facilitate the access to this interesting topic for teachers, teacher educators, students, as well as other educating institutions and may encourage them to integrate this topic into their professional practice, especially

in the initial teacher training of history teachers. Furthermore, this volume wants to promote research on a topic which will gain more and more attention in school practice during the next years.

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