

Graz, Budapest, Lucerne–Which way is international History Didactics currently heading to?

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CONFERENCE REPORT

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BASIC DATA, PANEL TITLES, AND THE KEY-SPEAKERS OF THE CONFERENCES

Present study intends to sum up the most recent, and probably the most current scientific trends in the field of international History Didactics by giving a detailed account on three conferences: the Graz Conference (in November 2020), the Budapest Conference (in April 2021), and the Lucerne Conference (in September 2021). All these three events were organized specifically in History Didactics, and discussed its core concepts; all involved top experts from the field from the most renowned academic centres; and all had very wide international character with active participants from five continents.

Since at these three international online events there were altogether some 160 lectures presented, it is a rather challenging task to sum them up in a regular study. Even if the author was directly involved in all these conferences, both as an active participant and/or organizer and a panel-chair, he was certainly not able to see and hear all presentations, and certainly not all discussion. Furthermore, it is not even possible to sum them up all – one should note that at least one printed volume is expected to come out from each conference!

Having considered all circumstances, I have set two limited goals in my study. Firstly, I outline the basics of the conferences: its title, its participants, and the titles of its panels. Secondly, I sum up three key speeches that in my understanding characterize both the core current themes of History Didactics as well as its scientific diversity. Namely I sum up lectures given by

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Prof. Jörn Rüsen (Bochum, Germany), Prof. Roland Reichenbach (University of Zürich), and Prof. Dipesh Chakrabarty (University of Chicago) Consequently, I will analyse and synthesize the scientific discourse of the conferences by reflecting and commenting upon both the selected keynote speeches and the wider scientific discourse they were escorted by Scientific relations, including international scientific conferences in the field of History Didactics, did not stop even during the Covid-19 season. Within the one-year-long period between late 2020 and late 2021, three wide ranging online international meetings took place which dealt with the most significant and most recent issues of History Didactics.

As a start, it is worth to have a look at the most basic data of these conferences, since already pure data are rather talkative in their simplicity: They tell us a lot about the overall title and goals of the conference; about its organizers; about the title of the sections or panels it included; about the number of participants; and certainly about the Key Speakers as potential concept-creators.

THE GRAZ CONFERENCE

Graz 2020: International conference “*Historical Consciousness Historical Thinking, Historical Culture. Core Concepts of History Didactics and Historical Education in Intercultural Perspectives Reflections on Achievements – Challenges for the New Generation*” took place from November 11 to November 14, 2020 as an international virtual conference, organized by Prof. Alois Ecker, and was hosted by the University of Graz, Centre for Intercultural Research in History Didactics, Social Studies and Citizenship Education.

Panel titles in Graz:

- Section I: Historical Consciousness in Intercultural Perspective
- Section II: Historical Thinking in Intercultural Perspective
- Section III: Historical Culture in Intercultural Perspective
- Section IV: Historical Learning
- Section V: Interrelation to (theories of) global political, social, economic or cultural developments
- Section VI: Theory of History – Theory of History Didactics
- Section VII: Impact of the Digital Revolution
- Section VIII: Human Dignity, Sustainability, Social Responsibility

Key speakers in Graz:

- Alois Ecker (Austria)
- [Jörn Rüsen](#) (Germany)
- Dipesh Chakrabarty (USA)

There were some 79 lectures present at the Graz conference, including lectures by Ágnes Ivett Beretzky (Hungary), Luigi Cajani (Italy), Arthur Chapman (Great Britain), Júlia Réka Fodor (Hungary), Richárd Fodor (Hungary), Peter Gautschi (Switzerland), József Kaposi (Hungary), László Kojanitz (Hungary), Andreas Körber (Germany), Susanne Popp (Germany), Steven Stegers (The Netherlands), Joanna Wojdon (Poland), and many others.



THE BUDAPEST CONFERENCE

Budapest 2021: International conference “*Nézőpontok - A történelemtanítás elméletének és gyakorlatának nemzetközi és hazai trendjei. Perspectives - International and National Trends in the Theory and the Practice of History Teaching*” took place on April 16 and April 17, 2021 as an international virtual conference, organized by the Teachers Division of the Hungarian Historical Society, Budapest, by Prof. Ágnes Fischerné Dárdai, József Kaposi, Barnabás Vajda, László Kojanitz, András Katona, Richárd Fodor, and András Gyertyánfy.

Panel titles in Budapest:

- New Approaches in the International History Didactics (Új megközelítések a nemzetközi történelemdidaktikában)
- New Approaches in the Historiography and in History Teaching (Új megközelítések a történettudományban és a történelemtanításban)
- The Innovative Teacher (Az innovatív pedagógus)
- Competencies in Teaching History and Civic Education (Történelmi és állampolgári kompetenciák)
- Section of Ph.D. Students (Doktorandusz szekció)

Key speakers in Budapest:

- [Ágnes F. Dárdai](#) (Hungary)
- Susanne Popp (Germany, President of the International Society for History Didactics, ISHD)
- Arthur Chapman (Great Britain)
- [Karl Benziger](#) (USA)
- [Stéphane Lévesque](#) (Canada)
- [József Kaposi](#) (Hungary)
- [László Kojanitz](#) (Hungary)
- Róbert Hermann (Hungary)
- Ignác Romsics (Hungary)

There were 22 lectures present at the conference, including lectures by Gábor Bánkuti (Hungary), András Katona (Hungary), Antal Molnár (Hungary), Gábor Kármán (Hungary), [Csaba Jancsák](#) (Hungary), Tibor Prievara (Hungary). Also, there were lectures and presentations by expert teachers from the field, plus presentations by Ph.D. students of History Didactics mainly from the University of Pécs (Hungary) and J. Selye University of Komárno (Slovakia).

THE LUCERNE CONFERENCE

Lucerne 2021: International conference “*Why History Education?*” took place from September 16 to September 19, 2021 as an international virtual conference, organized by the International Society for History Didactics, by Prof. Markus Furrer, Prof. Peter Gautschi, and Prof. Dr. Nadine Fink, and was hosted by the Pädagogische Hochschule Luzern, the Haute École Pédagogique Vaud.

The panels of the Lucerne Conference did not have specific titles; there were altogether 20 Panels there which all run under the overall umbrella theme “*Why History Education?*” The



umbrella theme had been set by the main organizer of the event, by the International Society for History Didactics, and the Panels were “Focused” organized the following themes:

1. Focus “Purpose of Teaching History”
2. Focus “Identity and Conflicts”
3. Focus “History as a subject - independent or integrated?”
4. Focus “Heritage Education/Remembrance Culture”
5. Focus “Educational Organization”
6. Focus “Concepts and Access to History Education”

The Key-Speakers in Lucerne were:

- Susanne Popp (Germany, President of the ISHD)
- Roland Reichenbach (Switzerland)
- Peter Gautschi (Switzerland)

Further, there were 66 lectures present at the Lucerne conference, including lectures by Nadine Fink (Switzerland), Markus Furrer (Switzerland), Joanna Wojdon (Poland), Karl Benziger (USA), Terry Haydn (Great Britain), Barnabas Vajda (Slovakia), Elisabeth Erdmann (Germany), Victor Nemchinov (Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, Russia), and many others.

I regard it as important to point out that even if all these three international scientific conferences were held online (i.e. without face-to-face personal meetings), this fact did not limit their scope of interaction – right on the contrary! Being specifically dedicated to history didactics; successfully concentrating on core history didactical issues; and giving the events very strong international dimension (with a very strong representation from renowned university departments from all over the world) – the Graz, the Budapest, and the Lucerne Conferences could very successfully overcome the technical obstacles. Even if all three conferences were organized online, they all successfully applied various online methods such as ppt. presentations, screen sharing techniques, as well as live discussion during the panel discussions, immediate written reactions on the lectures or engaging in lively written discussion on the chat-wall.

All three conferences were regarded as highly successful. This is certainly true for the Graz Conference, of which Peter Seixas (Canada) declared at the end that: “This conference will be milestone for next generation of researchers on history education.” Or as Susanne Popp, the President of the International Society for History Didactics put it: “I am sure that the conference in the field of history didactics with such a great forum for international scientific exchange will be remembered by the community as a milestone in the history of its international conferences – and not only because it is our first online conference. There is no comparable conference in the last years that has been so decisively dedicated to international taking stock, balancing and safeguarding terminological and conceptual concepts in order to advance joint intercultural and international research.”

JÖRN RÜSEN’S KEYNOTE SPEECH

In his keynote online lecture at the Graz Conference on 11 November 2020, Jörn Rüsen outlined his vision on the future of History Didactics, right from the beginning of his speech: “History



didactics has now achieved a new academic status. Let us start a more global, more intercultural and more institutionalized cooperation on essential issues of history learning. Let us bring in new people [...] and let us further deepen our understanding of historical learning.”¹

His lecture, titled *The Future of History Didactics. Challenges and Responses Today*, J. Rüsen as one of the founders of our discipline (along with Bodo von Borries, Klaus Bergann, Karl-Ernst Jeismann, and Walter Fürnrohr; F. Dárdai 2006: 15–16), as well as one of the main concept-creators in the field of History Didactics, commenced with the basics: What is History Didactics? In Germany, he stressed, it is an established scientific discipline; an academic discipline which was originally meant to be a kind of a methodology but which later became “the science of learning history”. Its aim is to enhance pupils’ historical consciousness to which the teaching (as a process) is the practical tool.

In J. Rüsen’s eyes, History Didactics has had three dimensions: empirical (in fact, the process of learning history, not only in school environment but in social life too), theoretical (the academic level), and a pragmatic dimension. It is especially in the pragmatic dimension, he argued, which is easier to define than to practice. “Historical consciousness includes its role in social life, i.e. how can a modern multi-leveled society educate historical consciousness?”

J. Rüsen was brave enough to address, as he said, the “challenges of History Didactics today in the age of globalism”. The first challenge is an intellectual one, i.e. facing the non-Western discourses, and especially the Chinese comparative viewpoint, that poses a serious intellectual challenge to us. As second, he referred to the “traumatic challenges like the Holocaust”. Thirdly, he said, we need to face the challenge of the nature, a thought that is strongly linked to the idea of future-oriented history teaching. Fourthly, new intellectual attitudes such as “post-humanistic” and “post-colonial” attitudes require our attention. These latter two challenges have many in common since both the environmental pollution as well as the “European modernity as a negatively viewed historical period”, seem to be linked with a forthcoming global catastrophe. However, as J. Rüsen warned, this sense of catastrophe “enables us to bring things to the feasible way of developing [or improving - note by BV] our future”.

In his 1-h-long lecture, J. Rüsen put a special emphasis on nationalism. When speaking about the “role of traumatic events”, Rüsen shortly stopped at the idea of the nation state: “All political systems are based on nation states; however, after 1945 nationality [nationalism? - note by BV] started to exclude others. We are all members of nations; nevertheless we should see non-ethnicised nations.” As a possible answer, he raised this question: What are the specific ethnical elements of doing history? “Fight ethnocentrism in order to open to acknowledgements to differences. Established history, in fact established historians used to be on the size of retrograde forces. But it is over. And the challenge we face is that history teaching is an element of legitimizing [political - note by BV] power.”

Seeking for solutions, J. Rüsen raised more questions: What should be the most necessary responses to recent challenges? One possible way to “giving sense to the past”, he argued, is through “basic concepts of history”, meaning here concepts like time, space, society, power,

¹From here on, I quote speakers’ words as faithfully as I am able to. Since at the time of writing of this study no official records are available from neither conference, my citations rely on my shorthand notes. For any discrepancy between the speakers’ own words and my quotations here, I take responsibility.



change and continuity, etc. In J. Rüsen's opinion, these are the core or key concepts that history teaching should be conceptually based on or arranged around.² Another way of facing challenges ahead of contemporary history teaching, is the narration, J. Rüsen continued: Telling stories, he said, is not only attractive for all humans from children to elderly, but it is an universal thing understood all over the world. The form of "telling stories" may differ from place to place, but telling stories is indeed universal.

The third option to find a way out from "narrow minded nationalism", he argued, is the anthropological approach, or "anthropological universalism". From this point on, and during the most part of his lecture, J. Rüsen's words could be understood as a confession in his deep faith in rational humanity. What is the ultimate goal? he asked. "The ultimate goal of history teaching is human dignity." And when stressing the value of human dignity, he added: "We need to look to human values. Differences in variety. Anthropologically universal values – they do exist." At his point, Rüsen used an unusual argumentation, namely he referred to the "sacrality of the person and the idea of humanism as specific quality".

The open debate after his talk gave J. Rüsen an opportunity to reflect upon some of his thoughts a bit longer. One of his most interesting added reactions was this: "I think in this case is very interesting to read what is said about universalisms and dignity from decolonial perspectives, radical humanist perspectives and posthumanist perspectives. We are wrong to say that modernity is the evil of humanity." His further arguments included that modernity was not exclusively a European phenomenon; it took place, for instance, in China and India, too. "We ought to opening up the Western discourse to other forms of discourse, for our own sake to understand ourselves better."

Speaking from his home in Bochum, and escorted by a careful assistance of his wife, Jörn Rüsen was laughingly waving farewell at the very end of his lecture.

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY'S KEYNOTE SPEECH

The title of Dipesh Chakrabarty's (University of Chicago) keynote lecture at the Graz conference on November 12, 2020, *The Planetary Age in Human History*, could not be a surprise for those who in the last decade have sensed a shift in history teaching from "classical themes" toward "present problems of the mankind".

D. Chakrabarty set off his lecture from a well-known historical process: the global expansion of Europe during the 15th and 16th century, including the colonization, deep sea navigation, and with the process that has been named as "Europeanization of the Earth". In D. Chakrabarty's understanding, the Europeanization lasted until the early 1800s; nevertheless, the globalization went on for one more century, until the 1950s when the massive decolonization process started.

"Planetary" in his concept means "the way in which Planet Earth system acts as agent". If you take a planetary phenomenon such as the air we breathe in, then "Who maintains the share of oxygen?", he asked. "Bacterium's, planktons, trees, etc. they all play role in it – humans do not [*In this*

²This idea of core concepts, expressed almost two decades ago in Rüsen's Historical Consciousness: Narrative, Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development, has since developed into a more complete scientific structure, further developed e.g. by P. Lee (2005), A. Körber (2011), S. Lévesque (2018), V. Kratochvíl (2019: 21–23), L. Kojanitz: (2021: 163–166) and others.



sense – note by BV] the Planet is not a human conception.” And as a consequence, he argued, “The 1950s were a threshold in history. Why? Because since then we see a great acceleration in human consumption”, growing continuously and exponentially. One of the numerous examples was the number of broiled chicken, the number of which has been increasing enormously. “Earth responds what we do. Take the loss of biodiversity. Aren’t we on the verge of the 6th extinction?” he asked.

D. Chakrabarty was focusing on present day issues, nevertheless he supported his thoughts with historical examples, and he offered new concepts, too. The academic historiography does traditionally separate “human” and “natural” history, he argued, and the separation of “human” from “natural” is one of the core assumptions which our historical understanding has been resting upon since the 19th century. “We have two options. Either human are separate from the nature. Or humans act as geographical force. Nature [*i.e. different elements of the nature – note by BV*] is related and this is a planetary force.” There is a bad news, unfortunately: “Humans are over expanded, and technology cannot solve the problem.” What is the solution then? someone asked in the debate. “Scaling back on your consumption. Humans are a minority form but a dominant form of life.” If I understood D. Chakrabarty’s point, these two should be (re)united, we should accept the organic combination of “human and natural history” in our historical culture. Unfortunately, from organization reasons there was no time to ask the speaker how does he think planetary history could be or should be incorporated into education?

ROLAND REICHENBACH’S KEYNOTE SPEECH

Roland Reichenbach’s (University of Zürich) keynote speech on September 17, 2021 at the conference of the ISHD, carried the title *The Crisis of Imagination and the Care for Ideas*. Commencing with his main goals, the speaker aimed at “contributing to the philosophy of history education”, and especially to the phenomenon of “imagination” and „reflexive judgements”. Strangely enough, he stated, “imagination” at the school environment appears to be “an opposition to traditional cognitive approaches which rest on ratio, reason, and logical causation”. Indeed, “imagination depend on knowledge and experience”, yet, it should have been treated and educated much more carefully. At this point, Wolfgang Hasberg wrote his reaction on the chat-wall: “History only exists as imagination about the past.”

Since in R. Reichenbach’s understanding imagination has been generally neglected in schools, thus we can speak about “a crisis of imagination”. And because reading as the most general skill in education highly depends on imagination, thus “we have been experiencing a crisis in reading” [*and a crisis in text understanding – note by BV*]. Turning to his main point, R. Reichenbach stressed that “imagination is a sense and should be educated”. Yet, according to him, “current schools force teachers to doing administrative issues mostly”.

The speaker raised some major questions regarding the role of modern state schools. “What is the responsibility of the state as far as school is concerned?” he asked. As a context, R. Reichenbach counted historical examples from education history, namely the cases of Plato, Karl Raimund Popper (1902–1994), and Wilhelm von Humboldt.³ In Reichenbach’s interpretation, W. Humboldt in his work *The Sphere and Duties of Government* expressed his belief in the

³Linguist and diplomat Wilhelm von Humboldt [1767–1835] served as Prussian Minister of Education; his younger brother Alexander von Humboldt [1769–1859] was a natural scientist.



“individual and his/her ego” while he was not advocating for general education for all. However, modern schools are not based on Humboldt but rather on Hegel’s concept of “family and community” in which individuals should undergo education in order to become useful members of the community – a process which the state should strongly support, encourage, and endorse. And if we add to this the most up-to-date job-oriented requirements, such as the expectations of the OECD for instance, where skills are seen as fundament for all schools, R. Reichenbach continued his argumentation, then we can state that “today education wants too much”.

Answering numerous questions afterwards, it appeared that R. Reichenbach, even if a non-historian himself, touched upon problems and issues that many history teachers feel actual. Answering a question regarding narration, he said: “The school should be a place of narration. Listening to stories is a good practice of imagination”; again, giving a fine idea how narration-based history teaching and imagination could be usefully linked. To the questions prying into the links between “imagination” and “images” on the one hand, and “imagination as a fiction” on the other, he replied: “Many pictures are not images but symbols”, and that “it is important to learn images and inner images, and even if [*our inner – note by BV*] images are intimate, they link people together”, giving some fine thoughts to the didactics of analysis of iconic sources at school (See further scholarly discourse in Engel and Vajda, 2021 and Fekete, 2021). When encouraged to reflect upon the presence of so called contemporary global problems at history lessons, R. Reichenbach replied: “I am not sure about the importance of the so called ‘present problems’; [*and even if they are important – note by BV*] why do we put this burden on pupils? First, learn to love the world” – he said. Finally, Markus Furrer asked the speaker’s opinion how would he promote history as a school subject? “Be an enthusiastic teacher”, was a witty ending to R. Reichenbach’s key speech at the Lucerne conference.

DEBATE OVER RELATION OF HISTORIOGRAPHY WITH HISTORY DIDACTICS

One of the key issues that popped up at all three conferences is the relation of academic historians and academic historiography with history teaching in general and history didactics in particular. The question “Which should be given a priority: the science or the school?” has been an issue for a long time, in fact, since the foundation of history didactics as a new branch of the historical sciences. Already the German “founding fathers” did expect some “clash” between academic historiography and the science oriented on the didactical aspects of the historical culture. Thus the problem is nothing new. What is new, however, is the polarization or strong division of views upon this matter. At the Graz Conference, Wulf Kansteiner was probably the most determined in his views: “Our history teaching should not be teaching history, but it should be teaching about the past, should be a reflection on us and on our past. We need to distance ourselves from history as an academic discipline” – this was the bottom line of W. Kansteiner’s lecture, to which he added during the debate that “Forget history! [...] Forget academic history when it comes to teaching.”

Even if we acknowledge that W. Kansteiner was articulating his strong position in order to be better prepared for responding social challenges that history teaching has been facing, I strongly wonder what would German founding fathers of history didactics say to this, being renowned historians themselves, who designed history didactics as a “daughter of historiography” and insisted on History as the “mother science” of History Didactics? I think that this kind of



separation of history teaching from renowned academic historiography would be a very big mistake; it would be a recapitulation not only of our own science but our own existence at all. Everybody understands the special environment what schools provide; as Peter Gautschi rightly stressed: “History didactics as a research science is one thing; teaching in the classroom is something else.” (Graz 2020) Nevertheless, strictly distancing ourselves from historiography would seriously hurt all of us who do (has been doing) historical research in the field. It is perhaps not only me who is convinced that we all deal with different segments of the same issue, i.e. be it a researcher or a teacher, we all should fix our eyes on the core of the problem what is *enhancing historical culture*.

As a reply (or opposition) to W. Kansteiner’s view, there was prof. Luigi Cajani who said in Graz that “The aim is to teach pupils how historians [...] construct their knowledge.” L. Cajani would have liked the Budapest Conference where there was a completely different approach than in Graz. Event organizers in Budapest deliberately invited renowned historians to the floor; they intentionally encouraged cooperation of historians with history didacticians and history teachers. To the Budapest conference on History Didactics, some key and most renowned historians were invited, such as Ignác Romsics, Antal Molnár, and Gábor Kármán among others. In his lecture, A. Molnár spoke about the specificities of the Osman occupation of the Hungarian Kingdom in the 16 century (*A magyarországi oszmán berendezkedés sajátosságai: egyedülálló jelenség-e a török-magyar kondomínium?*), since Gábor Kármán’s lecture reflected upon the Catholic–Protestant relations in the 17 century Hungary (*Kompromisszumképtelenség: Protestánsok és katolikusok a 17. század első felének magyarországi politikájában*). Prof. Romsics gave a perfect frame to these lectures in his wide ranging lecture, *Historiography and popular history (Történetírás és történeti ismeretterjesztés)*.

This is not to say that the harmony between academic historians and history didacticians is perfect. Yet, at the Budapest Conference, complete absence of academic historians would have been un-imaginable. In fact, this has always been the case since the Teachers’ Division of the Hungarian Historical Society was organizing its annual conferences. It was a generally accepted view within the Organization Committee of the Budapest Conference, that an organic cooperation for all parties involved in educating historical consciousness, is and will be in the future inevitable. In my understanding this message laid underneath all lectures involving didactical messages, both given by the most renowned Hungarian history didacticians, Ágnes F. Dárdai, József Kaposi, László Kojanitz, Gábor Bánkúti, but also of the lectures given by the most renowned international speakers such as Susanne Popp, Arthur Chapman (*University College London*), Karl Benziger (*Rhode Island College*), and Stéphane Lévesque (*University of Ottawa*).

It was surely in Budapest where inevitable cooperation between these two branches of the same field, academic historians and history educators, was stressed as complimenters to each other in order to make a harmonized impact on next generations’ historical consciousness and thinking. Anyway, historical thinking seemed to matter more in many speakers’ eyes than I had thought. Maybe the best demonstration of doing empirical research on this field was by three African scholars, Anitha Oforiwah Adu-Boahen (*University of Education, Winneba*), Cosmas Cobbold, and Charles Adabo Opong (*University of Cape Coast, Ghana*) in their contribution at Lucerne about “Testing the Understanding of Historical Significance among pre-service Teachers in Ghana”.

It was common to hear several reports during all three conferences describing that teachers from the field, on secondary and university level alike, are astonished to see that their students



do not have a clue how and through what process historical thinking is constructed by. This direct experience evoked an idea that popped up several times at all three conferences, that both initial teacher training as well as in-service-training should include specific lessons or courses on “Historical thinking”. As we heard it during the debate from Lightning Jay (USA), this discipline has already been taught in certain places in the USA, and perhaps other places too. (Graz 2020) (I could observe during the debates at the conferences that “historical thinking” was not necessarily an unambiguous concept. For instance, in the Hungarian scholarly literature “historical thinking” is meant either as “thinking about history”, as described by Kojanitz [2021, 85–88] or Gyertyánfy [2020].)

DEBATE OVER THE “ENVIRONMENTALISM” IN HISTORY

“Environmentalism”, or as someone from the audience in Graz put it, “the responsible behaviour toward nature”, is one of the most recent issues which have asked for time and space in European history teaching. Judging from the reactions of participants, it was not clear for me how many experts were inclined in favour of the environmentalism topic. Some speakers warmly greeted it; some argued against it as a topic not necessary belonging to our subject; and some expressed the dubious character of the issue. Peter Gautschi (University of Teacher Education Lucerne, Switzerland) in Lucerne pointed out to the challenge that “producing history in a stretched present – is a great challenge for education”. Similarly Steven Stegers from the Euroclio made a good point in Graz saying that “it is a very big challenge how recent events can be reflected in history teaching”.

Surely there was a point at both in Graz and Lucerne when professional dialogue turned toward themes such as microplastics, extinction of life, severe climate change, etc. As it was clear from the lively debate following prof. Chakrabarty’s lecture in Graz, “apocalyptic thinking” can easily shock people and can prevent them from actions. Andrea Komlossy (University of Vienna), who has published a lot on global history, raised in Graz a poignant question: How do you integrate capitalism into the so called planetary system? In other words, how can modern peoples’ (over-exceeding?) needs be harmonized with available natural resources? Is harmonization possible at all?

Perhaps the most renowned contribution to the overall context was prof. Susanne Popp’s contribution. As the President of the ISHD stated, “the present and the foreseeable future should be in the centre of history teaching”, expressing her firm view over the so called “future oriented history teaching”. Here we must face up to the complexity of the necessity of “deconstruction of anthropocentrism [...] human history and nature are connected.” This is the very point where global perspective comes to the front: “Global history approach [*inevitably – note by BV*] focuses on ‘trans-national’ and ‘trans-regional’ structures and processes.” (Graz 2020) The global approach is also a potential road to decrease nationalism in history teaching, specifically by putting more stress on the history of mankind for example in history textbooks. In S. Popp’s words, focusing on “global history”, in fact concentrating on transnational and transregional structures and processes, such as “on responsible behaviour toward nature”, would create a suitable basis for a more universal approach. What is not clear here, however, is how any coherent and sustainable curriculum would cope with (sometimes contradictory) aspects of regional, transnational, global, and planetary aspects – would and should they all fit into one



curriculum? I felt a similar tension during Piotr Podemski's lecture (University of Warsaw, Poland) *Unity in Diversity? The Perceived Sense(s) of History Education in Poland as Revealed in Regional History Competitions* (Lucerne 2021) as well as during Thomas Metzger's speech (University of Teacher Education St. Gall, Switzerland) *Transnational National History – Perspectives of Entangled History for History Education* (Lucerne 2021).

The participants of the Graz conference were rather divided in this question. Sebastian Barsch (Kiel University, Germany) draw from the interdisciplinary approach of the “green thought” in his “Environmental history interdisciplinary: Judgements between historical and scientific competencies” (Lucerne 2021) lecture. I think many would agree with Maria Grever who during the debate in Graz argued that “teaching about the anthropocene as a geological epoch provides alternative to traditional [*historical – note by BV*] chronologies. It also offers a bird's eye view on the word.” This is, however, in opposition, if not in direct contradiction, to what some speakers described as a fundamental need for expressing someone's own personal identity, or self-identification through learning history.

DEBATE OVER THE FUTURE OF HISTORY DIDACTICS

The tone of the discourse over the future of History Didactics was set by the main organizer of the Graz Conference, Alois Ecker: “We are just at the beginning of conceptualizing history didactics.” To make the prospect even dimmer, Arthur Chapman added that “in England we are not doing history didactics yet [...] [*At schools – note by BV*] we tend to focus on academic history as a narrow discipline.” How do we get pupils involved? he asked. Well, Arthur Chapman may have questioned the true existence of our discipline in his home country (“History didactics in England is in the future”), nevertheless, I think that the same could be stated about many other European countries, too.

The challenge ahead of us, in order to sustainably codificate History Didactics within the structure of social sciences, is not a small one. Especially if we add more aspects, i.e. more related academic streams or directions to the original problem that make History Didactics an even more complex subject. Giving just one example, as Andreas Körber pointed out, “the concepts on historical thinking is *different* at Windeburg, Seixas and Gautschi”. (Graz 2020) As a follow up, Carol Capita (University of Bucharest, Romania) rightly stated that historical thinking cannot be dealt with without “critical thinking”, since historical thinking has to always have “an element of critique” (what is probably true for all kind of thinking). At some point in his lecture, Carol Capita was praising the Hungarian school history curriculum for containing explicit goals and contents in fostering historical thinking (Graz 2020). Here, some excellent questions by Jörg van Norden's (University of Bielefeld, Germany) triggered a stream of counter-questions and arguments: “What is the difference between critical and historical reasoning? Is historical reasoning reduced to reason, excluding emotion? Is historical reasoning more than arguing?” Toward the end of this exchange of views any unbiased spectator would stress the importance/significance of distinguishing “narrative competence”, “historical thinking”, “historical reasoning” as inter-related concepts which at the end of the day indeed are synonyms of the same and most important phenomenon: How history is constructed?

It was especially the Graz Conference which was unique in generating lively and far-reaching, and yet exciting debate over certain key concepts. For instance, László Kojanitz (*Budapest*)



had an excellent presentation on his empirical research over pupils' historical notions, based on students' direct responses. When asked, what was his most striking finding in students' answers, L. Kojanitz expressed his surprise over the fact that for the pupils "understanding the present through history learning was more important than the identity issue". (Graz 2020) Following the debate on historical consciousness in Graz, Liz D. Duraisingh (*Harvard Graduate School of Education, USA*) questioned young peoples' historical consciousness, namely "what is the relationship between cultural identity and historical identity?", a very good point which would deserve extensive further empirical research. By the way, it was Luigi Cajani (University of Roma, Italy) who repeatedly urged "more empirical research on historical consciousness, involving psychoanalysts, social psychologists, etc.", and it was also him who warned that "historical consciousness does not only need to be formed/shaped but is changes too". (Graz 2020) In relation with fostering or developing historical thinking in pupils, more speakers supported the opinion that much more intensive "competency base approach" would be needed in school history teaching practice in order of fulfilling this challenge; as it was stated in Graz by Jaroslav Najbert (Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague, Czech Republic), Jens Paulsen (Denmark), and others.

It was illuminating to hear how (in what sense) experts from different countries raised the very same basic question: What is the point in learning and teaching history in the 21 century? At least five major contributions sought answers to the most fundamental problem of ours, such as "Why History Education - Now?" by Jennifer Clark (University of Adelaide) and Adele Nye (University of New England, New South Wales, Australia) in Lucerne; "Why History Education? - Answers from Swiss Primary Teacher Students" by Christian Mathis (Zurich University of Teacher Education, Switzerland) in Lucerne; "History? Sometimes I like to say it's useless" by Aurélie De Mestral (University of Teacher Education, State Vaud, Switzerland) in Lucerne; by Tanja Taivalanti (University of Helsinki, Finland) *Extra scholar learning of history by Finnish speaking young people and the importance of learning history at school* also in Lucerne.

Some experts could not hide their scepticism over the situation, such as Barnabás Vajda (J. Selye University, Slovakia) in Lucerne speaking over history as "A school subject that lost its way", or Béatrice Ziegler (PH University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland) whose contribution analysed "A creeping crisis of history education? Legitimations for History as School-subject in German-Speaking Switzerland since 1989" also in Lucerne.

It seems to be symptomatic that experts from the field who came from very different geographical points of the Globe, with experiences from very different school systems, and having experienced very different schools policies and edu-cultural practices – well, telling honestly, could not find reassuring answers. Yet, at many points during the long discussions, especially in Graz, but in Budapest and Lucerne too, I had the impression that these discussions aimed at clarifying basic history didactical terms and concepts, had a real impact on our positions on historical consciousness, historical thinking, and historical culture. The impact was palpable often in form of thoughtful doubts and questions rather than in form of well-shaped final answers. Liz Dawes (Australia) shared her view that "the Graz Conference 2020 has been a great attempt in re-finishing the relevance of the history education", and it was very good to hear from Peter Gautschi, from one of the most renowned expert in History Didactics in his farewell words in Lucerne that "Our discipline is very much alive."



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