

УДК 378.147:93/94(73)
930.2

378.096:93/94(73)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.31212/tokovi.2018.3.man.171-192>

Оригинални научни рад

Примљен: 20. 10. 2017.

Прихваћен: 16. 11. 2018.

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On Public/Applied History*

Abstract: The article explores the academic disciplines of Public and Applied History and presents university programs and courses in Public and Applied History. The focus is on the Applied History program of the Belfer Center of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and its *Manifesto* announced in 2016. It is compared with the book *History Manifesto* written by Jo Guldi and David Armitage in 2014.

Keywords: Applied History, Public History, Annales School, History Manifesto, Harvard University Belfer Center

Introduction

For decades, scholars and generations of history students have been analyzing Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre's text "À nos lecteurs" published in the first issue of the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* on January 15, 1929. This short introductory text announced the "unique spirit" of the *Annales* and its specific position among the related periodicals. Unlike their "glorious elders," who were insisting on disciplinary purity and exclusivism, *Annales* invited researchers to "rise up against (...) fearsome schisms" between the "two classes of workers" – the historians employed with "their good old tried and true methods to docu-

* This article has been written within the framework of the scholarly project *Tradition and Transformation – Historical Heritage and National Identity in Serbia in the 20th Century* (No 47019), financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

ments of the past” and the “investigators occupied with the present.” Having been “struck by the ills engendered by a divorce that has become traditional,” they stood against the walls and barriers that “often block the view” between researchers of humanity in the past and those who are exploring contemporary societies. The founders of the first school of *total history* concluded that “nothing would be better if each, practicing a legitimate specialization, laboriously cultivating his own garden, nevertheless strove to follow the work of his neighbor.”¹

Their direct reflection on *Candid’s* “garden metaphor” could be read as an homage to Voltaire’s historical rationalism and to his step forward from the traditional writings about the past. Bloch and Febvre acknowledged the legacy of Enlightenment and in particular Voltaire’s convictions that the rulers’ arrogant will and the church dogmas could not prevail over the dedicated work of each individual and a meaningful exchange of goods and knowledge among people. One of the most important manifests of the 20th century was, in a way, an appreciation of Voltaire’s conclusion “Work then without disputing (...) it is the only way to render life supportable.”

Ever since, the multifaceted position of history as a reflection and at the same time as a constitutive element of the present, in which it was created, continued to provoke debates and disputes. Following the footsteps of the *Annales* and their instructions for “more frequent intellectual exchanges,” numerous historical schools and theories (from the *Bielefeld School of Social History* to *The New Cultural History*, the *Nouvelle histoire*, or Foucault’s *History of the Present*, etc.) made ground-breaking achievements in historiography in the ensuing decades. Provocative thinking about the relationship between the past and the present radically changed historical methodology, introducing new research questions, recognizing various historical agents and subjects, and creating new disciplines. Furthermore, it crucially influenced social movements and (de)constructed personal and collective identities.

Among humanistic disciplines and approaches dealing with this tangled relationship, the concept of *Public* or *Applied History* appears as a particularly intriguing research framework, and as a curious academic and social phenomenon. This article explores several examples of uni-

1 Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, „À nos lecteurs“, *Annales D’Histoire économique et sociale*, Year 1929, Volume 1, Issue 1, 1–2, date of access 23. 7. 2018, http://www.persee.fr/doc/ahess_0003-441x_1929_num_1_1_1031 (the original version), <https://www.marxists.org/history/france/annales/1929/to-readers.htm> (English translation).

versity programs offering Public/Applied History courses. Its special focus is on the Applied History Program of the *Belfer Center of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government* and its *Manifesto* written with the aim to promote the applied history concept and, at the same time, to support the assertion that historical knowledge should have decisive influence on political decision making.

Understanding the terms Public/Applied History in this text coincides with the precise explanation given by Dennis Dierks and Juliane Tomann – the founders and coordinators of the Jean Monnet Network of *Applied European Contemporary History*: “While Public History can be described as a broad and overarching concept that deals with the uses of the past in public, Applied History as its subordinate field, explores more specifically how historical knowledge is made, how interpretations of the past impact society, why there is a societal need to deal with the past at all, and finally, what effect these issues have on the scientific methods of historical research.”²

The Public History Network

When in 1979, *The National Council on Public History* (NCPH) was established in the United States, it reflected a growing need for historians working “beyond the walls of the traditional classroom” to secure their professional positions and increase their social influence. The NCPH gathered “historical consultants, museum professionals, government historians, archivists, oral historians, cultural resource managers, curators, film and media producers, historical interpreters, historic preservationists, policy advisers, local historians, and community activists.”³ Robert Kelley of the University of California named those professionals who were performing, replaying and analyzing history as “practitioners of public history.”⁴ Their lowest common denominator was, and still is, the belief that

2 *Ibid.*

3 “How is Public History Used?”, date of access 23. 7. 2018, <http://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/>

4 Robert Kelley, “Public History, Its Origins, Nature and Prospects”, *The Public Historian*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Autumn, 1978, 16–28, date of access 28. 8. 2018, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3377666?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents and at <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/201/articles/78KelleyPublicHistoryOriginsTPH0001.pdf>, DOI: 10.2307/3377666; Charles C. Cole Jr., “Public History: What Difference Has It Made?”, *The Public Historian*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Autumn, 1994), 9–35; Thomas Cauvin, “The Rise of Public History: An International Perspective,” *Historia*

the contemporary understanding of history represents an important segment of almost every public interaction.⁵ Thus, the NCPH defined itself as “a membership association dedicated to making the past useful in the present and to encouraging collaboration between historians and their publics.”⁶ It published the quarterly journal *The Public Historian*, organized annual meetings and workshops and collected information on job opportunities for its members.⁷ The NCPH became part of a wider network established in the United States called *The National Coalition for History*, which is a non-profit educational organization providing leadership in history related advocacy.⁸

The National Council on Public History strengthened in time and today gathers more than one thousand professional public historians. As

Crítica, Issue 68, April 1, 2018, 3–26, date of access 1. 8. 2018, <https://revistas.unian-des.edu.co/doi/full/10.7440/histcrit68.2018.01>

- 5 The records of the NCPH are kept at the Indiana University Library under the name “National Council on Public History Records, 1977-2002”, date of access 23. 7. 2018, <http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/collections/general/mss021>
- 6 “NCPH establishes professional standards, ethics, and best practices; provides professional development opportunities; recognizes excellence in a diverse range of public history activities; fosters networking and a sense of community among public history practitioners; and supports history education. Our quarterly journal, *The Public Historian*, is the definitive voice of the public history profession in providing historians with the latest scholarship and applications from the field. The NCPH Annual Meeting each spring brings together several hundred members and non-members for workshops, sessions, tours, special presentations, and other events. Our quarterly newsletter (*Public History News*) and *History@Work* blog, as well as this web site, keep members and others interested in public history up-to-date with current developments and issues.” “Who We Are,” date of access 23. 7. 2018, <http://ncph.org/about/who-we-are/>
- 7 “Guide to Public History Programs,” date of access 23. 7. 2018, <http://ncph.org/program-guide/>
- 8 Although *The National Coalition for History* seems as an important organization of the civil society, its position is shaken in the last several years. In the last budget request to Congress, President Donald Trump proposed “devastating cuts to federal humanities and history funding, including elimination of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, and several key education and preservation programs.” “Trump Again Proposes Drastic Cuts to Federal History and Humanities Programs in FY19,” 13. 2. 2018, last access 23. 7. 2018, <http://history-coalition.org/2018/02/13/trump-again-proposes-drastic-cuts-to-federal-history-and-humanities-programs-in-fy19/>
On the problem of the current position of humanities and social sciences in the United States see the Report of the Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences of the American Academy of Arts and Humanities, *The Hart of the Matter*, (American Academy of Arts and Sciences: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013), last access 26. 7. 2018, http://www.humanitiescommission.org/_pdf/hss_report.pdf

many universities worldwide launched their own Public/Applied history programs, the conceptual framework of the association expanded and its membership also included academic professors. Specifically, four decades after the establishment of the NCPH, approximately two hundred programs at the graduate and undergraduate levels with a Certificate or Concentration in Public History came to exist in North America. Additionally, the NCPH website includes information on 27 international universities that have similar programs in Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Poland, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.⁹ University courses are offered to all who are looking for “history-related employment in the media, including film, television, print journalism, museums, and heritage organizations.”¹⁰ Project participants became people interested in civic engagement, those “who want to practice history but not teach, in order to shape public attitudes about the past, to participate in collaborative projects, find connections to issues of social justice, make history meaningful.”¹¹ The growing number of programs and courses named *Public History* demonstrated the readiness of numerous universities to train a new generation of historians in accordance with the values of the post-socialist neoliberal era. An illustrative example, in that respect, is the marketing slogan “A New Course: Converting a Passion for History Into a Private Sector Career,” which explains how taking a PhD course is supposed to create highly valuable associates in various fields.¹² This new trend was followed by the establishment of the *International Federation for Public History* in 2010.¹³

In the *Age of Commemoration* (as one could define the beginning of the 21st century), the past is revived in the present. Reenactments of historical events, anniversaries, and commemorations, monument mania and memorial mania are markers of a time in which revolutionary vi-

9 “Guide to Public History Programs,” date of access 23. 7. 2018, http://ncph.org/program-guide?fwpp_program_location=international

10 “Royal Holloway, University of London,” date of access 23. 7. 2018, <http://ncph.org/program/royal-holloway-university-of-london/>

11 Robert Weyeneth, “*A Perfect Storm?*,” date of access 23. 7. 2018, <http://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/weyeneth-essay/>

12 Joshua Wolff, “Career Paths, A New Course: Converting A Passion for History into a Private Sector Career,” *Perspectives on History*, January 1, 2014, date of access 23. 7. 2018, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2014/a-new-course-converting-a-passion-for-history-into-a-private-sector-career>

13 “International Federation for Public History,” date of access 1. 8. 2018, <https://ifph.hypotheses.org/sample-page/ifph-bylaws-fihp-statuts>

sions of the future are being replaced with revisions of the past. As at the turn of the 19th century, when the newly created national states invented ancient and the medieval traditions, contemporary societies are flooded by a tide of historical symbols and memorabilia. Political protagonists are creating positions through allegedly authentic historical interpretations, social groups are defined as communities of remembrances, while family and personal memories become crucial markers of each individual. "Dealing with the past" has become one of the crucial social and political concepts. However, besides its identity and ethical function, history has also gained a commercial/market value; it has become a repository of goods. Millions of memorabilia consumers and tourists searching for personal wealth, new experiences, and excitement have become interested in new spaces and their (un)known past. Public interest in the past requires (and consequently) produces more and more practitioners and promoters of history.

Marking victimhood, reconstructing the dynamics of violence, and introducing forensic methodology in humanistic research of the past, have opened new perspectives for the understanding of history at the beginning of the new millennium. The production of the many initiatives and artistic projects that mapped the historical places of terror and suffering, have increased in the public sphere, while acting out the past has become an alternative way of communication between the various social groups. The increased interest in history has become recognizable in the academic sphere through the organization of the Public History programs. In Germany *Freie Universität Berlin* and *Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam* introduced a Master's program in Public History in 2008.¹⁴ Seven years later, the *University of Cologne* adopted the same approach stating that the "new program takes into account the media's growing interest in history and society's increasing interest in museums, memorial sites, and other spaces of historical commemoration or education."¹⁵ Berlin and Cologne-based programs have covered theoretical and practical aspects

14 "Public History Master consecutive and application-oriented Master's degree at the Friedrich-Meinecke-Institute at the Freie Universität Berlin in cooperation with the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam (ZZF)", date of access 23. 7. 2018, http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/en/e/fmi/studium/masterstudium/public_history/index.html

15 "Die Studienrichtung Public History stellt sich vor", date of access 23. 7. 2018, <http://histinst.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/1072.html>

of history but also have taken into consideration the “aesthetic, political and commercial dimensions of history.”¹⁶

Although the context differed in every society, similar courses were established in other European countries too. Often, they were organized in partnership with the heritage and museum institutions, aiming to attract students from all over the world. In Great Britain and Ireland, where the public reenactments of historical events and the local historical festivals have a long tradition, this was more than a welcome innovation.¹⁷

Introduction of Applied History

At the same time, an increasing number of universities recommend Applied History programs in the United States, stating that they prepare future educators, public historians, and those interested in Museum studies, Historic Preservation, Archives, Oral History and Local History Research.¹⁸ *The Department of History of the Université de Montréal* offered MA courses in Applied History as “a bridge between the university and the labor market.”¹⁹ *The University of Waterloo*, also in Canada, organized four courses as “practical, real world uses of the past in society and the marketplace.” The courses covered Public and Digital History, Historical Memory and National Identity.²⁰ Focused on tracing the historical roots and causes of contemporary phenomena and trends, they defined the development of critical thinking as their main goal.

Political and social activism is recognizable in the description of the course: Introduction to Public/Applied History, launched by the *UCLA's History Department* and the Public History Initiative in the fall of 2017.

16 “Public History Master”, date of access 23. 7. 2018, http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/en/e/fmi/studium/masterstudium/public_history/index.html

17 The Public History and related programs in Europe are offered at the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Hertfordshire, Royal Holloway University of London, Ruskin College Oxford, University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, University of Central Lancashire, University of Exeter, Nottingham Trent University, Queen's University Belfast, University College Dublin, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, University of Ghent, University of Amsterdam, Université de Paris Est, Creteil-Val de Marne, University of Wrocław.

18 “Why Study Applied History at SHIP?”, date of access 23. 7. 2018, http://www.ship.edu/Academics/Programs/Graduate/Applied_History/

19 “New – MA in History, Applied History Option”, date of access 23. 7. 2018, <https://histoire.umontreal.ca/english/programs/graduate-programs/ma-in-history-applied/>

20 “Applied History”, date of access 23. 7. 2018, <https://uwaterloo.ca/history/program-requirements/specializations/applied-history>

Their students are invited to conduct joint research on the history of student protests at UCLA. "Through collaborative projects and use of visual and textual tools, students will learn how historical research is used to update digital projects, public policy, museum exhibitions, historic commemoration, and popular media productions. This is hands-on experience! Come and learn how history is applied and interpreted in a variety of places, settings, and media for a variety of audiences and purposes."²¹

The courses in Applied History are defined as "Usable Past" on the other side of the globe as well. *The Higher School of Economics of the National Research University in Saint Petersburg* explained that its program of Applied History "embraces methods and practices dealing with the identification, preservation, interpretation, and presentation of historical artifacts, texts, structures, and landscapes." Praising its new interdisciplinary approach, the program is defined as a preparation for "careers in the public spheres or in academia."²² The Applied History program at the *Universität Zurich* is presented to the public with a similar motto: "designed to look beyond the box." According to its founders, it reconfigures the use of historical knowledge and methodology and insists on the strategic potentials of Applied History in politics, diplomacy, economics, teaching, management, media, and cultural activities. "Historical thinking is presented as versatile intellectual software." However, the commercial component of the program is evident in the organization of numerous summer-schools organized between New York, Taipei, Hong Kong, London, Berlin, Tokyo...²³

These randomly selected university programs create a clear picture of the present academic search for new disciplines capable of attracting a larger number of students in the age of life-long education, influencing the public, and overcoming disciplinary and regional boundaries. Universities offering those courses are excellent examples of how the phrase "history sells" has changed academic practice and vice versa, how changes in academia are transforming the public sphere.²⁴

21 "Introduction to Public Applied History", date of access 23. 7. 2018, <https://phi.history.ucla.edu/hist-148-introduction-publicapplied-history/>

22 "Master's Program 'Applied and Interdisciplinary History *Usable Pasts*'", date of access 23. 7. 2018, <https://spb.hse.ru/en/ma/apphist/>

23 "MAS in Applied History", date of access 23. 7. 2018, <https://mas-applied-history.ch/>

24 "Top Public/Applied History Bachelors Degree Programs", date of access 1. 8. 2018, <https://www.collegeraptor.com/Majors/Details/54.0105/Level/Bachelors-degree/Public/Applied-History>; "Best Colleges with Public/Applied History Degrees in the USA in 2017", date of access 1. 8. 2018, <https://www.universities.com/programs/public-applied-history-degrees>

Historians searching for the interdisciplinary steps forward (researchers in the fields of Cultural, Memory, Heritage, or different Area Studies) have recognized Public/Applied History as an inspiring framework for lucid historical thinking. Furthermore, the rise of Universities providing Public/Applied History programs has influenced the formation of academic projects that thoroughly analyze various aspects of this disciplinary innovation. The best example in that respect represents the recently established *Applied European Contemporary History Network*. It is one of the Jean Monnet activities of the Erasmus+ Program funded by the European Commission with the aim “of establishing Applied European Contemporary History as a basic academic discipline in Europe.”²⁵ Including participants from Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Poland, Serbia, it compares and contrasts the diverse examples of historically dubious and painful episodes and processes and their interpretations. The network is dedicated to organizing international conferences and summer schools and designing teaching modules and international courses of study on European Applied History. Partners in the project are the University of Jena, the Ettersberg Foundation, Weimar, Ghent University, CEGE-SOMA, The ZFD Forum, The University of Tuzla, the Akademie für Konflikttransformation im Forum ZFP, the Krzyzowa Foundation, the University of Wrocław, the Museum of Yugoslavia, and the University of Belgrade.²⁶

Among the universities that offer Applied History programs, the most influential without doubt is Harvard University. The *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government* has formally included Applied History courses in its program since the fall of 2016 (after it was part of their curricula for several years).²⁷ From the very beginning, it was obvious that the *Belfer Center* had introduced a new perspective in this field, stating that the main aim

25 “The Network”, date of access 1. 8. 2018, <http://aec-history.uni-jena.de/network/>

26 One of the AECH actions was the organization of the conference *Public and Applied History on the Battlefield of Europe, Dealing with Painful Pasts in the 20th Century* in Jena in November 2016. Its organizers Dr Dennis Dierks and Dr Juliane Tomann, opened the space for the intriguing academic analysis of the Applied history phenomenon. They recognized the slow, but growing “democratization of the production of historical knowledge” and concluded that “History and representations of the past have become an increasingly public issue, especially over the past decades”. The numerous grassroots initiatives and the growing interest in history of the various civil society agents convinced them that further and more studious work is needed on this topic. Date of access 1. 8. 2018, www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-34361

27 “Applied History Project”, date of access 1. 8. 2018, <https://www.belfercenter.org/project/applied-history-project>

of the program was to educate historians for advisory and consultant positions in all aspects of contemporary policymaking. It defined work on Applied History as an “explicit attempt to illuminate current challenges and choices by analyzing historical precedents and analogues.”²⁸ Harvard’s Applied History Project took “a ‘big tent’ approach to revitalizing applied history in academia and promoting its use in government, business, and other sectors of society.”²⁹

The leading figures of the Project – its co-chairs were political scientist Graham Allison and historian Niall Ferguson.³⁰ Their main aim was to convince the public, especially the US Presidency, about the need to establish a *White House Council of Historical Advisers*. Faced with turbulent political changes, they invited the academics involved in the humanities and in political studies to rethink the possible tasks that could strengthen the “atrophied” relationship between history and politics. By reiterating that ancient and Renaissance historians were teachers of policy makers and by presenting the influence that writing history had on the art of politics, they stood up against the (according to them) contemporary marginalization of history and vociferously requested a more significant involvement of historians in the political sphere.

The project established an online hub with a list of assignments that are of interest to politicians and could only be answered by historians. The search for analogues and precedents of contemporary events, for history’s main agents, and its possible consequences, were put at the top of the list. Historians are supposed to provide specific answers to the questions: What lessons can be drawn from historical events that are relevant to the present? What if certain historical events had played out differently? What would a 20th century historical leader do today? What is

28 The Belfer Center was named the world’s best University Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program in the *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* produced by the University of Pennsylvania Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program. The Center has a dual mission: (1) to provide leadership in advancing policy-relevant knowledge about the most important challenges of international security and other critical issues where science, technology, environmental policy, and international affairs intersect; and (2) to prepare future generations of leaders for these arenas. Date of access 26. 7. 2018. #1 University Affiliated Think Tank <https://www.belfercenter.org/about>

29 Graham Allison, Niall Ferguson, *Manifesto*, date of access 26. 7. 2018, <https://www.belfercenter.org/project/applied-history-project#!manifesto>

30 Graham Allison was the Director of the Belfer Center for 22 years until his retirement in summer 2017. His latest book: Graham Allison, *Destined for War, Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?*, (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

the overreaching story of the state, institution, or issue at hand, and how do foreign protagonists understand it? Searching for similarities and differences, comparing and contrasting the present with past events, represents one of the main goals in the process of educating applied historians.

Offering a long list of notable quotes given by historians, writers, philosophers and politicians from all periods, the founders were keen to attract a wide spectrum of students and followers. Their highly provocative approach, which explores the most controversial political topics and the dynamic activities and seminars, are open to the public. The Faculty Working Group consists of mainly Harvard based professors interested in various aspects of global politics, area studies and history. The program provides the Ernest May Fellowship for students dealing with strategy studies and international affairs and support for professors “who teach policymaking in a historical context”. The online hub contains recommended readings (“a frequently updated selection of recent news articles and analyses incorporating historical thinking” published in influential political journals and newspapers) and a bibliography of academic texts.³¹

31 Frank Ankersmit, Hans Kellner, *A New Philosophy of History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); David Armitage, Jo Guldi, *The History Manifesto*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, (New York: Knopf, 1953); Hal Brands, Jeremi Suri, *The Power of the Past*, (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2016); E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, (New York: Knopf, 1962); R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1939); R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946); Will Durant, *The Lessons of History*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968); Ralph Waldo Emerson, *History*, (1841); Richard Evans, *In Defense of History*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger: The Idealist*, (New York: Penguin, 2015); Niall Ferguson, *Virtual History*, (New York: Basic Books, 1999); David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*, New York: Harper and Row, 1970); John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, (1837); Herodotus, *The History*, (440 BC); Robert Hutchings and Jeremi Suri, *Foreign Policy Breakthroughs, Cases in Successful Diplomacy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogy at War*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Henry Kissinger, *On China*, (New York: Penguin, 2011); Margaret Macmillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History*, (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008); Ernest May, “Lessons” from the Past, (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Ernest May and Richard Neustadt, *Thinking in Time*, (New York: Free Press, 1986); Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, (100s BC); Leon Pompa, *Human Nature and Historical Knowledge: Hume, Hegel, and Vico*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Arthur Schlesinger, *War and the American Presidency*, (New York: Norton, 2004); Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, (400s BC); Leo

Just one month before the 2016 US Presidential Election, the Project announced *Our Manifesto* titled *Establish a White House Council of Historical Advisers Now*, later to be renamed *Applied History Manifesto*. The main idea of its authors Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson was highlighted in the first paragraph of the *Manifesto*: "Mainstream historians begin with a past event or era and attempt to provide an account of what happened and why. Applied historians begin with a current choice or predicament and attempt to analyze the historical record to provide perspective, stimulate imagination, find clues about what is likely to happen, suggest possible policy interventions, and assess probable consequences. It might be said that applied history is to mainstream history what medical practice is to biochemistry, or engineering to physics. But that analogy is not quite right, because in the realm of science there is mutual respect between practitioners and theorists. In the realm of policy, by contrast, one finds a culture of mutual contempt between practitioners and historians. Applied history is an attempt to address that." The authors came up with the assertion that the current foreign policy of the United States is missing the historical perspective. The inadequate historical knowledge of the policy makers is seen as the main reason for the failed US initiatives in the Middle East, Ukraine, and for its turbulent relationship with the socialist giant – China.³²

Stressing just how important the decision to establish the *Council of Economic Advisers* within the Executive Office of the President after the Second World War was, they opted for a similar body comprised of historians.³³ "We suggest this council's charter begin with Thucydides' observation that 'events of future history will be of the same nature – or nearly so – as the history of the past, so long as men are men.'" In their conclusion, the authors quoted Winston Churchill (to be more precise, George Santayana): "the longer you can look back, the farther you can look forward" and exclaimed: "The next president's charge to this council should be to provide historical perspectives on contemporary problems." According to

Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, (1869); *The Vital Past: Writings on the Uses of History*, ed. Stephen Vaughan, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985); Giambattista Vico, *The First New Science*, (1725); Gordon Wood, *The Purpose of the Past*, (New York: Penguin, 2008).

32 Graham Allison, Nial Ferguson, "Manifesto", date of access 26. 7. 2018, <https://www.belfercenter.org/project/applied-history-project#!manifesto>

33 *The Council of Economic Advisers* (CEA) is an agency within the Executive Office of the President. It was established in 1946 and it is not to be mixed with the *National Economic Council* (established in 1993) as part of The Office of White House Policy.

the writers of the *Manifesto*, the only way to reach these goals is not to proclaim a bad history phrase “America First”, but “A better slogan – which has no past to speak of in the United States – (...) History First”. The authors of the *Manifesto* were aware that historical analogues could mislead and provide false conclusions with long-lasting consequences. However, they found contra-factual stories and calculations just as thought-provoking and inspiring. The question “what if?” rebuked by traditional historians as highly unprofessional and viewed as the best example of the dilettantism of the so-called para-historians, represents one of the crucial assignments of the *Belfer Center*-educated applied historians.

Their highly pragmatic *Manifesto* underlines the statement that history “illuminates the consequences of actions in comparable situations.” Accordingly, the program creators made a list of questions every presidency must answer in its time: What lessons of statecraft from a former president’s handling of another crisis could be applied to a current challenge? (What would the 20th century statesmen have done?) What is the significance of a historical anniversary for the present (a common topic for presidential speeches)? What is the relevant history of the state, institution, or issue at hand? What if some action had not been taken (the kind of question too seldom asked after a policy failure)? Grand strategic questions like “Can the United States avoid decline?”

The questions raised seem precise, while the answers could only be speculative. The authors of the project believed that they are instructive and listed the possible important problems of future US Administrations that could be best discussed and analyzed by historians: Will ISIS buy or steal a nuclear weapon? Will Chinese and Japanese forces clash in the East China Sea, sparking a wider war? Will the Saudi royal family be deposed? Will the European Union disintegrate? Will Russia invade a Baltic state?³⁴ The authors were aware that this kind of prediction and analysis are part of the job of intelligence agencies. Nevertheless, they believed that historians have a better knowledge that could and should provide better positions and perspectives in answering those dubious questions.

According to Allison/Ferguson, two names were the best examples of political advisors: George F. Kennan and Henry Kissinger. The first one as the “proto applied historian” and the second as the practitioner that promoted the idea “History teaches by analogy, not by maxims.” Sir Michael Howard of Oxford and Paul Kennedy of Yale are presented in the *Manifesto* as “applaud colleagues” and “mentors” of the whole idea.

34 Allison, Ferguson, *Manifesto*.

“For too long, history has been disparaged as a “soft” subject, often by social scientists offering spuriously hard certainty. We believe it is time for a new and rigorous applied history to close America’s history deficit. Not only do we want to see it incorporated into the Executive Office of the President, alongside the economic expertise that has so long been seen as indispensable to the executive branch. We also want to see it develop as a discipline in its own right in our universities, beginning with Harvard.”³⁵

This *Manifesto* and the whole concept of the political application of history, has gained its first critics. *Jeremy Adelman, professor of history and director of the Global History Lab at Princeton University, analyzed the demand for the Council of Historical Advisers and asked the question: “who needs who? Is it the state that needs the historian, or the historian the state?”*³⁶ His main argument was that the plurality of the past fades away with such an approach and those who are supposed to document historical complexity are reducing it to a single (currently and politically) useful perspective. He recalled Julien Benda’s critique of intellectuals who betrayed “higher, universal duties” in order “to play the game of political passions, serving ideology instead of science and giving up on their hal- lowed place as the vanguards of rationalism” and asked: “Whose past gets summoned? And whom should the past serve if relevance drives the agenda, shakes up status differences, and allocates resources?” *Historians Without Borders*, an organization from Finland uniting historians from different Baltic states, Russia and Ukraine, dedicated to the strengthening of the role of historians in the peace building processes and conflict resolutions, have examined the same problems and opened the forum for discussion.³⁷

For a precise analysis of the *Applied History Manifesto* and *Belfer’s* entire project, it is important to mention that one of its experts is Profes-

35 *Ibid.*

36 Adelman asked for “more humility about what we historians have to offer.” Jeremy Adelman, “Who Needs Historians? What a recent call to get historians to become political advisers gets wrong, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 9, 2016, date of access 26. 7. 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Who-Needs-Historians-/237415> His article (unclear dating! OMP) was reaction to Allison, Ferguson’s text in the September issue of *The Atlantic*, “Why the US President Needs a Council of Historians, It isn’t enough for a commander in chief to invite friendly academics to dinner. The United States could avoid future disaster if policy makers started looking more to the past”, date of access 26. 7. 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/09/dont-know-much-about-history/492746/>

37 Emma Hakala, *Applied History or Inflated Expectations – How to Use History (and Historians)?*, date of access 26. 7. 2018, https://www.historianswithoutborders.fi/en/applied_history/

sor David Armitage who, together with Jo Guldi, wrote the book, *The History Manifesto* in 2014.³⁸ Those two texts have similar titles, raise similar questions, and tackle similar problems. However, they differ on many levels and must be contrasted in many ways. Armitage/Guldi wrote methodological and social analysis inside the academic framework. Their postulates and conclusions are highly politically provocative, but written in a much more subtle style.³⁹ *History Manifesto's* intention was similar: to reviving the long durée analyses, to fight the short-sightedness and lack of long-range perspective in contemporary "western" culture and humanities in particular. Faced with the epochal changes: economic globalization and rising political and economic inequality inside nations and among countries, the digital revolution and the accelerating ecological crisis, they concluded that "almost every aspect of human life is plotted and judged, packaged and paid for, on timescales of a few months or years." Perceiving the present as a time of permanent political campaigns and framed by the electoral circles from two to seven years, *The History Manifesto* called on historians to take action. It stood against the influence of the corporate boards in their constant search for new profit. Being obliged to apply for funds on an annual basis, "international institutions, humanitarian bodies, and NGOs are forced to follow the same logic." This is the precondition that limits perspectives. "Why is history – especially long-term history – so essential to understanding the multiple pasts that have given rise to our conflicted present? *The History Manifesto* is a call to arms for historians and everyone interested in the role of history in contemporary society."

The authors are both historians of Early Modern History and, although their intention was to debate the position of history and humanities in the digital era, they have produced a much wider range of arguments and responses. *The History Manifesto* is a book that challenges micro histories and their short-sighted conclusions, and claims that, without analyzing the long term processes and perspectives, historians are losing a clear picture of the past. Armitage/Guldi fought "specialization" of historical knowledge and called "for more global, long-run and trans-disciplinary approaches to big questions, including climate change, inequali-

38 Jo Guldi, David Armitage, *History Manifesto*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), date of access 26. 7. 2018, https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/AC1A1EC711AE91A4F9004E7582D79AF-D/9781107076341AR.pdf/The_History_Manifesto.pdf?event-type=FTLA

39 Their book is by no means inspired by the Report of the Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences of the American Academy of Arts and Humanities, *The Heart of the Matter*. See footnote 9 in this text.

ty and the future of capitalism” as Thomas Piketty wrote in his review of the book.⁴⁰ They praised “history’s power to sort truth from falsehood” and insisted that the global crisis could be recognized and overcome only when observed from the long *durée* perspective.

The authors of *The History Manifesto* stressed that historians disappeared from public debates during the last half of the century and that economists became advisors to policy makers. They shared the idea that historians should be invited to advise politicians, being (paradoxically) the best futurologists. Knowing how many faces and multiple choices the past has offered to its protagonists, historians are the ones who understand that nothing is determined and inevitable.

The opening sentences of *The History Manifesto* “A specter is haunting our time: the specter of the short-term” directly associates readers to a Manifest written one hundred and sixty-six years earlier. Marx’s famous *Communist Manifest* runs through the book and the concluding sentence once again proves this connection: “Historians of the world unite! There is a world to win – before it is too late.” The chains, about which Marx wrote, were not mentioned but the concern for the world’s future is what closes the book in a dramatic way.

Although tackling similar problems, those two approaches differ. While Armitage and Guld created the framework that deals with global problems from a critical humanistic perspective, the *Applied History Manifest* is a highly provocative political statement dealing with the problems of the US Administration in foreign affairs and in turbulent domestic relationships. They both call for the active involvement of historians, but with different aims. The first one, with the intention of raising the awareness of historians and pointing to the present ideological and political traps, the second in order to reconsider the US position in international affairs. The first is written for the historians that are defending their role among the other researchers of the past, the second for the historians that are insisting on their role as political agents and advisers. Without a doubt, *The History Manifesto* has made a significant impact on Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson, but their thinking and conclusions have taken a different direction. However, after reading both texts, the question still remains: is it possible to understand the current problem of historical methodology

40 Jo Guldi, David Armitage, Reviews In *The History Manifesto* (Ii-Iv), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014), date of access 26. 7. 2018, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/history-manifesto/reviews/A30A3C817D1947AC08DE59F47407C3A3/core-reader>

and position in a post-socialist world as a problem *per se*, without analyzing the wider social, political or ideological framework? The interest both texts have raised in the historical guild could be understood not only as a new search for the understanding of the past/present complex relationship, but also as a manifestation of the crisis of the humanities and finally, as a problem of global politics defined thorough Margaret Thatcher's famous slogan: "There Is No Alternative."⁴¹

Conclusion

Contemporary societies have developed a peculiar interest in the past, recognizable on several levels in the public space. The popularity of historical reenactments, flourishing of historical museums and exhibitions, the renovation of existing and the opening of new memorials, clearly reflects this statement. History festivals and the position of historians as celebrities are even more interesting phenomena. Alternate history, contra-factual history, and revisionist history, considered as branches of literature and fictional genres (and rarely as historical discourses), are increasingly attracting a wider public. Predicting and questioning consequences of possible different turnouts of history and "what if" questions, have always been intriguing for novelists, artists, theoreticians, but under constant criticism and suspicion from scholars.⁴² Despite strong opposition from traditional historians, these approaches to the past are regularly included in wider public discussions.

Although highly problematic on many levels, this plurality of historical interpretations and methodologies is provocative in a positive way too. It questions the unique and privileged position of historians as the only professionals dealing with the past. Civil society organizations, local communities, artistic groups, numerous amateurs (rightly, or not) considered as experts and connoisseurs of the past, are actively involved in creating historical images and narratives. Their interest is mainly focused on the historical controversies and politically intriguing questions. For some, this change reflects the democratization of historical knowledge, for others, it creates a cacophony of multiple voices, since constantly performed

41 Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to Conservative Party Conference" October 20, 1967, date of access 27. 7. 2018, <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/101586>

42 Karen Hellekson, *The Alternate History, Refiguring Historical Time*, (Kent, Ohio, London: The Kent State University Press, 2001), 1.

and invented historical images blur the borders between the past, the present, and the future.

Although some applied historians are openly asking for more political influence and advisory positions, the majority of practitioners are driven by the need to revive the past in order to explain it to their contemporaries and trace the roots of the current processes and controversies in the past. They are struggling to identify and critically reconsider historical continuities in order to explain present trends. In doing so, they are in a position to recognize how the unquestionable authorities hidden behind the traditional historical methodology are sometimes in a position to manipulate the public, pretentiously presenting their conclusions as the only allegedly objective and scientifically justified conclusions. The disciplines of Public and Applied History have a potential to follow (but at the same time, further develop) this contemporary social and cultural phenomenon. They represent the practical application of historical knowledge in the public space and a way to overcome the “mutual contempt” between history practitioners on one hand, and scholars and academics on the other. Public/Applied History is bridging the gap between researchers of the past and contemporary phenomena analysts. Successfully disclosing their interference in the fields of ideology and politics, Applied History has a potential to revive Annale’s approach that aimed to deconstruct the walls between the humanistic disciplines and, simultaneously, to revive Voltaire’s advice “let us cultivate our own garden.”

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Summary

The text shows the development of the concept of Applied History. In recent years, many universities have been offering their students courses on Public and Applied History, describing them as a practical use of the past in society and on the market and as a strategic potential in politics, diplomacy, economics, education, management, media and cultural activities, showing “historical thinking (...) as versatile, intellectual software.” The article gives several examples of universities that offer basic and advanced Masters courses in the field of Public and Applied History. Special attention is focused on the work of the *National Council on Public History* (NCPH) in the United States, which offers detailed information on academic programs and business opportunities in the field of Public History. On the other hand, it shows the Applied History Program of the *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University*. Its creators, Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson, view the difference between traditional historiography and applied history in their approach to the past. Whereas traditional historians focus on events from the past in an attempt to give answers to questions about what happened and how, Applied historians begin with a current choice or predicament and attempt to analyze the historical record to provide perspective, stimulate imagination, find clues about what is likely to happen, suggest possible policy interventions, and assess probable consequences. The article pays special attention to a document initially called *Our Manifesto: Establish a White House Council of Historical Advisers Now*, later to be renamed *Applied History Manifesto*. This document is compared with the book, *History Manifesto*, written by Jo Guldi and David Armitage in 2014. This book deals with the place of history in modernity and the problems of historical methodology, which the authors believe places too much emphasis on researching short historical episodes and is devoid of possibilities for properly contextualizing historical phenomena.

Резиме

Олга Манојловић Пинтар

О јавној и примењеној историји

Апстракт: Рад анализира нову академску дисциплину под називом *јавна/примењена историја* и представља универзитетске програме и курсеве из ове области. Фокус је на програму примењене историје Центра Белфер Универзитета Харвард и на његовом *Манифесту* који је објављен 2016. године. *Манифест* је поређен са књигом *Историјски манифест* коју су написали Џо Гулди и Дејвид Армитиџ 2014. године.

Кључне речи: јавна/примењена историја, школа *Анала*, *Историјски манифест*, Центар Белфер Универзитета Харвард

Текст приказује развој концепта јавне и примењене историје. Последњих година бројни универзитети нуде својим полазницима курсеве из ове дисциплине описујући их као практичну употребу прошлости у друштву и на тржишту и као стратешки потенцијал у политици, дипломатији, економији, образовању, управљању, медијским и културним активностима, представљајући „историјско размишљање (...) као свестрани, интелектуални софтвер“. У раду је приказано неколико примера универзитета који нуде основне и мастер студије из области јавне и примењене историје. Посебна пажња је усмерена на рад Националног савета за јавну историју у Сједињеним Америчким Државама, удружења које пружа прецизне информације о академским курсевима и пословним могућностима у области јавне историје. Поред тога, приказан је пројекат примењене историје Центра Белфер са Харвард универзитета. Његови творци Грејам Алисон и Најл Фергусон су разлику између традиционалне историографије и примењене историје видели у приступу прошлости. Док традиционални историчари полазе од догађаја из прошлости у намери да пруже одговор на питања шта се догодило и како, историчари који се баве примењеном историјом у својим анализама полазе од савремених избора и неусаглашености у намери да разумеју њихове историјске корене како би отворили перспективе, подстакли размишљања, про-

нашли одговоре на питање шта се догодило, предложили могуће политичке интервенције и предвидели даље последице. У раду је посебна пажња посвећена документу који је иницијално назван *Наш манифест: Одмах успоставити веће историјских саветника Беле куће*, да би касније био преименован у *Манифест примењене историје*. Тај документ је упоређен са књигом *Историјски манифест* коју су 2014. написали Џо Гулди и Дејвид Армитиџ. Књига се бави местом историје у савремености и проблемима историјске методологије, за коју аутори сматрају да је превише усмерена на истраживање кратких историјских епизода и лишена могућности правилне контекстуализације историјских феномена.