

Public and Applied History in Germany

Just Another Brick in the Wall of the Academic Ivory Tower?

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German university history departments typically hire two types of historians. Under the roof of history departments, historians research the past and produce historical narratives (*Geschichtswissenschaft*), whereas professorships with an appointment in history teaching (*Geschichtsdidaktik*) deal with the practice and the theory of history. Both professors of history and professors of history education teach and research in their related realms. However, with this division of labor between historical research on the one hand, and the practice and theory of history on the other hand, these two stakeholders of the discipline of history in Germany are in friction. Public and applied history have emerged somewhere in between the frontlines.

In this article, we argue that public and applied histories are indicators of change in German historical sciences.¹ We will describe the phenomenon, explain why there are two terms for publicly engaged history in Germany, and describe the change that is underway. This article is written in the spirit of a field report by two participant observers. It describes coming to terms with a phenomenon for which various actors in the field offer different paths. All people writing about public and applied history are part of the phenomenon that they describe, including the two authors of this text. Therefore, our observations are neither exhaustive nor fully objective but rather, they are self-critical.

Public history and applied history can still be considered relatively new phenomena for historical sciences in Germany. This is in spite of the fact that the terms have been increasingly employed in the discourse about public representations and uses of the past for the last decade. In a landmark article in 2010, historian Irmgard Zündorf described public history as an American phenomenon that had impacted German universities through the establishment of new courses, yet noted that it had not yielded institutional change, such as new professorships, within the

¹ With “German historical sciences” we are referring to the German concept of *Geschichtswissenschaft* as the specific term employed to describe German history departments.

established historical sciences at that time.² The resonance of these terms, however, indicates a broadening of focus in historical science that takes into consideration nonacademic, public uses of the past. This widening of the historical research agenda has been aligning with an increasing public interest in history, historical knowledge, and historical products since 1970, in Germany as well as worldwide. Also, the late 1960s student revolt in West Germany reverberated in the historical sciences; students protested elitist and traditional historical research that emphasized victories of powerful men. Their protest led to reform. Reform first occurred in the subdiscipline of history teaching. The terms “historical culture” (*Geschichtskultur*) and “historical consciousness” (*Geschichtsbewusstsein*) henceforth enlarged the realm of research well beyond the classroom. According to Jörn Rüsen, “historical culture” means in a nutshell, “all cultural practices using the past in order to adjust to the present, and by providing future perspectives for human action.”³ Historical consciousness matters in civic education, museums, and archival practice as well as other media.⁴ A discussion evolved around the concepts of historical culture and historical consciousness about how to analyze public representations of the past. However, this discussion remained an expert discourse within the circles of history teaching and only occasionally spread into other historical subdisciplines.

Since the 1990s, the political use of history for legitimizing power and for constructing continuities of social groups has been analyzed in the realm of memory studies. With the “memory boom” (the growth of the scholarly study of memory), the concept of “remembrance culture” (*Erinnerungskultur*, or in English simply “memory”) became popular in German historical sciences, overlapping with the already existing concepts of historical culture and historical consciousness.⁵ For certain reasons the conversations about historical memory and about historical consciousness did not develop a productive exchange and have been existing in parallel ever since.⁶ This “doubled structure” of the discourses on memory and of

2 Irmgard Zündorf, “Zeitgeschichte und Public History,” Version: 1.0, *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, November 2, 2010, http://docupedia.de/zg/Zuendorf_public_history_v1_de_2010.

3 “Geschichtskultur ist der Inbegriff aller kulturellen Praktiken, in denen im Rückgriff auf die Vergangenheit Orientierungsprobleme in der Gegenwart angegangen und gelöst werden. Damit werden Zukunftsperspektiven für menschliches Handeln eröffnet.” Jörn Rüsen and Juliane Tomann, “Geschichtskultur und Angewandte Geschichte,” in *Angewandte Geschichte. Neue Perspektiven auf Geschichte in der Öffentlichkeit*, ed. Jacqueline Nießer and Juliane Tomann (Schoeningh: Paderborn, 2014), 58.

4 Karl-Ernst Jeismann, “Didaktik der Geschichte: Die Wissenschaft von Zustand, Funktion und Veränderung geschichtlicher Vorstellungen im Selbstverständnis der Gegenwart,” in *Geschichtswissenschaft*, ed. Erich Kosthorst (Göttingen, 1977): 9–33.

5 Volkhard Knigge, “Erinnerung oder Geschichtsbewusstsein?: Warum Erinnerung allein in eine Sackgasse für historisch-politische Bildung führen muss,” in *Kommunismusforschung und Erinnerungskulturen in Ostmittel- und Westeuropa*, ed. Volkhard Knigge (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), 177–93 and Stefanie Samida, Sarah Willner, and Georg Koch, eds., *Doing History: Performative Praktiken in der Geschichtskultur* (Waxmann: Münster, 2016), 4.

6 See Juliane Tomann, *Geschichtskultur im Strukturwandel: Öffentliche Geschichte in Katowice nach 1989* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017), 85–90.

historical culture has shaped the emergence of applied history and public history in the German context.

Historical representations have also been rapidly diversifying since the 1990s. Established institutions such as museums, historical sites, and memorials and forms such as books, history journals, and documentaries have been accompanied by a growing number of newcomers. These newer phenomena stretch from historical reenactments or other living history events to graphic novels to historical (video) games. Additionally, some historians have discovered that they can market their skills and knowledge. In Germany, agencies such as “Facts & Files—Historical Research Institute Berlin”⁷ were established around the new millennium. Their employees make a living by researching and writing histories of organizations or businesses for anniversaries and other occasions. In short, history is providing not only political and social resources but also central elements of entertainment and other profitable sectors of the economy.

For a long time, the majority of German historians employed at universities remained skeptical observers of the latter development. A certain arrogance towards historians who “sell” their knowledge outside the academic ivory tower still prevails among most historians in Germany. This criticism was traditionally aimed at professors of history education and history teachers; back in the seventies, for instance, history teaching was depreciated as “an endeavor to produce babyfood.”⁸ Nowadays, such skepticism is aimed at those engaged in history outside of academia—historians active in the media and business in particular. Public and applied history, we argue, can be considered as attempts to reconcile those tensions.

The Roots of the Terms in the United States

Public and applied history as an American phenomenon can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s when public history came into being as a component of the so-called new history in the United States with all of its related fields, such as social or cultural history. The underlying assumption of these new perspectives was that history was no longer determined by grand narratives and traditional political history but by a view from the bottom up. Social change and collective mentalities were researched and described with a focus on everyday life instead of political decisions and decision makers.⁹

Public history emerged in the 1970s also partly due to an increasing number of university students at the time. Additional job opportunities for trained historians in nonacademic settings were needed, and public history seemed to provide them.

⁷ *Facts & Files—Historisches Forschungsinstitut Berlin*, <http://www.factsandfiles.com/de/historisches-forschungsinstitut-berlin.html>.

⁸ Jeismann, “Didaktik der Geschichte,” 11.

⁹ Two handbooks on public history in the United States have been published recently: Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016) and Faye Sayer, *Public History: A Practical Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

All in all, the development of public history suggested a critique of the established American historical sciences. The focus had been on research-trained historians who learned to investigate but not how to communicate and disseminate their knowledge to nonspecialists. The public history movement lamented this lost connection to the public, who actively engaged in writing about and understanding the past before history was established as a scientific discipline at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ The first two public history-themed academic courses introduced in the United States were Public Historical Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Applied History and Social Science at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the academic year 1975–76. The program in Santa Barbara focused on training historians who would be qualified to work in administration, politics, business, or industry after graduating. The Applied History course emphasized that history and historical knowledge can be useful for the public policy sector too. Applied history emphasized the qualities of trained historians in political analysis. Historians would no longer be concerned solely with gathering, organizing, and interpreting of sources in the form of scholarly monographs, for example, but they would also influence the political sphere and political decision-making processes.¹¹

The Uses of Public and Applied History in Germany

Nowadays, the University of Zurich in Switzerland offers programs in a similar vein. For example, students may take a master's course in applied history specifically designed for professionals in the political, business, or media sectors.¹² In Munich, Germany, a comparable option was introduced recently: a certificate course in "Advanced Studies in Applied History." This program promises to connect the study of history with actively shaping the present and creating the future.¹³ The Zurich and Munich programs are not incorporated into regular university curricula and target leadership in politics, media, or administration. The programs in Zurich and Munich cooperate and both courses charge high participation fees, which are not common for graduate programs in Germany.

At German universities, public history is still far less established than it is in the United States. But since Zündorf described the situation in 2010, an increasing number of academic offerings in the realm of public history has emerged in Germany. German historians describe the development as an adoption of US practices in teaching public history.¹⁴ For instance, Cord Arendes, professor of applied historical sciences and public history at the University of Heidelberg, points out that

¹⁰ Simone Rauthe, *Public History in den USA und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 2001), 87.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹² <http://mas-applied-history.ch/studiengang/einfuehrung/studiengang2017-2019/>.

¹³ <http://www.appliedhistory.geschichte.uni-muenchen.de/index.html>.

¹⁴ It remains an open question why German public historians mostly refer to the development in the US, despite the fact that public history also developed in the UK around a "history workshop"

“the U.S. model of public history has been copied at German universities, which are implementing it in different ways depending on their organizational requirements and policies.”¹⁵ Arendes’s chair was established in 2012.¹⁶ Prior to that, the first regular public history master’s program in Germany started in 2008 at the history department of the Free University of Berlin in cooperation with the Center for Contemporary History in Potsdam. Zündorf, one of the program coordinators, argues that there are similarities but also differences to the American model.¹⁷ With its combination of classic history scholarship and public history projects, this public history master’s program seeks to prepare students for jobs outside academic teaching careers and fosters the employability of historians in media, museums, historical sites, memorials, foundations, or corporations. The overall aim of the program is to train students how to communicate scholarly knowledge about the past to the broader public. Additionally, the program includes theories and methods of historical research as well as aspects of historical learning and history teaching.

The oldest German program that emphasizes history in the public sphere without specifically branding it “public history” is located at the University of Gießen. There, a program in history titled “Special-Interest Journalism” was established in 1985. After the introduction of the BA and MA system in Germany, the program became a bachelor degree program in 2007 and then a master’s program in 2015.¹⁸ Later, the University of Cologne launched a master’s program in public history in the winter semester of 2015.¹⁹ Several other German universities such as the University of Hamburg offer courses in public history or have created fields of study in of public history.²⁰ The Catholic University in Eichstätt-Ingolstadt uses the term “applied history,” whereas the University of Bochum uses public history, but both locate them with the discipline of history teaching.²¹

An increasing number of public history courses have been established thanks to a growing number of academic staff and the creation of new teaching positions. This increased attention can also be explained by the impact of the Bologna process. The goals of the Bologna process (a series of agreements meant to create

movement at the end of the nineties. Hilda Kean, Paul Martin, and Sally J. Morgan, eds., “Introduction,” in *Seeing History: Public History in Britain Now* (London: Francis and Taylor, 2000), 14.

¹⁵ Cord Arendes, “Who We Are: Public Historians as Multiple Personalities?” *Public History Weekly*, November 26, 2015, <https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/3-2015-36/public-historians-multiple-personalities/>.

¹⁶ “Professur für Angewandte Geschichtswissenschaft—Public History,” <http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/zegek/histsem/mitglieder/arendes.html>.

¹⁷ Irmgard Zündorf, “Public History,” *Docupedia Zeitgeschichte*, June 9, 2016, https://www.docupedia.de/zg/Public_History.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The staff of the University of Cologne working on the intersection of public history and history teaching has established a new book series in 2015 under the title *Geschichtsdidaktik diskursiv: Public History und historisches Denken*, edited by Jürgen Elvert, Wolfgang Hasberg, Holger Thüne-mann and Christine Gundermann.

²⁰ <https://www.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/arbeitsbereiche/public-history/forschung.html>.

²¹ <http://www.ku.de/ggf/geschichte/didgesch/forschung/angewandte-geschichte/>; http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/histdidaktik/public_history.html.

more uniformity within European higher education), with its claim for employability, can be met to a greater extent by public or applied history than by conventional history programs. The University of Cologne, for instance, installed an assistant professorship in public history in 2014.²² In Munich, history teaching and public history are combined into one professorship, and the University of Flensburg has established an assistant professorship for “Public History and Historical Learning” in 2016²³ as has the University of Hamburg.²⁴ Most of these new positions are linked to the departments of history teaching.²⁵ In 2013, the German publishing house De Gruyter/Oldenbourg began to run *Public History Weekly: The International Blogjournal*²⁶ and the new journal *International Public History* launched its first issue in 2018.²⁷ *Public History Weekly* publishes contributions in English and other languages and features interactive discussions with readers. Its contributors mainly come from Germany and Central Europe and include scholars of history teaching. Moreover, a new book series “Public History—History in Practice” (Public History—*Geschichte in der Praxis*) has been launched recently offering handbook orientation for historians to enter the nonacademic job market; two books have so far been published.²⁸

This overview indicates that the term public history has attracted more attention in the German academic landscape than its counterpart applied history. Nevertheless, both terms are still in use to describe the relationship between public representations of the past and the production of historical knowledge by academics. The name of a working group within the German Historical Association, Applied History/Public History (*AG Angewandte Geschichte/Public History*), provides evidence of the lack of clarity regarding the distinction. The phenomenon of “history marketing”—the hiring of historians to write the history of a company—also mirrors this dilemma. An issue of the journal of German history teachers, *History in Academia and Teaching (Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht)* in 2015 discussed history marketing as applied history. It did so by providing space for historians working in the field of corporate history services to reflect on the relationship between their training and their profession.²⁹ A similar venture (albeit with a more

22 <http://histsem2.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/918.html>.

23 http://www.did.geschichte.uni-muenchen.de/ueber_uns/index.html.

24 <https://www.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/arbeitsbereiche/public-history/personen/logge.html>.

25 Such as at the university of Tübingen which runs the Institute of Didactics of History and Public History. <https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/faculties/faculty-of-humanities/departments/departments-of-history/institutes/didactics-of-history-and-public-history/institute/>.

26 *Public History Weekly: The International Blogjournal*, <https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/>.

27 *International Public History*, <https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/iph>.

28 Hilmar Sack, *Geschichte im politischen Raum: Theorie - Praxis - Berufsfelder* (Tübingen: UTB, 2016), Thomas Fischer and Thomas Schuhbauer, *Geschichte in Film und Fernsehen: Theorie - Praxis - Berufsfelder* (Tübingen: UTB, 2016).

29 Christoph Cornelißen, Michael Sauer, and Winfried Schulze, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht: Angewandte Geschichte* 66 (2015) 3–4.

diverse pool of participants) had been published in 2012 as an anthology under the title “Public History—between economy and science.”³⁰ In one case, history marketing was referred to as applied and in another as public history. It seems therefore that history sold for profit could be classified as either applied or public history. What could be the difference then, between applied and public history?

The German Version of Applied History

Applied history in German is endowed with various meanings, inside and outside the academy—but always related to it. The Heidelberg Chair of “Applied Historical Science—Public History” and the working group within the Association of German Historians use both terms. Few institutions in Germany use only the term “Applied History.” One that did was known as The Center for Applied History (*Zentrum für Angewandte Geschichte* [ZAG]) in Bavaria, which was established in 2005. It was one of the most successful players in history marketing. ZAG was a commercial venture and was run by the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. After the recent retirement of its director, Prof. Gregor Schöllgen, however, the venture closed.³¹ In contrast, The Institute for Applied History (*Institut für angewandte Geschichte e.V.*), located geographically far from Bavaria, in the German northeast, is also conceptually distant from Erlangen’s Center for Applied History. The Institute for Applied History in Frankfurt (Oder) has defined applied history as the civic engagement of academics by facilitating exchange between citizens about local history at the German-Polish border.³² Despite its title of an “institute,” this organization operates as an association of students, graduates, and employees of the Viadrina European University. These two institutes practice different concepts of applied history: one had focused on history as a business, while the other one is concerned with history as civic activism. “One makes money, the other makes citizens,” could sum up the difference. What both forms of applied history have in common, though, is that they are carried out by academics, and their field of activity reaches well beyond academia.

The first German anthology mapping the field of popular forms of history and branding it “applied history” was published in 2009.³³ It describes the wide variety of activities engaged in history outside academia as the result of increasingly diversified information, communication, and knowledge opportunities through the changing media landscape. The book summarizes, but does not analyze, various forms of popular history ventures, predominantly in Germany.

³⁰ Christoph Kühberger, ed., *Vergangenheitsbewirtschaftung: Public History zwischen Wirtschaft und Wissenschaft* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2012).

³¹ <http://www.zag.uni-erlangen.de>.

³² The two authors of this text were involved in this development. <http://www.institut.net>.

³³ Wolfgang Hardtwig and Alexander Schug, eds., *History Sells!: Angewandte Geschichte als Wissenschaft und Markt* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2009).

It was a collaboration between a historian running a history-marketing agency³⁴ and a historian working in academia. The latter, Wolfgang Hardtwig, had been striving in his career for an integrated anthropological perspective on history in which the concept of historical culture (*Geschichtskultur*) was a driving force.³⁵ With this first applied history anthology, Hardtwig and his coauthor Alexander Schug called for overcoming the “die-hard defense mechanisms” (*eingefleischte Abwehrreflexe*) historians employ towards popular and consumerist forms of history.³⁶

Also in 2009, the journal *History in Academia and Teaching* dedicated an issue to “Applied History—Studies and Practice.”³⁷ The Zürich masters of applied history was presented there along with the Gießen graduate program on “Media and History” next to a description about “history marketing” agencies. This was followed by an article about places of memory in Northern Poland and a reflection on the concepts of public history and historical culture. This spectrum of topics mirrors the core yet conceptually volatile themes of public history in Germany: history as a science, in practice and in public; history in media and business; and German history’s relationship to memory studies and to Eastern Europe.

In 2011, an authors’ collective (which included the two contributors of this article) mapped applied history in German academia and society in a scholarly Wikipedia-format website for contemporary history titled *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*.³⁸ The five authors were members of the already mentioned Institute for Applied History. During the collaborative research for this article, we learned that the German term *Angewandte Geschichte* carries a problematic legacy. Whereas the roots of applied history in the United States can be traced back to the mid-1970s, the term *Angewandte Geschichte* in Germany dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1910, history teacher and writer Heinrich Wolf began publishing a series of six books under the title “Applied History: An Education Towards Political Thought and Will.”³⁹ Wolf’s volumes included “Applied Church History” (vol. 2) and “Applied Racial Theory (World History on Biological Foundation)” (vol. 5).⁴⁰ A fierce anti-Semite and proponent of racial pan-German theory, Wolf applied history on behalf of the ideological, national-socialist battle of his time. Therefore, the German term *Angewandte Geschichte* can be regarded as problematic.

34 The “Vergangenheitsagentur” also brands itself as offering “services in applied history.” *Vergangenheitsagentur*, <http://www.vergangenheitsagentur.de/>.

35 Wolfgang Hardtwig, *Geschichtskultur und Wissenschaft* (München: Dtv., 1990) and Wolfgang Hardtwig, *Deutsche Geschichtskultur im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013).

36 Hardtwig and Schug, “Einleitung,” in *History Sells!*, 16.

37 *Angewandte Geschichte - Studium und Praxis*, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, special issue, “Angewandte Geschichte - Studium und Praxis”, 2009/2.

38 Felix Ackermann, Jakob Ackermann, Anna Littke, Jacqueline Nießer, and Juliane Tomann, “Diskussion Angewandte Geschichte: Ein neuer Ansatz?,” *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 2011, https://docupedia.de/zg/Diskussion_Angewandte_Geschichte.

39 Heinrich Wolf, *Angewandte Geschichte. Eine Erziehung zum Politischen Denken und Wollen*, 6 Bde., Leipzig 1910ff. cf. ebenda, S. 2.

40 Heinrich Wolf, *Angewandte Rassenkunde (Weltgeschichte auf biologischer Grundlage)* (Leipzig: Theodor Weicher Verlag, 1927).

At the beginning of the new millennium, however, when students and young academics founded the Institute for Applied History at the Viadrina European University, they were not aware of the history of the term and concept.⁴¹ Situated at the Polish-German border in Frankfurt (Oder), they developed their approach to applied history against the backdrop of their time: the readjustment of German-Polish relations after German reunification in 1990. Sparked by their experiences of enhancing German-Polish dialogue about history and identity in this formerly contested border region, the students applied history to civic educational projects. Those students at the European University were trained in interdisciplinary cultural studies, which included cultural history. Their curriculum also required them to organize cultural projects, which inspired them to engage as expert citizens along the German-Polish border. While trying to apply their study of culture (circulating around identity, tradition, memory, language, space, and nation) to the local communities along the German-Polish border, they became aware of the crucial role historical knowledge plays in intercultural exchange. This was especially the case in an area where different cultures left their traces on the territory and in the stories of the people living there. The history of expulsions, especially those following World War II, both of Germans from the former German territories which came to belong to Poland, and of the Poles from the former Polish lands that came under Soviet rule, proved to be a particularly sensitive topic at this specific border location. The students set up a series of cultural events under the title “Terra Transoderana” (space beyond the Oder river) to tackle this German-Polish joint history of expulsions through public readings of literature, screenings of films, and talks with eye witnesses, among other things. They also established a travel company to help descendants of German expellees in exploring their family history through individual trips to Poland.⁴² For a long time, the history of German expellees had been a topic of contention between the two nations. By using this same history for reconciliation, applying history became a crucial ingredient of cross-cultural civic activism. In this specific case, knowing the languages and history of other cultures proved to be just as important as knowing how to organize an event, communicate with local media, and moderate a discussion. Practical, communicative skills hence were needed as much as historical and cultural knowledge.

The practice of exploring local and regional history together with local residents had actually been very popular in the 1980s in West Germany and was known as the History Workshop Movement (*Geschichtswerkstättenbewegung*).⁴³ At the beginning of the millennium in Frankfurt (Oder), this way of “doing history from below” arose

41 The “Institute for Applied History” first was a project by the association “transkultura e.V,” founded in 2001. In 2007, the association decided to focus on intercultural history projects and became the “Institute for Applied History.”

42 To get an impression about how this travel company worked see <http://www.institut.net/silberhochzeit-srebrne-gody-heimatreise/>.

43 Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg/Galerie Morgenland/Geschichtswerkstatt Eimsbüttel (Hrsg.), *Geschichtswerkstätten gestern – heute – morgen. Bewegung! Stillstand. Aufbruch?*, München 2004.

from German-Polish projects and was henceforth expanded to other intercultural endeavors for historical dialogue under the title “History Workshop Europe.”⁴⁴

In short, applied history in Frankfurt (Oder) became the term used in intercultural history projects by academics trained in cultural studies with citizens along the German-Polish border. In this specific context, history was the kernel of intercultural and interdisciplinary civic activism. “Applied” in this context meant “grounded” in place and time; what was important here was the history that mattered in places and people’s lives.

In 2014, the two authors of this article published a second anthology on applied history, with more analytical aspirations.⁴⁵ In this volume, Jörn Rüsen presented the above-mentioned concept of historical culture (*Geschichtskultur*) and traced its evolution since its coinage in the late 1980s.⁴⁶ The anthology includes an additional interview with Rüsen, in which he warned that the term “applied history” was misleading, arguing that history is essentially rooted in human life and therefore is inherently always applied.⁴⁷ Moreover, he hinted at the possibility that applied history can also mean instrumentalized history, for example for a one-sided political purpose. At the same time, the theoretician conceded that historical science can become self-referential, as when researchers look to fill gaps in the historical record without considering whether the new findings have social relevance. To fight this danger, Rüsen proposed to introduce the term “practical history” and to avoid the concept of applied.⁴⁸

Contributors to the anthology asserted that public history complements applied history. Nevertheless, we proposed a distinction with regard to public interaction. Whereas public history presents history *to* the public (using popular forms such as films and games), applied history works by doing history *with* the public.⁴⁹ Public history emphasizes forms, and applied history emphasizes agents involved in popular history projects. Historians are considered one of those agents. When historians do history, they are fulfilling an important civic responsibility. However,

44 The “Institute for Applied History” ran the program “Geschichtswerkstatt Europa” from 2008–2013. It was funded by the German Public Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility, Future” (Stiftung “Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft”). Visit this web site for more information: <http://www.institut.net/geschichtswerkstatt-europa/>.

45 Jacqueline Nießer and Juliane Tomann, eds., *Angewandte Geschichte: Neue Perspektiven auf Geschichte in der Öffentlichkeit* (Schoeningh: Paderborn, 2014).

46 Jörn Rüsen, “Die fünf Dimensionen der Geschichtskultur,” in Nießer and Tomann, *Angewandte Geschichte*, 46–57.

47 *Ibid.*, 59–60.

48 The term “practical history” is in use, too, although not so much in the German context. It is employed to describe phenomena that are similar to what is discussed here as applied history and public history in a Polish handbook on the theory of memory, remembrance, and memory culture. See, for example Juliane Tomann and Marcus Ventzke “Historia praktyczna,” in *Modi memorandi: Leksykon kultury pamięci*, ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Robert Traba, and Joanna Kalicka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar 2014): 163–68. See also Ludmilla J. Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000).

49 Jacqueline Nießer and Juliane Tomann, “Die Ironie der Praxis: Angewandte Geschichte an der Oder,” in Nießer and Tomann, *Angewandte Geschichte*, 109.

Frankfurt (Oder) practitioners would see historians working in applied history not necessarily as experts but as moderators and facilitators of exchange. Therefore, the historian interacts with other agents in doing history and facilitates participation among stakeholders.

In the anthology, two owners of history marketing companies argue in a similar vein. Although they are selling historical services, Gerhard Obermüller and Thomas Prüfer understand their business as a means of strengthening the historical consciousness of their clients as well as the publics who consume their products.⁵⁰ In his article, historian Gangolf Hübinger reminds readers of the difficult task of every historian to socially contribute as a public intellectual and at the same time to keep a critical distance from the public.⁵¹ Irmgard Zündorf argues that public history relies more on academic historiography and concentrates on aspects of communicating history to the public, whereas applied history advocates for a democratization of historical knowledge by strengthening interaction between academia and stakeholders in the field.⁵²

Just Another Brick in the Wall?

In a 2016 review essay titled “Public History in Germany,” the historian Thorsten Logge argued: “It is not helpful to introduce a new term like applied history. Public history already includes the notion of civic engagement; there is no need to split the field and waste resources by drawing needless frontiers.”⁵³ The problem with Logge’s argument is that the term applied history already exists. But whether the two concepts are indeed in tension with each other and “split the field” is still worth contemplating.

After having described the use of public and applied history in institutions and publishing, we will now move on with a theoretical discussion. In a recent article, Cord Arendes and Juliane Tomann state that more has been written about public history than applied history,⁵⁴ and our review of the institutional development here indicates a greater popularity of the term public history in the German academic landscape as well. Our survey shows furthermore that in Germany, public and applied history operate in a divided institutional landscape of historical science. On the one hand, teaching and methodology are researched by professorships in

⁵⁰ Gerhard Obermüller and Thomas Prüfer, “Aus Geschichten Geschäfte machen: Kleine Pragmatik des Historischen,” in Nießer and Tomann, *Angewandte Geschichte*, 77–96.

⁵¹ Gangolf Hübinger, “In zwei Welten leben : Zu den Aufgaben des Historikers,” in *Angewandte Geschichte*, 37–45.

⁵² Irmgard Zündorf, “Public History und Angewandte Geschichte: Konkurrenten oder Komplizen?,” in Nießer and Tomann, *Angewandte Geschichte*, 63–76.

⁵³ Thorsten Logge, “Public History in Germany: Challenges and Opportunities,” *German Studies Review*, 39, no. 1 (2016): 141–53.

⁵⁴ Cord Arendes and Juliane Tomann, “Wytyczanie dróg ku sferze publicznej: czym jest public history i historia stosowana?,” in *Historia w kulturze ponowoczesnej. Koncepcje – metody – perspektywy badawcze*, ed. Miloš Řezník, Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Katrin Stoll, and Sabine Stach (Universitas: Kraków, 2017), 43–63.

history teaching, and on the other, historians research the past. We already have mentioned that these two different academic classifications produced different concepts (historical culture and remembrance culture or memory) to investigate public uses of history. The term “public/applied history” in Germany is predominantly used for historical research as a profit-making enterprise or as entertainment.

Unfortunately, this distinction is not always so clear. Historian Robert Traba, for instance, proposes to conceive of applied history as a way “to deal differently with the topics of memory and cultural space.”⁵⁵ Additionally, classifying doing history as civic activism, which is emphasized in Frankfurt (Oder) when referring to applied history, also falls under the realm of memory activism. Applied history therefore is connected with all the concepts mentioned: historical culture, memory, and history for profit.

Others recommended conceptualizing public history by looking at the historical periods such popular history formats deal with. In this vein, Irmgard Zündorf and Hanno Hochmuth understand public history as tied to contemporary history, which would encourage historicizing the memory boom and a self-reflective perspective within the historical sciences. Zündorf and Hochmuth consider this boom as “rather a contemporary historical phenomenon than an issue of didactics of history.”⁵⁶ This proposal can be regarded as an attempt to incorporate public history in history departments to the disadvantage of history teaching; the battle continues under the flag of self-reflection. Frank Bösch and Constantin Goschler also highlight the link between public and contemporary history by labeling a compilation of articles about different public and popular forms of dealing with National Socialism as “public history.”⁵⁷

On the other hand, Stefanie Samida criticizes the close junction between contemporary and public history and notes that TV documentaries about prehistory are second in popularity to those about the Third Reich in Germany.⁵⁸ Samida, an archaeologist and media studies scholar, warns that limiting the practice of public history to a certain era unnecessarily truncates it.⁵⁹ Furthermore, she sees many similarities between public/applied history and empirical cultural studies.⁶⁰ Samida proposes to call the public history field “historical-empirical cultural studies.”⁶¹ Felix

55 Robert Traba, “Kulturgeschichte in der Praxis: Angewandte Geschichte aus polnischer Perspektive,” in Nießer and Tomann, *Angewandte Geschichte*, 112.

56 Irmgard Zündorf and Hanno Hochmuth, *Public History als Zeitgeschichte: Version 1.0* (2015, May 21), 4.

57 Constantin Goschler and Frank Bösch eds., *Public History: Öffentliche Darstellungen des Nationalsozialismus jenseits der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2009).

58 Stefanie Samida, “Public History als Historische Kulturwissenschaft,” *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, June 17, 2014, https://docupedia.de/zg/Public_History_als_Historische_Kulturwissenschaft, 4.

59 Stefanie Samida (Hrsg.), *Inszenierte Wissenschaft: Zur Popularisierung von Wissen im 19. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld, 2011.

60 Sarah Willner, Georg Koch, Stefanie Samida, eds., *Doing history: Performative Praktiken in der Geschichtskultur* (Waxmann: Mú nster, New York, 2016).

61 Stefanie Samida, “Public History als Historische Kulturwissenschaft,” *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, June 17, 2014, https://docupedia.de/zg/Public_History_als_Historische_Kulturwissenschaft, p. 10.

Ackermann argues in a similar vein. As one of the founders of the Institute for Applied History, Ackermann treats the experiences at the German-Polish border as attempts of “applied cultural studies” to advertise the public impact (of academia), to harness the participation of nonexperts, and to be self-reflective of those involved.⁶²

For the two latter authors, public and applied history are part of the interdisciplinary field of empirical cultural studies. Therefore, public and applied history are not housed in a discipline-based department such as history but rather in an interdisciplinary unit. Logge similarly promotes the idea of public history as “a program for interdisciplinary scholarship in the humanities and social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) about how history is put into practice in the public sphere.”⁶³ He has identified some trends to which this new program is responding. In his investigation of commercial and popular uses of history, he sees a challenge in the diversity of formats such as tweets and websites, but also in films, journals, theatre, and reenactments of historical events.⁶⁴ Logge acknowledges that cultural studies theories offer existing conceptual interpretations of these changes. Yet in the discipline of history, historians have created new subfields such as visual and digital history. They also embraced the performative turn. The challenge of working with new and varied kinds of media, therefore, inspired scholars to interpret these new forms of historical representations using an interdisciplinary set of tools.⁶⁵ Logge also observed that the practice of public and applied history implies that multiple stakeholders are involved in doing history. Historians accept that interacting with others requires self-reflection, but deciding how to approach this task requires more nuanced theoretical consideration. Another scholar also noted the interdisciplinary methodology and the focus on “agents.” Marko Demantowsky teaches “didactics of social sciences” in Basel, Switzerland, and sees the debate around public history as “a wonderful opportunity to put old differences behind us. It is the best ‘umbrella’ that is currently available.”⁶⁶ Demantowsky does not mention applied history when he observes that “Public history makes the actors involved in the communication of history visible,” and in turn, practicing public history “also supports their positive self-image.”⁶⁷

62 Felix Ackermann, “Angewandte Kulturwissenschaften: Partizipative Wissensproduktion in Theorie und Praxis,” in *Partizipative Erinnerungsräume. Dialogische Wissensbildung in Museen und Ausstellungen*, ed. Felix Ackermann, Anna Boroffka, and Gregor H. Lersch (Transcript: Bielefeld, 2013), 51–68.

63 Thorsten Logge, “Public History in Germany: Challenges and Opportunities,” *German Studies Review* 39, 1 (2016): 142.

64 Moritz Hoffmann, Christian Gieseke, Charlotte Jahns, Petra Tabarelli, and Michael Schmalenstroer, eds., *Digital Past*, <http://www.digitalpast.de>.

65 See also the updated version of Irmgard Zündorf, “Zeitgeschichte und Public History,” Version: 2.0, *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, June 9, 2016, http://docupedia.de/zg/Zuendorf_public_history_v2_de_2016.

66 Marko Demantowsky, “Public History’: Sublation of a German Debate?,” *Public History Weekly*, January 29, 2015, <https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/3-2015-2/public-history-sublation-german-debate/>.

67 Ibid.

This overview of the German debate shows that, throughout the last two years, “public history” has become the favored term and “applied history” is often—if at all—just mentioned in a footnote. Moreover, it revealed that although history departments and history teaching converged around their common interest in working with and in public spaces outside academia, the institutional schism in German historical science still impacts the discussions. Reflections about public and applied history have in common that they conceive of historical work as research *and* activism, which means analyzing and participating in the field. For both, historians act as analysts and activists, supporting the participation of others. This parallels the American scenario, where in an 1994 article in *The Public Historian*, Philip V. Scarpino defined public history as follows: “It calls for sharing of the authority to ‘do’ history; it invites wider participation in the creative process.”⁶⁸ In the German context, many public historians call for a dehierarchization of historical content and methods.⁶⁹

Public and Applied History in Germany—A Device of Motion

We claim that public and applied history do not split the field and that they are two parts of one phenomenon. For illustration, it might help to imagine public and applied history as two sides of a hinge. They are hence two components of one device connecting two parts of an item.



One side of the hinge is attached to the *forms* of history—public history, the other side to the *agents* of history—applied history. Examples of forms include films, reenactments, and exhibitions. The agents might include individuals, movements, or institutions. According to Rüsen, both the forms and agents of history are affected by social change, to which public and applied historians react.⁷⁰ Conceived like this, public and applied history are two parts of a device enabling motion.

68 Philip V. Scarpino, “Common Ground: Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future of Public History and the NCPH,” *The Public Historian*, 16, no. 3 (Summer 1994), 14.

69 For instance, see Ventzke, 35, Logge, 152, and Cord Arendes, “Public History and Spaces of Knowledge,” *Public History Weekly*, October 6, 2016, <https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/4-2016-32/7194/>.

70 Jörn Rüsen, *Historik: Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Böhlau: Köln u.a., 2013).

This motion or change is anything but new, and it consists of a constant and necessary interplay between sciences and life.⁷¹ What varies, however, is the nature of change. In our age of Wikipedia, valuing nonexpert participation in the practice of public history has become a key characteristic of the field, which is similar to how people engage with science as citizen scientists. In other words, nonprofessionals play a role in producing knowledge.⁷² It also means that knowledge is not only generated within academic circles but that it is also grounded in life lived by nonexperts. Imagining public and applied history as two components of a hinge on the door of the ivory tower can facilitate this process for history as a science. Public history practitioners describe, analyze, and also produce the forms of popular history; practitioners of applied history observe, analyze, and foster the agents of popular historical projects. In consequence, the “public” in public history is the “other” of academia with which the historian interacts. The “public” in applied history is the social setting in which the historian performs as one agent amongst others. That means the “public historian” functions as a translator, whereas the “applied historian” acts as a moderator and facilitator of historical dialogue. In this way the public historian interprets history in popular forms for nonexperts, whereas the applied historian facilitates nonexpert participation in the production of historical knowledge.

We envision that this conceptual framework will advance and spark more theoretical discussions about the nature of public history. In conclusion, we suggest readers consider a few challenges. How does the participation of nonexperts and a dehierarchization of science (including social science) change the work of academics? When the process of interpreting history is in the spotlight and participants’ levels of expertise lose relevance, ethnographic methods might provide guidance. Felix Ackermann has warned that the necessary comprehensive documentation of the process of knowledge production, self-critique, and communication with all agents involved requires more time than the usual historical method as well as additional skills that are commonly not part of a historian’s training.⁷³ Also, the participation of nonexperts and a dehierarchization of science raises questions of quality standards and ethics. And how does history as a commodity and form of entertainment impact the way we conceive of history?⁷⁴ Concerning this,

71 Reinhart Koselleck, “Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel: Eine historisch-anthropologische Skizze,” in Christian Meier and Jörn Rüsen, eds, *Historische Methode* (München: Dtv, 1988), 13–61.

72 Peter Finke, *Citizen Science: Das unterschätzte Wissen der Laien* (oekom verlag: München, 2014).

73 Ackermann, “Angewandte Kulturwissenschaften,” in *Partizipative Erinnerungsräume. Dialogische Wissensbildung in Museen und Ausstellungen*, ed. Felix Ackermann, Anna Boroffka, Gregor H. Lersch, (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 51–68.

74 See cf. Paul Nolte, “Öffentliche Geschichte. Die neue Nähe von Fachwissenschaft, Massenmedien und Publikum: Ursachen, Chancen und Grenzen,” in Michele Barricelli/Julia Hornig (Hrsg.), *Aufklärung, Bildung, “Histotainment”? Zeitgeschichte in Unterricht und Gesellschaft heute* (Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main 2008), 131–146.

Wolfgang Hardtwig has argued that history as pure entertainment loses its purpose of providing orientation in time.⁷⁵ Do the principles of the market hence defeat the academic striving for truth? Last, but not least, we have to keep in mind that public and applied history are situated in a broader setting that reaches well beyond historical sciences. The interdisciplinary roots of public and applied history are definitely worth contemplating. The far more interesting question seems to be, however, how public and applied history are linked to a certain region, such as Eastern Europe. Just recently, a Jean Monnet Network for European Applied Contemporary History has been established at the University of Jena to foster Europeanization through critical cross-cultural dialogues on history.⁷⁶ Finding answers to these challenges may prevent public and applied history from becoming just another brick in the wall of the academic ivory tower.

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⁷⁵ Wolfgang Hardtwig, *Verlust der Geschichte?: Oder wie unterhaltsam ist die Vergangenheit?* (Berlin: Vergangenheitsverlag, 2010), 47–50.

⁷⁶ URL: <http://aec-history.uni-jena.de/>.

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