

# The Rise of Public History: An International Perspective<sup>✉</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article explores the birth and development of public history and presents the different criteria of its internationalization from the 1970s to the more recent creation of the International Federation of Public History. Based mostly on North America and Europe, the international perspective sets the development of public history in the United States into a broader context of debates about the changing role of historians. While public history was mostly perceived in the 1980s as the application —through consulting— of history to present-day issues, the more recent internationalization is made of a variety of local and national approaches to the field.

**Keywords:** *Thesaurus: international; university; historian. Author keyword: public history.*

## El auge de la historia pública: una perspectiva internacional

**Resumen:** El presente artículo explora la creación y el desarrollo de la historia pública y presenta los diferentes criterios que llevaron a su internacionalización a partir de la década del setenta y más recientemente a la creación de la Federación Internacional de Historia Pública. Esta perspectiva internacional, estudiada principalmente en Norte América y Europa, tiene sus orígenes en los Estados Unidos en un contexto propicio para amplios debates sobre la naturaleza cambiante del papel de los historiadores. En la década de los ochenta, la historia pública era entendida como la aplicación —por medio de consultorías— de la historia a asuntos de actualidad. Sin embargo, en los últimos años una variedad de acercamientos locales y nacionales han hecho sus aportes a este campo.

**Palabras clave:** *Thesaurus: universidad; historiador; investigación aplicada. Palabras clave autor: historia pública, internacional.*

## O ascenso da História Pública: uma perspectiva internacional

**Resumo:** O artigo explora o surgimento e desenvolvimento da história pública e apresenta os diferentes critérios da sua internacionalização desde a década de 1970 até a criação mais recente da Federação Internacional da História Pública. Baseada principalmente na América do Norte e a Europa, a perspectiva internacional estabelece o desenvolvimento da história pública nos Estados Unidos da América dentro de um contexto mais amplo de debates sobre a evolução do papel dos historiadores. Enquanto a história pública era percebida principalmente na década de 1980 como as aplicações —através de consultas— da história a assuntos da atualidade, a internacionalização mais recente é composta de uma variedade de abordagens locais e nacionais no campo.

**Palavras-chave:** *Thesaurus: História Pública; historiador. Palavras-chave do autor: internacional; pesquisa aplicada; universidade.*

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## Introduction

Coined by Robert Kelley in the United State in the 1970s at the University of California in Santa Barbara, the term “public history” bears the signs of a success story. Public history is on the forefront of the profession in North America and increasingly in other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> A handful of books have recently been published in English and other languages.<sup>2</sup> English no longer being the unique language for resources demonstrates a shift in the development of public history around the world. Public history looks, today, more international than ever. Public history programs exist, among others, in North America, but also in most of European countries, in Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and China. This international popularity raises questions about the history and development of public history. However, international discussions on public history are confronted with diverse and unstable definitions of the field. The disagreements on the definition of public history have led to constant debates —that are part of the history to the field— among historians and practitioners.<sup>3</sup> I define public history as being based on three particular emphases: the communication of history to non-academic audiences, a public participation, and the application of historical methodology to present-day issues.<sup>4</sup> These criteria relate to a broader re-definition of the history profession since the 1960s. Symbolized by the rise of the internet and new popular access to knowledge, novel questions have emerged about the historian and his/her role in society.

In spite of its success, little is known about the history and development of public history. Most articles have been written by North American historians which reflects on the creation of the field in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Very few publications propose broader, more international and comparative approaches.<sup>6</sup> This creates a misleading perception of public history practices as being born in the United States in the 1970s. What was born then was the institutionalization of a movement, not the practices. An international perspective helps to set this institutionalization into a longer and broader context.

It is important to explore whether the public history movement in the United States had an international impact —so an internationalization of the American movement— or whether the development of public history around the world has been due to simultaneous reappraisals of

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1 The National Council on Public History (NCPH) —the main public history institution in the United States— lists more than 200 public history programs in the United States and Canada, and the figures keep increasing every year. See “Guide to Public History Programs,” *National Council on Public History*, <<http://ncph.org/program-guide/>>, consulted July 30, 2017.

2 Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (Routledge: New York/London, 2016); James Gardner and Paula Hamilton, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Public History* (Oxford: OUP, 2017); David Dean, ed., *A Companion to Public History* (Forthcoming: Wiley Blackwell, 2017); Ana Maria Mauad, Juniele Rabêlo de Almeida e Ricardo Santiago, eds., *História pública no Brasil: Sentidos e itinerários* (São Paulo: Letra e Voz, 2016).

3 Thomas Cauvin, “Public History: A Working Definition,” *Thomas Cauvin. Personal Website*, consulted April 2016, <<http://thomascavvin.com/uncategorized/public-history-a-working-definition/>>.

4 Cauvin, “Public History.”

5 See for instance: Rebecca Conard, “The Pragmatic Roots of Public History Education in the United States.” *The Public Historian* 37, n. °1 (2015): 105-120, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2015.37.1.105>; Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002).

6 See for instance: Paul Knevel, “Public History. The European Reception of an American Idea?” *Levend Erfgoed. Vakblad voor public folklore & public history* 6, n. ° 2 (2009): 4-8.

the role of historians. In other words, was there an American definition of public history adopted elsewhere, under what circumstances, and what local adaptations/translations took place? A long and international perspective on public practices helps to understand the roots of the movement as well as how and why it developed in different parts of the world and not in others.

Finally, the international perspective raises questions about whether or not we can, today, talk about an international public history, whether it is composed of communication, exchange and collaboration from different parts of the world or whether we witness the emergence of national movements disconnected from each others. In doing so, we also need to question the vectors—people and institutions—and how they influenced the process of internationalization of public history. Although this article uses examples from all around the world, the main comparison focuses on North America and Europe since the 1970s.

In the first part, this article presents the history of public practices before the development of the public history movement in the 1970s. This enables the roots from which public history developed and was institutionalized in the 1980s to be understood. The analysis deals, then, with the different processes of internationalization in the 1980s and 2000s. The international perspective demonstrates the different approaches to public history. Public history developed more as applied, contract-oriented in mostly Anglo-Saxon countries in the 1980s while the process of internationalization in the 2000s seems to be more successful due to a general reappraisal of the role of historians.

## 1. Public Practices Before Public History: Reconsidering the Ivory Tower

Historian Robert Kelley wrote in 1978 that “public history refers to the employment of historians and historical method outside of academia.”<sup>7</sup> The opposition between academic and public historians was at the core of the debates in the 1970s. Thinking back about the origins of the movement, Barbara Howe—one of the founding members of the movement—underlined that “something happened thereafter that created a new way for us to identify ourselves.”<sup>8</sup> The creation of a new public historian was, according to Wesley Johnson, an answer to academic historian’s isolation. In 1978, he explained that “increasingly the academy, rather than historical society or public arena, became the habitat of the historian, who literally retreated into the proverbial ivory tower.”<sup>9</sup> From the beginning, the public history movement in the United States claimed to create new historians who would break the “ivory tower” in which academic historians had been working. However, it is necessary to distinguish between public practices and their institutionalization in American universities.

### 1.1. Public Practices and the Professionalization of History

We would be wrong to date the birth of public historical practices to the 1970s in the United States. It is necessary to distinguish between public history as a movement born in the United States in the 1970s and other much older public historical practices. As North American historian Ian Tyrrell

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7 Robert Kelley, “Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects.” *The Public Historian* 1 (1978): 16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3377666>

8 Barbara Howe, “Perspective on an Anniversary.” *The Public Historian* 1, n. ° 3 (1999): 9.

9 Wesley G. Johnson, “Editor’s Preface.” *The Public Historian* 1, n. ° 1 (1978): 6.

underlines, “scholars tend to see public history as something new” but “the roots run much deeper [...] historians have long addressed public issues.”<sup>10</sup> There is no lack of examples of historians participating in public debates. For instance, historian Paul Knevel points out that “ever since the activities of the Italian humanist historians of the fifteenth century, Western historiography had had a public function” and considers humanists like Bruni and Guiccardini as “the first ‘modern’ European public historians, using history to show their fellow burghers important civic duties and the merits of the city-state they were living in.”<sup>11</sup> The question is not whether those humanists were (public) historians or not, but to clarify that there have been no lack of publicly-engaged scholars interacting with broad audiences. Despite early examples, it is true that the professionalization of history that started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century affected the relations between historians and the public.

Although historians had never been completely disconnected from the general public, they experienced a major change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. History became a scientific and professional discipline. In Germany, Leopold von Ranke was an inspirational model for the new historians and the quest for scientific objectivity based on primary sources and factual analysis. Based on a new methodology to recover facts and to avoid opinions, scientific methodology resulted in the professionalization of the discipline and changed both the historical production and the relations between historians and their audiences. Academic publication became the usual vector of dissemination for professional historians. Academic journals focused on facts and events. The new historians celebrated factual historical narratives as an “instrument of liberation from the suffocating temperature and humidity of overarching systems.”<sup>12</sup> This evolution came from the professional historians’ wish for objectivity and their need to distance themselves from their topic. Nevertheless, by doing so, historians participated in the increasing distance between academic historians and the general public. Professional historians began to address more and more specific audiences—their academic peers—with a wish to move away from popular writing style. This specialization was at the origins of the ivory tower that the founders of the public history movement intended to fight in the 1970s. However, the professionalization of history in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century mostly affected academic historians employed in universities. Many other historians still enjoyed public practices.

## 1.2. Applications of History: The Forgotten Tradition

The rise of academic and professional historians should not hide the fact that many other historians have applied history outside of education. Rebecca Conard points out that discussions about the public uses of the past had a long history in the United States.<sup>13</sup> She explains how, in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, figures such as Franklin Jameson (at Carnegie Institution of Washington), Herbert Friedenwald (at the Library of Congress), and Benjamin Schambaugh (at the State Historical Society of Iowa) proposed an utilitarian aspect of history-making and defended “the value of using history to explain contemporary issues, to make history relevant to

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10 Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 154.

11 Knevel, “Public History,” 7.

12 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 43.

13 Conard, “The Pragmatic Roots,” 105-120.

the present.”<sup>14</sup> This trend materialized in what Schambaugh called “applied history”. In 1909, he explained “I do not know that the phrase ‘Applied History’ is one that has thus far been employed by students of history and politics [...] but I believe that the time has come when it can be used with both propriety and profit.”<sup>15</sup>

In addition to historians appointed in national parks in the 1930s, others have worked with the Army.<sup>16</sup> In an article about the pragmatic roots of public history in the United States, Conard explains that World War I transformed isolated military history initiatives “into a more serious effort to document various aspects of the war as it was taking place.”<sup>17</sup> After 1945, the Historical Division of the War Department was “set to writing the official history of the army in World War II” and became the Office, Chief of Military History (OCMH) in 1950.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in the United Kingdom, the War Office, the Admiralty, and the Committee of Imperial Defence had, as Avner Offer explained, “their own historical sections before the First World War.”<sup>19</sup> Historical sections were extended after WWII to other Departments.<sup>20</sup>

Other historians have worked in local institutions. Oral historian Ronald Grele points out that “prior to the emergence of public history, it was the local history movement which offered the most thoroughgoing alternative to the historical work done in the academy.”<sup>21</sup>, symbolized by the creation of the American Association for State and Local History in 1940. Those local historians worked mostly in archives and historical societies. Corporate archives also developed due to the corporations’ wish to preserve their records. In Germany, Krupp Company developed internal archives as early as 1905 with the help of historians. Likewise, historian William D. Overman became a permanent employee of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company (USA) in 1943 to “establish the first professionally staffed corporate archive in the United States.”<sup>22</sup>

The vision of the public history as a new movement in the 1970s was partly due to the wish that the founding members had to demonstrate the specificity of their movement. Many historians were working outside of academia in archives, historical societies, national parks, museums, federal agencies, or in corporate societies. However, those practitioners were not considered professional historians. There was no agreed common denominator for those historians outside academia. Academic historians were both isolated from popular audiences, as well as isolated from other non-professional practitioners who worked in local, cultural, and political institutions. This isolation triggered reactions from some historians in the 1970s.

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14 Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh*, 10.

15 Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh*, 33.

16 Denise D. Meringolgo, *Museums, Monuments and National Parks. Towards a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), xiv.

17 Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh*, 149-150.

18 Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh*, 156.

19 Avner Offer, “Using the Past in Britain: Retrospect and Prospect.” *The Public Historian* 6, n.º 4 (1984): 28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3377380>

20 Peter Beck, “Public History: Civic Engagement and the Historical Profession,” 2006, [unpublished paper].

21 Ronald J. Grele, “Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?” *The Public Historian* n.º 3 (1981): 43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3377160>

22 Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh*, 161.

## 2. People's History and Public History: New Approaches in the 1970s

“The history of public history as a term and concept is told in the United States as an internal story in which emissaries from the United States introduce it as a practice to the rest of the world. In fact, from the 1970s and 1980s many western countries experienced similar expansion in professionalization of heritage, expansion of history interpretation, and also the oral history movement, the method that provided the most impetus for broader community projects.”<sup>23</sup>

As James Gardner and Paula Hamilton rightly explain in their introduction to the *Oxford Handbook to Public History*, it is necessary to set the creation of the public history movement in the United States into a larger, more international and comparative, context. By the 1970s, many historians had already shown an interest in new topics and new collaboration.

### 2.1. Oral History and People's History: New Public Participation

Oral history has a very long history, and large projects developed in the United States in the 1930s.<sup>24</sup> But the 1960s saw a new development in the field all around the world.<sup>25</sup> Studs Terkel in the United States, Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Passerini in Italy brought to light the experiences of people whom mainstream history-writing had ignored.<sup>26</sup> Oral historians consider that the past is mediated by the narrator's own intimate perception and the permanence of collective memories.<sup>27</sup> Alessandro Portelli has studied collective memories through oral history of the community of steelworkers in Terni, Italy and with the miners in Harlan County, Kentucky.<sup>28</sup> By its collaborative production in which historians and narrators make history, oral history contributed to the reconsideration of public participation. Oral historian's interest in narrators and communities explain why some of them —like Ronald Grele and later Michael Frisch— took part in debates about public participation in history.<sup>29</sup> The rise of oral history was symbolic of new currents in historiography from the 1960s —social history, history from below, people's history, or bottom-up history— which have moved from the study of elites to a focus on ordinary people and ethnic minorities. However, the impact of the new historiographical currents on the public practice turned out more significant in Europe than in North America.

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23 James Gardner and Paula Hamilton, Introduction to *Oxford Handbook of Public History*, edited for James Gardner and Paula Hamilton (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 4.

24 The Federal Writers' Project recorded thousands of life histories, notably the “slave narratives” from elderly former slaves living in the South.

25 The Oral History Association was founded in 1967.

26 Hilda Kean and Paul Martin, eds., *The Public History Reader* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), xvi.

27 Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, eds., *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

28 Alessandro Portelli, *Biografia di una Città: Storia e Racconto: Terni 1830-1985* (Torino: Einaudi, 1985); Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); and Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

29 Grele, “Whose Public? Whose History?”; Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).



For instance, derived from their political positions, some Marxists historians developed in the 1960s and 1970s new publicly-engaged practices. In Britain, although the term “public history” was not used until very recently, new approaches of public participation emerged in the 1970s.<sup>30</sup> Historian Raphael Samuel created the History Workshop at Ruskin College (a trade-union, adult-education institution, Oxford, Britain). The approach adopted by Samuel came from a “desire to lessen the authority of academic history and thereby further a democratisation of the study and uses of history.”<sup>31</sup> Raphael Samuel’s approach in not only giving a public role to academic historians but also as giving voice to under-represented social groups was, in terms of participatory process, more radical than the public history movement in the United States.<sup>32</sup> As Paul Knevel argues, “the leading members of the History Workshop developed some highly influential ideas about ‘sharing authority’, and gave new impetus to the practice of local history, community studies and oral history.”<sup>33</sup> Comparing historical practices in the United States and in Britain, Ian Tyrrell stresses that “the British tradition facilitated popular and working class recording of their own historical experiences and involved important contributions to this process by trade unions, workers’ education, and local history groups.”<sup>34</sup> In 1996, a Master of Public History was created at Ruskin College as a successor to the History Workshop’s focus on people’s history.<sup>35</sup>

Historians also launched large projects of public communication in the 1960s. Starting in 1969, some students and teachers from the University of Leuven (Belgium) organized “Clio 70” that aimed to spread historical narratives outside schools to broad audiences through media.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the group created the *Fonderie* (Museum of Industry and Labor for the Brussels’ Region) in 1980 to connect historians and popular audiences. Other media such as television provided new opportunities for historians. In Holland, historian and director of the State Institute for War Documentation, Loe de Jong published *The Kingdom of the Netherlands during the Second World War* (fourteen volumes published between 1969 and 1991) and produced *The Occupation*, broadcast between 1960 and 1965 on television.<sup>37</sup> New possibilities of communication created opportunities for public history activities. The international perspective on public practices shows that the creation of the public history movement in the United States in the 1970s was not the only process of reappraisal of the role of the historian. Less based on radical history and activism, the specificity of the North American movement, however, was its capacity to institutionalize the public practices and to propose new academic training.

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30 For a survey of public history practices in Britain, see the special issue “History and the Public in Britain” of *The Public Historian* (1995). Holger Hoock “Introduction.” *The Public Historian* 32, n.º 3 (2010): 7-24, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2010.32.3.7>

31 Bernard Eric Jensen, “Usable Pasts: Comparing Approaches to Popular and Public History,” in *Public History and Heritage Today. People and Their Pasts*, edited by Kean and Ashton (London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 46.

32 Bill Schwarz, “History on the Move: Reflections on History Workshop.” *Radical History Review* n.º 57 (1993): 203-220, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1993-57-203>

33 Knevel, “Public History,” 8.

34 Tyrrell, *Historians in Public*, 157.

35 Hilda Kean, “People, Historians, and Public History: Demystifying the Process of History Making.” *The Public Historian* 32, n.º 3 (2010): 25-38, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2010.32.3.25>

36 Guy Zelis, “Vers une Histoire Publique.” *Le Débat* 177, n.º 5 (2013): 157.

37 Knevel, “Public History,” 7.

## 2.2. Birth and Institutionalization of the Public History Movement in the United States

Robert Kelley coined the term “public history” at the University of California in Santa Barbara in the 1970s. This marked an important step in the institutionalization of the movement in the United States. The approach to historian’s public practices was significantly different from Samuel’s people history movement in Britain. University professor, environmental historian, consultant and expert witness on matters related to water rights, Kelley was symbolic of an attempt to redefine the history profession to include practical applications. This attempt was seen by the founding members of the movement as a new start. In the first volume of *The Public Historian* journal, Wesley Johnson argued that “It is rare when any profession witnesses the birth of a new field, especially when that specialization is History [...] However, this is one year when the discipline of history is seeing a new field, Public History, emerge.”<sup>38</sup> The context is crucial to understand how the public history movement developed in the United States.

Public history was mostly created in opposition to what was perceived as a traditional academic history that ignored the public. At first, public history was simply defined as the type of history done outside of the classroom.<sup>39</sup> Wesley Johnson explained that “the development of Public History as a special field of history, however, derives from a different set of presumptions. It assumes that historical skills and method are needed now outside of the academy.”<sup>40</sup> As the name of the journal —*The Public Historian*— denotes, the founding members of the public history movement proposed to create a new historian. Johnson asserted that “a new type of professional person is needed; the Public Historian.”<sup>41</sup> However, the reality was more complex. Lots of supporters of public history in the United States —Robert Kelley, Wesley Johnson, and Joel Tarr among others— had academic positions in universities. Their own profile demonstrated that the clear-cut opposition was rather artificial. The public history movement came from a desire to offer new academic programs to train history students to work outside education.

In a context of global economic depression in the 1970s, universities entered a major job crisis. The shortage of permanent academic jobs led many doctoral programs in the United States to decrease the number of students. Jobs in higher education dramatically dropped. There were too many historians for too few jobs in academia. By 1977, the crisis had reached such a level that major historical institutions established programs and committees to provide new answers —and hopefully new opportunities— for historians. The National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History was set up in 1977. Focusing on career issues, the Committee worked at building bridges between universities and non-academic worlds. Public history appeared then as one possible solution to the job crisis. The vocational tropism of public history training perfectly matched this context of diversification in higher education. The job crisis encouraged the institutionalization of public history through university training programs.

In 1978, while acknowledging that “the variety of sectors may suggest that Public History is a collection of unrelated sub-fields.” Wesley Johnson explained that “this is not the case, when

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38 Wesley G. Johnson, “Editor’s Preface,” 4.

39 Kelley, “Public History,” 16.

40 Johnson, “Editor’s Preface,” 4.

41 Johnson, “Editor’s Preface,” 5.



examined from the point of view of training the historians.”<sup>42</sup> To some extent, the unity of the public history movement derived from its connection to university training. Kelley applied for a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to build a program that would encourage the links between history and public policy.<sup>43</sup> The first graduate program in public history opened at UCSB in 1976. In addition to this first university program, part of the Rockefeller Foundation grant was used by Johnson to publish the first edition of *The Public Historian* in 1978. Johnson also received a grant from the Arizona Humanities Council to organize several conferences about public history.<sup>44</sup> Organized between 1978 and 1980, the conferences contributed to the creation of the National Council on Public History (NCPH) in 1979. The new association, the journal and the creation of university programs institutionalized public history as a specific field of study.

The public history movement was defined in the long tradition of applied history in the United States. Also applied and public history have often been used interchangeably, the former focused more on the application of history to present-day policy issues, while the latter also includes communication to, and participation, of large audiences. For instance, Kelley perceived public history training as being, first of all, targeting positions into government offices and public policy. One should not forget that Kelley worked as an expert in public policy and environmental issues. In his introduction to the first volume of *The Public Historian*, Wesley Johnson listed the eight sectors in which public historians usually work. Although he included history-linked institutions such as museums and archives, he clearly stressed governmental administration and corporate business as the two main fields.<sup>45</sup> This focus on public policy and corporate management reflected the profile of the founding fathers —Kelley Johnson— who had been working as a consultant in addition to their academic positions much more than with heritage management. In an article in 1981 about applied history, Joel Tarr —director of the Applied History program at Carnegie-Mellon University— acknowledged that the program was “not primarily concerned with records or artifacts, or with reaching a broader public by new methods of presentation.”<sup>46</sup>

The birth of the public history movement in the United States took place as part of a broader context of reappraisal of the role of historians. The specificity of the American movement was its capacity to develop a rapid institutionalization of public history through university programs, a journal and an institution that gave credibility to the movement and created an identity for new (public) historians. This focus on the applications of history to the public policy and corporate issues would have consequence on the manner in which historians outside the United States reacted to the spread of public history.

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42 Johnson, “Editor’s Preface,” 7.

43 Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments and National Parks*, xvii.

44 Wesley Johnson, “The Origins of the Public Historian and the National Council on Public History.” *The Public Historian* 21, n. ° 3 (1999): 168-169, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3378969>

45 Johnson, “Editor’s Preface,” 6.

46 Peter Stearns and Joel Tarr, “Applied History: a New-Old Departure.” *The History Teacher* 14, n.°4 (1981): 517, <https://doi.org/10.2307/493687>

### 3. Internationalization of Applied History in the 1980s: Anglo-Saxon, Contract-oriented and Vocational Approach

While the institutionalization of the field progressed in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, the term “public history” received some echoes in different parts of the world. The perception of an American public history by historians in Europe, Australia and other parts of the world was informed by their own conception of the changing role of historians. Public history was often considered as an American model though. In 1984, French historian Henry Rousso wondered, “born in the United States, public history is crossing the Atlantic. Is it the future of history?”<sup>47</sup> In Australia, Graeme Davison argued later that public history was mostly informed by the American public history movement.<sup>48</sup> This perception of public history as being an American model partly derived from the wish, by American historians, to give an international perspective to public history.

From the outset, the National Council on Public History (NCPH) envisioned some international partnership. Historian of Africa, defined by Peter Beck as “a kind of traveling missionary preaching the public history gospel,” Wesley Johnson was an active agent of internationalization of public history.<sup>49</sup> From 1981 to 1983, Johnson undertook several international tours during which he listed the different programs that had public history components. For instance, he noticed the *Istituto per la Scienza dell' Amministrazione Pubblica* (Institute for Public Administration Science) in Italy that was directed by historians to train public servants for administrative responsibilities.<sup>50</sup> In 1981, he took the opportunity of a meeting on Africa and colonial history at the *Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent* (French Institute for Contemporary History) to present public history.<sup>51</sup> He met French historian Francois Bedarida who would become one of the tenants of public history in Europe. In 1983, Johnson also visited several African countries such as Ivory Coast and Nigeria.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, as early as 1983, the fifth annual meeting of the NCPH was held in Waterloo, Canada.<sup>53</sup> In the opening session, Johnson stressed that there were signs that the movement was becoming more international.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, some European historians, such as Peter Beck —presenting a paper on “The British Potential of Public History”<sup>55</sup>— participated in the conference and international discussions.<sup>56</sup> Beck remembers that “attendance at the NCPH’s conferences in Chicago (1982) and Waterloo (1983) brought (him) into personal contact with

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47 Henry Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée ou les historiens thaumaturges.” *Vingtième Siècle* n. ° 1 (1984): 105.

48 Graeme Davison, “Public History,” *Oxford Companion to Australian History*, edited by Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), 532-535.

49 Beck, “History’s Future: A British View,” 4.

50 Wesley G. Johnson, “An American Impression of Public History in Europe.” *The Public Historian* 6, n. ° 4 (1984): 91, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3377384>

51 Dr. Henry Rousso, (historian), in discussion with the author, July 4, 2017.

52 Johnson, “An American Impression,” 95.

53 Barbara Howe, “Chair’s Annual Address.” *The Public Historian* 11, n. ° 3 (1989): 77.

54 Peter Beck, “History’s Future: A British View.” *National Council on Public History Newsletter* 3, n. ° 4 (1984): 3.

55 NCPH’s, “Waterloo, Ontario—Public History in Action: International Perspectives, 1983,” *Past Annual Meetings, National Council on Public History*, <<http://ncph.org/past-meetings/annual-meetings>>.

56 Beck, “History’s Future: A British View,” 4.

Wes Johnson, Bob Kelley and Darlene Roth, among others.<sup>57</sup> However, it is critical to acknowledge that Europe was not devoid of publicly engaged historians. American tenants of public history did not invent nor bring public practices to Europe.

When Johnson visited Europe in the early 1980s, some historians were already accustomed to applied history. In the early 1970s, British economic historian, Michael Drake, organized a series of lectures on applied historical studies that resulted in the publication of *Applied Historical Studies: An Introductory Reader*, in 1973. Applied historical studies mostly focused on economic and statistical data. Drake's view of applied historical studies "as providing 'historical answers to basically unhistorical questions'" was very close to the American conception of public history supported by Kelley and Johnson.<sup>58</sup> This proximity of the two approaches explained the links between American and British historians.

British historian Anthony Sutcliffe met Wesley Johnson during a meeting of urban history in 1980 at the American Historical Association's conference. He saw "the mutual, and understandable, sympathy between public history and urban history in North America."<sup>59</sup> He stressed that he "sensed a potentially constructive common interest between public history and the discipline of economic and social history which, in its distinctive British manifestations, already acknowledged some of public history's perspectives."<sup>60</sup> So, when Michael Drake suggested organizing a new committee on economic history in the early 1980s, Sutcliffe worked at connecting it to the new American public history movement. When the committee discussed a report on Economic and Social History in 1981, they invited Wesley Johnson as reviewer.<sup>61</sup> Through the application of history to economic and urban policy, some European historians contributed to the internationalization of public history.

Through the British Social Science Research Council, Sutcliffe organized a conference on Applied History at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam in September 1982. The conference gathered historians from the United Kingdom, Holland, France, and Wesley Johnson from the United States.<sup>62</sup> As Sutcliffe points out, "the main question asked at Rotterdam was whether a further convergence of historical knowledge and contemporary concerns would be of benefit to society."<sup>63</sup> Similar to Kelley and Johnson's definitions of public history, the conference focused on the applications of history in public policy and, to some extent, private companies.<sup>64</sup> Not much however was discussed about heritage management or cultural institution. Through the prism of economic and urban historians, the reception of the public history movement in Europe mostly ignored the "public" issues and rather focused on the applications of history. So when Sutcliffe attempted to develop public history at the University of Sheffield, he proposed to create a Centre of Applied

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57 Peter Beck, "Presentation, Presentation, Presentation," 2011 [unpublished paper].

58 Michael Drake, *Applied Historical Studies: An Introductory Reader* (London: Methuen, 1973), 12.

59 Anthony Sutcliffe, "The Debut of Public History in Europe." *The Public Historian* 6, n. ° 4 (1984): 9. See also: Bruce M. Stave, "A Conversation with Joel A. Tarr: Urban History and Policy." *Journal of Urban History* 9, n. ° 2 (1983): 195-232, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009614428300900203>

60 Sutcliffe, "The Debut of Public History in Europe," 9.

61 Sutcliffe, "The Debut of Public History in Europe," 9.

62 The list of participants can be found in: Sutcliffe, "The Debut of Public History in Europe," 10.

63 Sutcliffe, "The Debut of Public History in Europe," 11.

64 British historian Peter Beck explained his role as advisor for the British government during the Falklands War in 1981.

Historical Studies.<sup>65</sup> As Paul Knevel explains, the Rotterdam conference —and the overall discussion about public history as well— “skipped maybe the most intriguing theme of it all: what is so public about public history?.”<sup>66</sup> This approach to public and applied history also resulted in more skeptical reactions in other countries such as France.

## 4. Between Social Demand and Academic Resistance: The French Perception

### 4.1. Public History as Applied and Business History

Perception of public history in France in the 1980s sheds light on the complex process of internationalization. Embodied by Marc Bloch and the Annales School, France had had a long tradition of publicly-engaged historians. It is not then surprising that the development of the public history movement in the United States did not stay unnoticed. In 1984, French historian Henry Rousso published an article about public history and its possible development in France.<sup>67</sup> He stressed that public history raised issues and questions that French historians had been dealing with in regards of an increasing “social demand” from the state, trade unions, political parties, associations and individuals.<sup>68</sup> However, Rousso also explained that the terms “public history” could not be translated in French because of the inherent American conception of the field.<sup>69</sup> He also confessed that almost nobody knew about public history.<sup>70</sup> He himself had learned about public and applied history from Wesley Johnson who visited the Institute for Contemporary Research in 1981.<sup>71</sup> Questioning the act of “importing public history from the United States,” Rousso’s article was, in itself, inviting historians to reflect not only on the definition of public history but also more broadly on the role of historians in France.<sup>72</sup>

Among the new possible public practices for historians in France in the 1980s was historical consulting. Felix Torrès, and the creation of *Public Histoire*<sup>73</sup> in 1983 —the first historical consulting company in France— symbolized these new practices. *Public Histoire* shows the connection between French and American historians. During one trip to North America in 1982, historian Felix Torrès went to the University of California in Santa Barbara to meet with Wesley Johnson. Coming back to France and convinced by Johnson, Torrès decided to use the term “public history.”<sup>74</sup> Through *Public Histoire*, Torrès specialized in historical consulting —mostly archiving— for private companies. The way Torrès perceived public history was very close to the Anglo-Saxon development of economic and applied history.

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65 Beck, “History’s Future: A British View,” 4.

66 Knevel, “Public History,” 7.

67 The English version of the article was published in *The Public Historian*. Henry Rousso, “Applied History, or the Historian as Miracle-Worker.” *The Public Historian* 6, n.° 4 (1984): 65-85, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3377383>

68 Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée,” 105, 113.

69 Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée,” 108.

70 Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée,” 114.

71 Rousso, discussion, interview.

72 Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée,” 105.

73 One possible translation of Public History in French.

74 Dr. Felix Torrès, (historian), in discussion with the author, July 2017.

With economic historian Maurice Hamon —who was also in charge of the archives of French company Saint Gobain— Torrès organized the first conference on Applied History in France at Blois in 1985.<sup>75</sup> Like in Britain, public history was understood in France as applied history and mostly dealt with historical consultants working under contract for companies. When French historian Sylvie Lefranc asserts in an article in 1995 that “public history, as a new practice coming from the United States, blossomed in France in the 1980s,” she meant the rise of consulting services offered by historians to companies.<sup>76</sup> For many French historians, the focus on consulting meant that public history was largely understood as business history and contract-oriented. Lefranc concluded that the context of reception of public history in France in the 1980s was much less favorable than in the United States.<sup>77</sup>

Wesley Johnson noticed reluctance and even criticisms to the applications of history during his tours. He remembered that German students and scholars were skeptical about “historians working with business corporations” and openly hostile “to the idea of historians working with federal government agencies.”<sup>78</sup> Criticisms focused on the fact that historical narratives would become a product —and as any product— sold for marketing purposes. The fear regarding the uses of the past for commercial and political purposes was clearly visible in France too. In 1984, Rousso quoted famous French historian Pierre Chaunu who had just argued that the only real historical research is fundamental research (as opposed to applied) based of the quest for absolute truth.<sup>79</sup> Although the quest for pure objectivity was already debated in the 1980s, it is true that the applications of history remained a taboo. The references to public uses of the past became even more critical in the 2000s and were associated with the corruption of historical independence. The *Comité de Vigilance face aux Usages Publics de l'Histoire* (Watchdog Committee Against the Public Uses of History) —that clearly targeted the application of history— was founded in 2005 by three historians to clarify the relations between history, memory and politics.<sup>80</sup> The Committee rightly questioned the manipulation of the past for political purposes. The Committee emerged as an answer to the French Government’s proposal that intended to encourage school teachers to explain the positive aspect of French colonization. The 2005 Committee’s Manifesto made a clear distinction between academic history and public memories.<sup>81</sup> Even though the Committee and the Manifesto have to be understood in the particular context of the 2005 memorial laws, they revealed a general mistrust towards use and production of history by non-academic actors. Obstacles came partly from a perception of public history as applied to non-academic and present-day issues, but also from the American intention to create a new sort of historian.

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75 See Maurice Hamon and Félix Torres, eds., *Mémoire d'avenir. L'histoire dans l'entreprise* (Paris: Economica, 1987).

76 Translated from French to English by the author. Sylvie Lefranc, “L’histoire d’entreprise : l’état de lieux.” *Communication et organisation* n. ° 7 (1995).

77 Lefranc, “L’histoire d’entreprise.”

78 Johnson, “An American Impression,” 90.

79 Quoted in Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée,” 114.

80 *Watchdog Committee against the Public Uses of the Past*. The committee was founded by Gerard Noiriel, Nicolas Offenstad, and Michèle Riot-Sarcey.

81 Comité de Vigilance face aux Usages Publics de l’Histoire, “Manifeste du Comité de Vigilance face aux usages publics de l’histoire du 17 juin 2005,” *CVUH*, February 6, 2007, <<http://cvuh.blogspot.com/2007/02/manifeste-du-comite-de-vigilance-face.html>>.

## 4.2. A new (Public) Historian

In their desire to justify the need for public history training programs, the members of the public history movement in the United States distinguished themselves from “others”, from traditional academic historians isolated in their ivory tower. This clear distinction did not facilitate the possible institutionalization of public history in France where historians associated with “the others”. Rousso warned in 1984 that France remained an academic landscape.<sup>82</sup> Unlike the United States where some academic historians like Kelley, Johnson and Pomeroy had consulting activity too, a clear distinction still existed in France between fundamental academic research and application of history outside university.

In his report about the 1982 Applied History conference in Holland, Wesley Johnson defined historian Hans Blom as “possibly one of the earliest public historians in Holland.”<sup>83</sup> Although Blom had been part of a commission on war criminals, he did not see himself as a public historian and underlined, instead, in his paper at the 1982 Rotterdam conference “the praise the report received from his academic colleagues as a useful contribution to the scholarly historiography of the postwar period.”<sup>84</sup> Historians, even though some had some public or applied history practice, considered themselves as academic historians first - European historians were not ready to distinguish between public and academic historians. In connection with the power of academic networks in France, public history’s lack of theory was seen as a weakness. Rousso stressed that “pragmatism is not a French quality (or impairment).”<sup>85</sup> He implied that American historians were, perhaps too eagerly, driven by public practices. Before any application of public history, French historians would, according to Rousso, need major theoretical debates.

During his tour of Europe, Wesley Johnson noticed what he called a public history graduate seminar launched in 1982 by Bedarida.<sup>86</sup> Historian Francois Bedarida tried to adapt American applied and public history training to a French epistemological thinking on the use of the past. Director of the Institute for Contemporary History where he received Wesley Johnson in 1981, Bedarida contributed to a French approach to public history.<sup>87</sup> Bedarida, an urban and economic historian, participated in the 1982 conference in Rotterdam and was connected to the British network of historians led by Sutcliffe. In his presentation at the Rotterdam conference, Bedarida focused on the role of historians who study the very recent past and who, therefore, are connected to political and economic actors.<sup>88</sup> Bedarida’s consideration for applied and public history was linked to the creation of the Institute for Contemporary History in 1978. Deriving from the Second World War Research Committee, this new research institute focused on the recent past such as WWII, French political life and decolonization. In doing so, Bedarida and fellow historians at the

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82 Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée,” 114.

83 Wesley G. Johnson, “Public History in Europe. Maiden Voyage.” *Newsletter of the National Council on Public History*, 2, n.° 4 (1982): 1.

84 Knevel, “Public History,” 7. See also Johannes Cornelis Hendrik (Hans) Blom, “Historical Research as an Answer to Critical Political Questions: The Example of the Menten Case.” *The Public Historian* 6, n. ° 4 (1984): 27-48.

85 Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée,” 114.

86 Wesley G. Johnson, “Editors’ Note.” *The Public Historian* 5, n. ° 1 (1983): 4.

87 Bedarida went to the United States in 1983 and interviewed the founding fathers of the public history movement.

88 Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée,” 115.



Institute had to question the role of historians in contemporary society.<sup>89</sup> Bedarida therefore organized a seminar on *History of Present Time and Social Demand: Fundamental Research and Social Uses of History*.<sup>90</sup> Through the epistemological reflection on the role of historians in contemporary societies, public and applied history entered some French academic fields. However, the spread of public and applied history was limited to epistemological seminars and no public history training was created in France until 2015.<sup>91</sup>

North American focus on applications of history in governmental and corporate fields and their intention to create a new historian different from traditional academic profiles made the development of public history difficult in Europe. In spite of some efforts, the North American public history movement missed an opportunity for international collaboration. Wesley Johnson himself recognized that “given the European propensity, as Rousso argues, to formulate first and act afterwards, the possibility of a European-authored theoretical conceptualization for public history is attractive.”<sup>92</sup> However, the collaboration and mutual gain between theorized (in Europe) and pragmatic (United States) public history had a short life. While urban and economic historians discussed applied history, no public history training persisted in Europe.

## 5. From a North American Applied History Model to an International Public History Approach

The internationalization of the public history movement received another boost in the previous few years. This process was eased by a redefinition of the field in the United States, as well as a more favorable context and a real international perspective on public history.

### 5.1. Changing Perspectives: From Applied to Public History

Definitions of public history have changed over times. Even though the uses and applications of history are still central to public history,<sup>93</sup> practitioners now propose more diverse definitions. As Knevel points out “in the 1990s the perspectives of all these historians —European and American— would merge together and American public history would be redefined as ‘history for the public, about the public, and by the public’.”<sup>94</sup> This move was part of a new focus on the public and audiences in cultural institutions. Symbolized by the “new museology”, practitioners proposed to put visitors at the center of the process.<sup>95</sup> Putting audiences at the center of public history has triggered new interest in modes of communication for non-academic audiences. Media (film, podcast, video games, storytelling) and cultural institutions (museums, archives, parks) are more present in today’s debates on public history than they were for Wesley Johnson and other

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89 Rousso, “L’histoire appliquée,” 115.

90 Anthony Sutcliffe, “Gleams and Echoes of Public History,” 8.

91 The first program of public history in France was created by historian Catherine Brice at University Paris-East Creteil in 2015.

92 Johnson, “An American Impression,” 94.

93 The official name of the NCPH’s blog —History@work— derives from the perception that history can be applied to present-day issues <<http://ncph.org/history-at-work/>>.

94 Knevel, “Public History,” 8.

95 Peter Vergo, ed., *The New Museology* (Islington: Reaktion Books, 1989).

American supporters of public history in the late 1970s. Presenting history is sometimes seen as more important than applying history.<sup>96</sup> The shift from an applied history oriented towards corporate business and governmental uses of the past (that was criticized by many European academic historians in the 1980s) to a public history based on the communication of the past to large audiences had consequences on the internationalization of the field. In some aspects, many academic historians while they could not accept to work for governments and corporate business were inclined to communicate their research to a broader audience.

Australia offers here a vivid example. Australian historians Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton—two of the founding members of the public history movement in Australia—attended American conferences of the NCPH in the 1980s and were part of the short-lived internal committee on international public history.<sup>97</sup> Public history developed in Australia in the late 1980s. In 1992, the Australian Professional Historians' Association launched the *Public History Review* that became, with *The Public Historian*, one of the two main journals in the field. However, much more than the economic and public policy focus in Europe, the first Australian program at the University of Technology in Sydney “had a media inflection and a political commitment to accessible scholarship, rather than an orientation to providing more jobs for graduates (though this was a factor).”<sup>98</sup> Hamilton wrote that “the consultant who assisted in drawing up the original course in 1987-1988 was Peppino Orteleva from the Cliomedia company in Italy, which specializes in historical commissions utilising visual media, especially film and video, and still operates out of Turin.”<sup>99</sup> Communicating history—much more than consulting— influenced the development of public history in Australia and matched the shift from applying history to present-day issues, to communicating history to larger audiences.

Communicating history to non-academic audiences became all the more important since universities underwent a major structural change. Due to decreasing public funding, universities have been increasingly under pressure to find alternative resources. One solution has been to cultivate links with non-academic partners, be them corporate companies, or local communities. Gardner and Hamilton write that “British public history has flourish rapidly in the early twenty-first century, partly impelled by Conservative government higher education policies that recognize social or community ‘impact’ as a component of university funding.”<sup>100</sup> Public history represents one way for academic historians to demonstrate community engagement and outreach impact. Former director of the Institute for Contemporary History in France, Henry Rousso, noticed the diversification of funding. While State funding represented the majority of the Institute’s budget at its creation in 1978, more and more contracts of consulting were signed in the 1990s.<sup>101</sup> Today there is an expectation that academics should engage with various external communities and partners. This

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96 Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Peter Beck, *Presenting History: Past and Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2011).

97 Dr. Paula Hamilton, (historian) in discussion with the author, June 7, 2017.

98 Gardner and Hamilton, Introduction, 5.

99 Gardner and Hamilton, Introduction, 5.

100 Gardner and Hamilton, Introduction, 5.

101 Rousso, discussion, interview.

trend explains why the focus of public history on communicating knowledge to large audiences received a better reception in the 1990s and 2000s.

## 5.2. The International Federation for Public History

The North American interest in international public history —embodied by Wesley Johnson in the 1980s— did not fade away. A NCPH's international committee formed in 1996 in order to assess the need and ways for getting an international discussion on the public practices of history.<sup>102</sup> This creation was linked to the theme of the 1998 NCPH's annual conference —international, multicultural, interdisciplinary— and Jannelle Warren-Findley's (President of the NCPH) speech.<sup>103</sup> However, it took more than a decade for the international dimension of public history to develop. In 2009, a group of public historians set up a task force within the NCPH for internationalizing public history.<sup>104</sup> While the task force worked within the NCPH, the goal was, from the beginning, to go beyond North America. Anna Adamek, chair of the task force, points out that the international committee was to work as a section of the International Committee of Historical Sciences that gathers historical organizations around the world.<sup>105</sup> The committee was formally named the International Federation for Public History (IFPH) in 2010. Although the IFPH included long-time tenants of public history in the United States —like Arnita Jones or Jim Gardner— it demonstrated a new process of internationalization.

The development of the IFPH coincided with a global context of questions about the changing role of historians: an international conference about public history was arranged at the University of Liverpool (UK) in 2008.<sup>106</sup> Public history also developed in Brazil:<sup>107</sup> the *Rede Brasileira de História Pública* (Brazilian network of public history) was created which gathered various public history practitioners<sup>108</sup> and in 2014 they organized a symposium on international public history.<sup>109</sup> Networks of public history began to grow in different contexts and the IFPH contributed to their connection. In its 2016 annual conference in Bogotá (Colombia), the IFPH hosted more than 300 participants coming from 40 different countries.<sup>110</sup>

Unlike the internationalization in the 1980s, the process in the 2010s was more structured and less controlled by North American historians. The IFPH is now distinct from the NCPH, has more

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102 Jannelle Warren-Findley, "The Globalizing of Public History: A Personal Journey." *The Public Historian* 20, n.º 4 (1998): 11.

103 Warren-Findley, "The Globalizing of Public History," 11.

104 Anna Adamek, "International Task Force." *Public History News* 3, n.º 1 (2010): 8.

105 Adamek, "International Task Force," 8.

106 School of Advanced Study at the University of London, "Conference Program," *School of Advanced Study*, April 2008, <<https://www.sas.ac.uk/about-us/news/public-history-conference-liverpool-10-12-april-2008>>.

107 Juniele Rabêlo de Almeida and Marta Gouveia de Oliveira Rovai, eds., *Introdução à história pública* (São Paulo: Letra e Voz, 2011).

108 "Rede," *Rede Brasileira de História Pública*, <[http://historiapublica.com.br/?page\\_id=520](http://historiapublica.com.br/?page_id=520)>.

109 See also Mauad, Rabêlo de Almeida and Santhiago, *História pública no Brasil*.

110 International Federation for Public History, "Program of the 3rd Annual IFPH Conference, University of Los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia," *IFPH*, June 29, 2016, <<http://ifph.hypotheses.org/1056>>.

than 250 members and has its own international board.<sup>111</sup> The fact that only one of the 7 board members is working in the United States symbolizes how international public history is becoming independent from its North American counterpart. The diversity of profile also enables the development of public history in non-English speaking countries.

### 5.3. The Future of International Public History

Every semester, I arrange discussions between my public history students and fellow students from public history programs in Europe (Ireland, Germany, France and Italy). Through these discussions, students discover different approaches and different challenges that historians face in Europe. Through international discussions it is then possible to highlight similarities and differences. One critical asset for the internationalization of public history is the transferability of a historian's skills—learning how to make a documentary film or an online exhibition can be applied in different cultural contexts. For instance, in 2014, the public history program at Trinity College Dublin (Ireland) was composed of more than one third of non-Irish students, including several North Americans. This was an example of the diversification of the demand in public history training. However, the internationalization of public history is often confronted with linguistic issues.

Apart from rare examples, most of the literature that deals with public history is in English.<sup>112</sup> Although public history mostly developed in English-speaking countries—partly as a consequence of its spread from the United States—such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the IFPH has contributed to an internationalization of the field. Lots of resources exist in different languages on the various public practices such as oral history, museums and digital history. These resources are, however, usually disconnected from each others and from the larger field of public history. The IFPH has therefore established a committee to create a database of public history-related teaching resources in eight languages (German, Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese and English). The focus on new languages matches the IFPH's attempt to develop public history in non-English speaking countries.

For the first time, the 2017 conference of the IFPH was organized in collaboration with a national association: the Italian Association of Public History (IAPH).<sup>113</sup> Created in 2016, the IAPH is the first national association of public history in Europe. The IFPH was heavily involved in the creation and development of the Italian association. During the 2015 IFPH annual conference—held in Jinan (China) through the International Committee of Historical Sciences—Serge Noiret (President of the IFPH) and Andrea Giardina<sup>114</sup> discussed the development of public history in Italy and the possibility of an Italian association.<sup>115</sup> Born in Belgium, president of the IFPH since its creation, historian Serge Noiret has been working in Italy since the 1980s and has been deeply involved in Italian historical networks and largely contributed to the development of public

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111 The IFPH board is composed of seven historians from Belgium, Italy, Germany, Canada, Brazil, Colombia, and the United States.

112 One of the recent exceptions is Paolo Bertella Farnetti, Lorenzo Bertucelli, Alfonso Botti, eds., *Public History: Discussioni e Pratiche* (Milan: Mimesis, 2017).

113 For more information see “Associazione Italiana di Public History Blog,” *Associazione Italiana di Public History*, <[www.aiph.it](http://www.aiph.it)>.

114 Professor of Ancient History at the Scuola Normale in Pisa, A. Giardina is the President of the Italian Council for Historical Studies (*Giunta centrale per gli studi storici*).

115 Andrea Giardina, “Opening Speech,” (Presentation in Annual Conference of the Italian Association for Public History, Ravenna, June 7, 2017).

history.<sup>116</sup> His international profile (Noiret works at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy) contributed to the development of public history in Italy through international networks.

Unlike the 1980s process of internationalization that mostly attempted to spread a specific approach of public history in the United States, the new process mingles different local and national conceptions of the fields. The definitions and approaches to public history vary according to cultural contexts. The process of internationalization is, less than in the 1980s, based on the spread of the American approach and relies more on local practices. It is important to notice that neither the IFPH nor the IAPH provide any strict definition of public history.<sup>117</sup> For instance, while the English term “public history” is often translated in France (*Histoire Publique*) and Brazil (*História Pública*)—partly due to their reluctance to use an English and American oriented concepts—while other programs in Italy (*Associazione Italiana di Public History*), Germany or Holland keep the English expression.<sup>118</sup> In Italy, one argument to keep the English terms was to connect practices in Italy to the broader international network of public history.<sup>119</sup> As Noiret explains, “individuals are open to the field in Italy and have no problem at all in importing solutions from other countries and readapting them locally.”<sup>120</sup> Besides, he explains, unlike France where Paris is omnipresent, Italy relies “on a very articulated network of decentralized regional and urban communities that have many territorial cultural institutions working with the past.”<sup>121</sup> And clearly, those communities act as many public history partners.

Other examples demonstrate that the internationalization of public history relies on local contexts. In comparison with the United States “Italy has a much longer past to deal with and public history offers a broader range of topics and practice on Ancient, Medieval and early modern history.”<sup>122</sup> Then, much more than in North America, public archaeology has played a role in the constitution of a public history field in Italy. Besides, the development of an Italian association for public history was, much more than for the United States, based on a top-down process. The IAPH reflects the hierarchy of historical associations in Italy. Under the direct supervision of the Department of Heritage, the Italian Council for Historical Studies (*Giunta centrale per gli studi storici*) gathers most of historical associations in Italy. Created by this Council, the Italian Association for Public History was initially more conceived as a council of association than a

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116 Chiara Ottaviano, (historia), in discussion with the author, June 4, 2017.

117 See the by-laws of the “Statuto dell’Associazione Italiana di Public History-AIPH,” *Associazione Italiana di Public History*, <<http://aiph.hypotheses.org/statuto>>; see also the about section of the “IFPH/FIHP,” *Associazione Italiana di Public History*, <<http://ifph.hypotheses.org/sample-page/about>>.

118 See the website of the German program at Free University in Berlin, “Public History. Master’s programs,” *Free University Berlin. Studying in a Stimulating Environment*, <[http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/studium/studienangebot/master/public\\_history/index.html](http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/studium/studienangebot/master/public_history/index.html)>; at the University of Amsterdam, “Public History. Museums, films, television, novels, urban walks and genealogical research all introduce a wider public to history,” *University of Amsterdam*, <<http://www.uva.nl/en/disciplines/history/specialisations/public-history.html>>. For the program in Paris, see “Master Histoire Parcours Histoire Publique,” *Université Paris-Est Créteil*, <<http://www.u-pec.fr/pratiques/universite/formation/master-histoire-parcours-histoire-publique-644604.kjsp>>.

119 Ottaviano, discussion, interview.

120 Dr. Serge Noiret, (historian), in discussion with the author, July 28, 2017.

121 Noiret, discussion, interview.

122 Noiret, discussion, interview.

membership association.<sup>123</sup> The purpose was not to create a new historian —as the North American founding fathers argued in the 1980s— but to gather historians who practice history in public.

The specific objective is to gather historians who have practiced public history (oral history, public archaeology and digital history among others) or to train new historians with specific public skills. The focus on practitioners —more than academic public history— explains why the board of the newly created Italian Association has few historians with academic positions.<sup>124</sup> It remains to be seen if the Italian Association for Public History will convince enough academic historians to develop public history as university training.

## Conclusion

The birth and development of public history was inherently linked to the changing role of historians. Although the terms were invented in the United States in the 1970s, public history as a reappraisal of the use and communication of history resonates in many different countries and contexts. Public practices of history are not new and many historians acknowledge today that they had been doing public history without knowing it. The specificity of the North American experience was the capacity of the founding members to institutionalize the public history movement through academic training programs in universities. Although they created a North American public history model —based on the applications of history— in the 1980s, the process of internationalization was not a simple diffusion and reception of the American criteria. If internationalization largely failed in the 1980s, it was partly due to the very specific North American approach of public history but also due to a limited number of European academic historians with experience outside education who could have supported the development of public history in universities. The recent success of international public history is due to a richer definition of public history and a favorable context in which communicating history to larger audiences has become a new mode of validating academic research. Internationalizing public history is creating space of discussion and exchanges in which a practical and vocational approach, such as that in North America, could collaborate with more theoretical discussions in Europe to better understand the changing role of historians in contemporary societies.

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<sup>123</sup> Interestingly, the American association for public history (NCPH) was also first defined as being primarily a group (or council) of associations but evolved into a membership association in the early 1980s.

<sup>124</sup> Only 4 out of 9 members have positions as academic historians. Serge Noiret, Chiara Ottaviano, Luigi Tomassini, Marcello Ravveduto, Enrica Salvatori, Giorgio Uberti, Agostino Bistarelli, Michela Ponzani and Paolo Pezzino were elected in July 2017. See the IAPH's, "2017-Elezioni Direttivo AIPH," *Associazione Italiana di Public History* <<http://aiph.hypotheses.org/2017-elezioni-direttivo-aiph>>.



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