

# From Great Men to Ordinary Citizens? The Biographical Approach to Narrating European Integration in Museums

By Wolfram Kaiser

## Abstract

The history of European integration is not easy to tell – in books or, for that matter, in museums. Most importantly, it appears to lack drama. This lack of drama creates a dilemma for museum practitioners who wish to tell stories about the contemporary history of Europe as shared history. In these circumstances, one prominent way of telling stories about European integration history in museums, and the focus of this article, is the biographical approach. Drawing upon research in all of the museums mentioned in this article and many more, and some 60 interviews with museum practitioners from across Europe, this article first discusses three biographical approaches to narrating European integration history in museums. It proceeds to draw out general conclusions about the prospects of mainstreaming European integration in history museums, and about the particular opportunities and pitfalls of the biographical approach and its different varieties.

**Keywords:** Biographical approach, European integration history, founding fathers, museums, personalization

## **From Great Men to Ordinary Citizens?**

The history of European integration is not easy to tell – in books or, for that matter, in museums. Most importantly, it appears to lack drama. At first sight at least, it seems like a story of tedious negotiations by men in grey suits (and only recently, some women) striking compromises, very often with no immediately obvious direct relevance to the citizens of the present-day European Union (EU); discussions and negotiations, moreover, which take place in a highly complex institutional setting that is incomprehensible to most citizens and that appears to lack transparency and responsiveness to their everyday needs. Most traditional national historical narratives, in contrast, are full of glamorous leaders and drama. Flamboyant nationalists like Giuseppe Garibaldi and Lajos Kossuth caught the imagination of millions. With their allegedly superior statecraft, great statesmen like Otto von Bismarck or Winston Churchill built nation-states or protected them from external threats. For the sake of the nation, moreover, patriotic volunteers died heroic deaths in wars of independence or unification. True, much of this drama may have been ‘imagined’ to create and mould new ‘communities’ (Anderson 1983). However, from this imagination resulted powerful myths of nations and of their past (e.g. Berger & Lorenz 2010). These myths have helped shape collective memory, and they have penetrated museums as prime sites of cultural self-representation (Boswell & Evans 1999).

The apparent lack of flamboyant leaders and of drama in the history of European integration after World War II creates a dilemma for museum practitioners who wish to tell stories about the contemporary history of Europe as shared history. Narratives of shared history now often encompass stories about the experiences of migrant workers and cultural exchanges, for example. However, they also somehow have to address the historical evolution of the present-day EU and its growing role in shaping politics and policy-making across Europe. After all, even though it is not always obvious to its citizens, the EU actually does have a far-reaching impact on their everyday lives and even on those of people in countries like Norway or Turkey that are associated with it through arrangements like the European Economic Area or association treaties.

Post-war European integration increasingly features as a subsidiary theme in many national, regional and thematic museums, especially in the ‘core Europe’ of the founding member states of the EU. In these museums, the greater interest in addressing European integration history in one form or another mainly results from a strong recent trend in history museums in large parts of Western Europe in particular. Here, museum practitioners have been increasingly working to transnationalize their museum narratives in an age of Europeanization and globalization, and to break down, rather than project and confirm, national historical myths. They are doing this for professional reasons, especially to align their museum narratives with recent historical research that has emphasized transnational and pluralistic perspectives on history; for practical reasons, especially to make their

museums more accessible to a greater variety of visitors including foreign tourists; and sometimes also for normative reasons, to counteract populist nationalist political parties that often demand a return to exclusionary nineteenth century myths of the nation, normally in opposition to ‘foreigners’ and ‘Europe’ (Mazé 2008; Kaiser, Krankenhagen & Poehls 2012, chapter 4).

In contrast to these national, regional and thematic museums, the history of European integration is at the heart of the different plans for creating a museum of European (integration) history. They include, most importantly, the project of the European Parliament (EP) for a House of European History (HEH) to be opened in Brussels in 2014 – a museum to be devoted entirely to twentieth century European history, especially the history of the present-day EU. The theme of European integration history was also the focus of the temporary exhibition *C’est notre histoire* which was on show in Brussels in 2007-8 and in Wrocław in 2009 (Kaiser & Krankenhagen 2010); and it features prominently in the combined memory sites and museums devoted to four of the so-called founding fathers of the EU: Jean Monnet in Houjarray near Paris, Robert Schuman in Scy-Chazelles near Metz, Konrad Adenauer in Rhöndorf near Bonn and Alcide De Gasperi in Pieve Tesino near Trento.

Different museums employ a variety of strategies for telling different stories about the history of European integration broadly speaking (Kaiser, Krankenhagen & Poehls 2012, chapter 6). Thus, post-war integration is sometimes narrated as a peace project that has brought an end to internecine conflict in Europe; as the institutionalization of ‘unity in diversity’ creating purposeful organized cooperation while also protecting the cultural diversity of nations and regions against hegemonic threats from within; or as the careful construction of a set of institutions promoting a new form of European constitutional patriotism embedded in a community of values.

Another prominent way of telling stories about European integration history in museums, and the focus of this article, is the biographical approach. Conceptually, we can identify two dimensions of this approach, although they become amalgamated in museums: first, the inclusion in exhibitions of individual Europeans as crafting the present-day EU and participating in integrating Europe; and secondly, the use of the biographical approach drawing upon objects and testimonies as a narrative strategy for engaging visitors and communicating particular messages about the benefits of European integration and the EU.

In this article, I argue that we can distinguish three modes of the biographical approach: first, the founding fathers myth with its focus on prominent politicians who played a key role in the origins of post-war continental western European integration; secondly, more or less strategically selected testimonies of Europeans, who are not prominent, but who are particularly active participants in integration in their professional or private lives; and thirdly, encouraging visitors to become active participants in narrating European integration history by employing oral

history methods and creating opportunities for them to contribute their personal stories of what we might call ‘lived integration’. This last approach allows for narrative pluralism. It may also be the most attractive for visitors. However, it might create a dilemma for initiators and organizers of normatively driven museum projects like the Musée de l’Europe and the HEH in Brussels who wish to represent European integration as a project with a coherent historical evolution and clear objectives for the future.

Drawing upon research in all of the museums mentioned in this article and many more, and some 60 interviews with museum practitioners from across Europe, I first discuss these three biographical approaches. I then draw some general conclusions about the prospects of mainstreaming European integration in history museums and about the particular opportunities and pitfalls of the biographical approach and its different varieties.

### **The Founding Fathers: Narrative of European Idealism**

The narrative, or myth, of the founding fathers was not invented by museums. It was originally inspired by the American example, where the founding fathers myth is at the core of the prevailing master-narrative about the birth of a nation in the eighteenth century. This particular narrative of the origins of European integration has actually become embedded over several decades in the political rhetoric of institutional and societal actors in the EU who have used it to create their own traditions. This is true, for example, of the European People’s Party (EPP) which has drawn upon the heritage of the likes of Robert Schuman, the French Prime Minister and foreign minister, Konrad Adenauer, the first West German chancellor, and Alcide De Gasperi, the Prime Minister of Italy, to protect its pro-integration core beliefs across many enlargements of the EU and the EPP itself (Kaiser 2007).

The temporary exhibition *C’est notre histoire!* took up the founding fathers myth in its first large room devoted to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951-2 (Tempora 2007, 37-44).



Creating the present-day European Union: *C'est notre histoire!*,  
Wroclaw/Poland, 2009 © Wolfram Kaiser

This room, which was structured with beams that looked as if they were made of steel, contained seven cases. Each case was devoted to one politician, with at least one politician per founding member state. The curators exclusively used objects to tell their stories about these founding fathers: busts, photos showing the protagonists at treaty signing ceremonies, their autobiographies in print or musical records with their speeches and, most importantly, objects taken from their everyday lives. These latter included, for example, a pair of glasses from Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian foreign minister, Jean Monnet's walking stick, Robert Schuman's passport and Konrad Adenauer's watering can from his rose garden. *C'est notre histoire!* used neither film nor radio footage of the founding fathers in the room that dealt with the creation of the ECSC. It also made no attempt to construct a chronological narrative. Instead, it continued with a room with a large table designed to look like a setting for intergovernmental negotiations in the EU, where visitors could obtain information about select aspects of the EU's evolution, institutions, and policies.

The four museums of founding fathers are very different institutions of a mixed character. In different ways, they combine the politicians' renovated private houses as sites of memory with museums and various educational programmes, especially for youngsters. Interestingly, with the exception of Houjarray, which is owned by the EP, these museums originally focused much more on the regional and national political roles of their protagonists. This is especially true of Rhöndorf and the first West German chancellor, as historiographical and museum narratives of post-war western German history have increasingly adopted Arnulf Baring's notion, 'In the beginning was Adenauer' (Baring 1982). It is only more recently that the founding fathers institutions have begun to strengthen significantly the European dimension of their narratives. They now work together in a loosely

organized network with some joint academic and museum events and publicity. This cooperation has clearly reinforced the ongoing European reshaping of their established narratives. More recently, the four institutions have actually developed plans for organized ‘transnational trips’ – especially for youngsters and pensioners – from one museum to the next. In an analogy with a famous Catholic pilgrimage, they have characteristically called this voyage the ‘Camino de Santiago of the European integration process’.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the great differences among these different museums and exhibitions and their objectives, three related characteristics of their founding fathers narratives stand out. First, they focus on the politicians’ private lives and their identities – in the words of *C’est notre histoire!* – as *pater familias*. In Rhöndorf, for example, Adenauer with his many children and grandchildren forms the central feature of the private house as a memory site. In the case of Schuman, who was not married, his fervent Catholic beliefs and very simple private life are emphasized, suggesting that he devoted all of his energies and resources to helping others. In fact, the chapel with Schuman’s remains, the European flag and the flags of the 27 EU member-states highlights the sacral character of the site. The Monnet house, in turn, shows the leading French official as the head of a transnational network among Europeanists who worked tirelessly for reconciliation and integration. Making no attempt at a realistic reconstruction of the house’s interior, the organizers have placed telephones from the early post-war period everywhere in the building, thus emphasizing Monnet’s identity as a networker connecting influential leaders across borders.



Networking Europe: Monnet's living room, Maison Monnet,  
Houjarray/Paris © Wolfram Kaiser

As the exhibition catalogue of *C'est notre histoire!* claims (Tempora 2007: 38), these politicians (with the exception of Monnet, who was a leading French civil servant) also 'governed their own country' like 'family fathers' – likewise, they wisely created European institutions to serve the interests of all citizens.

Secondly, the narratives of the founding fathers heavily de-politicize their protagonists' actions. The catalogue of *C'est notre histoire* only mentions in passing that 'the majority of them were Christian democrats or liberals, in addition there was one social democrat' (Tempora 2007: 38). Yet the geographical scope, the institutional design and the ideological orientation of European integration were of course heavily contested in the early post-war period. Adenauer and De Gasperi in particular used their policies of western integration to fight the socialists in domestic politics (Kaiser 2007). At the same time, criticism of the 'core Europe' of the six founding member states as dominated by conservative and Catholic forces was widespread among northern European social democrats, especially in Sweden (e.g. af Malmberg 1994). None of this strong contestation features anywhere in the founding fathers narratives. This is just as true of the first concept of the HEH expert group submitted to the EP in December 2008 (Sachverständigenausschuss 2008) as it is of existing museums and exhibitions, where the founding fathers are presented as a family without friction. To paraphrase the German Emperor William II at the start of World War I, the founding fathers – or so it seems – no longer knew any political parties, but only Europe.

Finally, the founding fathers narrative also heavily de-nationalizes their protagonists' upbringing and orientation. Thus, the museum in Pieve Tesino emphasizes De Gasperi's fluent German and his role as a Catholic deputy in the Austrian *Reichsrat* parliament in Vienna until 1918. It also opposes rather boldly the nineteenth-century liberal-nationalist *Risorgimento* myth, which is still pervasive in Italian collective memory, concerning the universal desire of all 'Italians' to become united in one (liberal) nation-state. Instead, it stresses how few people (around 700) from the almost entirely Italian-speaking Trentino region, which was one of three parts of the historical Tyrol, actually moved across the border to fight for this Italian state when Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary in 1915. Similarly, the museum in Scy-Chazelles makes a point of stressing Schuman's 'anchrage germanique', his fluent German, education at German language universities and the influence of Rhenish social Catholicism on his political beliefs. All of this is historically true and was in fact the main reason for aggressive attacks on him especially by communists and Gaullists during the Fourth Republic (Poidevin 1986). In the museum at Scy-Chazelles, Schuman's transnational and intercultural socialization actually appears as an asset in the attempt to rebuild Europe and institutionalize reconciliation after World War II.

By re-emphasizing the transnational and intercultural dimensions, however, the museum narratives of the founding fathers also write the importance of interests out of the history of European integration altogether – interests that are usually

rhetorically claimed to be of a 'national' character although they may be those of particular social and economic groups extending – in many cases – across borders. This is true, for example, of the origins of Monnet's proposal for a European community in coal and steel. The concrete plan, which he submitted to Schuman in the spring of 1950, was in fact largely rooted in the failure of the purely French modernization plan, which did not take sufficient account of the economic interdependencies especially between France and Germany (e.g. Milward 1984; Lynch 1997). It is also true of Adenauer's objective of achieving a status of equality for the newly created Federal Republic of Germany (Schwarz 1986: 850-79). In the end, therefore, the founding fathers narrative is one of European idealism; of a few enlightened and purposeful politicians driving the origins and construction of European integration.

## **27 Selected Europeans: Narrative of Good European Union Governance**

One of the many problems of using the founding fathers myth – at least as the only biographical approach in museums – lies in the fact that the social and political connotations associated with the idea of the well-meaning 'family father' have little contemporary relevance. In the emerging European society, the *pater familias* has been on the retreat for some time, and the unavoidable complete absence of women from this particular founding narrative is becoming an issue, too. Moreover, the quasi-monarchical style of governing apparently used by the founding fathers does not chime well with our more pluralistic contemporary democracies and the experience of younger generations either. The founding fathers, ultimately, all come from the founding member states of the present-day EU. It remains unclear how visitors from other member states, which joined the EU later, and sometimes reluctantly, can connect either intellectually or emotionally with these politicians' post-war experience.

These problems of the founding fathers myth in part explain why testimonies of living Europeans with their own stories of how they participate in integrating Europe in their daily lives have entered museum narratives of European integration. It is also important to note, however, that this representational strategy chimes well with the strong trend to utilize more and more eyewitness accounts in history (and other) museums, which started with museums and exhibitions on the Holocaust (Kushner 2001; de Jong 2011).

In *C'est notre histoire!* these living Europeans formed the core of the exhibition featuring alongside the founding fathers. In the EP visitors' centre in Brussels, which opened in 2011, they largely replace the founding fathers.<sup>2</sup> And in the exhibition 'Die Entdeckung Europas' in the Europeum in Mariazell in Austria – designed for European pilgrims and tourists – they – and only they – represent the EU of lived integration.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, however, all of these museums, exhibitions



and centres use a representational strategy which they claim the present-day EU has overcome as an organizational principle for the good of Europe, that is, they take what could be coined an ‘intergovernmental’ approach to narrating lived integration. They nominate one individual with one testimony for every member state of the EU just as *C’est notre histoire!* chose one founding father from each founding member state in addition to Monnet irrespective of the historical merits of the choice. In other words, the testimonies in the first instance do not matter because of the individual person or because of the story they have to tell, or how compelling, exciting or engaging this story might be. Rather, these Europeans are chosen in the first instance because of their nationality. They are effectively supposed to represent their member state in an attempt to draw visitors from all member states into the exhibition and its overall narrative including those from reluctant or involuntary latecomers to EU integration – something discussed in greater detail in Steffi de Jong’s article in this special issue.

In its use to date, this particular biographical approach to narrating European integration and its history is characterized by three striking features. First, the selection of testimonies used is not transparent at all. The exhibition company Tempora has claimed (Benoit interview) that the combination of testimonies for *C’est notre histoire!* was not guided by any particular rationale. Nonetheless, most of the 27 testimonies clearly appear to have been neatly selected and arranged so as to cover most of the EU’s major objectives and policies. Thus, the Polish eyewitness argues that ‘when life is good for people, they don’t want to fight wars’ highlighting the EU’s contribution to increasing the welfare of its citizens. The military officer from Luxembourg emphasizes that ‘we all know that the priority of the EU isn’t in the military sphere but rather development aid or diplomacy’, thus reiterating the EU’s self-image as ‘normative power Europe’ (Manners 2002). The Swedish employee of the multilateral European Organization for Nuclear Research centre in Geneva, finally, claims that scientific collaboration is ‘all about the common European knowledge capital’ to enhance the EU’s competitiveness. In this latter case, the language used in the interview actually replicates one to one European Commission policy papers and rhetoric.

Second, the testimonies of positive experiences of lived integration very predominately come from well-educated middle- and upper-middle class professionals; in other words, from much more transnationally socialized and oriented elites who profit most socio-economically and culturally from European integration, just as much the same social groups derived most benefits from national integration and the creation of larger markets in the nineteenth century. The curators of course belong to these more transnationally oriented elites. In their case, using this kind of biographical approach inadvertently amounts to a quasi-autobiographical form of narrating European integration. In fact, in the case of *C’est notre histoire!*, Belgian professors from the advisory board have intimated (Dumoulin & Witte interviews) that they had to work hard to get the Tempora team to integrate an

older Belgian female communist as one of the 27 Europeans in order to create a contrast. But even her not easily intelligible story about gender discrimination in the 1960s could easily be understood by visitors as a complaint about a conservative Belgian state refusing to implement enlightened European equality rules enshrined in the European Economic Community treaty of 1957-8.

The organizers of the 27 testimonies used in the EP visitors' centre claim to have learned from this experience (Kleinig interview). They wanted to create a greater social mix by including, for example, a story about a Spanish truck-driver and how he has been affected in his work by EU health and safety regulations. It remains true, however, that all of these testimonies focus exclusively on what the organizers consider as the multiple benefits of European integration and EU governance (European Parliament n.d.). The testimonies will not feature – to take a random actual example from the world of EU enlargement and market liberalization – the middle-aged German butcher who has lost his job in a slaughter-house in Westphalia to a more cheaply employed Polish colleague, and who emigrates to China where he opens a small business for selling German sausages to the Chinese nouveaux riches. Yet, European integration as market integration – like globalization – clearly has created, and will continue to create, socio-economic losers as well as winners – something that could also feature in historical exhibitions on the present-day EU.

Finally, the 27 testimonies in *C'est notre histoire!* only create a narrative of the multiple alleged advantages of the EU at the time when the exhibition was conceived in 2006-7. This makes them look, in the words of one interviewee who acted as an external advisor to the project (Dumoulin interview), like 'an extension of Commission propaganda policy'. At the same time, the stories together do not constitute an intelligible chronology. The fragmentation of these individual narratives (as opposed to their standardized presentation with films on TV screens accessible in four languages) creates a dilemma for normatively driven projects like the Musée de l'Europe and the HEH in Brussels, as their initiators and organizers actually want to represent a coherent chronological narrative of the EU's past evolution and future objectives. For these projects, therefore, drawing upon such testimonies can only ever complement other, more traditional modes of narrating history as a chronology of events.

### **Museum Visitors: Transnational Narratives of Diversity**

It may be at least in part these and other problems associated with the founding fathers and the selected 27 Europeans narratives that are currently motivating the search for suitable means to integrate the visitor and his or her experience of lived integration into museums. This constitutes a possible third biographical approach to narrating European integration, which has advantages, but also pitfalls for curators. This approach is embedded in a much larger trend to narrate history in muse-

ums as history from below, which is clearly influenced by perspectives from social, oral and gender history and anthropology. In this kind of narrative, the history of great men is supplemented or even supplanted by the history of ordinary men, women and children and their historical experiences. In a study of museums devoted to the two world wars, Thomas Thiemeyer (2010) has recently observed the same phenomenon. He has characterized this trend as a shift from the ‘Personalisierung’ of history – in the form of the great men – to a ‘Personifizierung’ of history – in the form of stories of acting or suffering individuals who are unknown (Bergmann 1997; Thiemeyer 2010: 146). This strategy also introduces an emotional human touch into the museum, which in turn can attract visitors, who identify with these (other) ordinary citizens.

At the same time, the trend towards personifying history is also being accelerated by the drive to involve visitors more through interactive devices. The greater use of museum websites, new interactive technologies that can link visitors in different museums and of social network sites can create potential for allowing the visitors to tell their own stories about ‘Europe’ – something that Alec Badenoch also points out in his article in this special issue in his discussion of the *Virtual Exhibit* project and its planned future interactive features. This approach apparently is also one of the options being considered by the HEH project team. The resulting new opportunities for creating testimonies in a less structured or strategic manner would probably be welcomed by contemporary historians as a valuable source. In fact, to date, sociological and historical research has completely neglected the oral history of cross-border experiences in post-war Europe.

This third biographical approach to Europe also has its potential problems, however, especially for the initiators and organizers of normatively driven projects like the Musée de l’Europe and the HEH. These include, first of all, that most of the testimonies generated in this way and included in some form in museums and exhibitions are unlikely to speak to any links to the present-day EU and its policies. Visitors recounting their transnational experiences may well be oblivious to the EU’s role in facilitating them. Thus, the Spanish truck-driver, if allowed to speak freely and not forced to respond to strategically formulated questions, may well talk about his trips across Europe and how he first ate Norwegian brown cheese and thought it was a caramel dessert, for example. But he will probably not discuss how his trips across Europe might have been induced by the creation of a common market with increased intra-European trade or how he has recently enjoyed extended periods of sleep thanks to EU health and safety regulations.

Secondly, the diversity of languages used in Europe could mean that only a fraction of any such testimonies by visitors of a website or the actual museum or exhibition would be intelligible to other visitors. The EP visitors’ centre has actually dubbed all testimonies to make them accessible in all 23 official EU languages. It is highly likely that the HEH project will do the same. No national or

regional museum could possibly afford the EU institutions' language policy and practice, however. Curators could of course play with testimonies in different languages as illustrating Europe's diversity in unity. But unity would be absent from such an impressionist mosaic. If the curators wanted to represent the aspect of unity (or economic and political integration), as is clearly the case with the normatively driven projects, they would then have to represent it in a more structured section of their museum or exhibition.

Thirdly, without guidance visitors might find it easier to make normative statements about 'Europe' and what they like or dislike about it or the EU more concretely, rather than giving testimonies of past experiences of lived integration. Such normative statements could well be very interesting, too. They have been used, for example, for the contemporary history section of the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh where they highlight the great diversity of ideas and images of Scotland and of the views and preferences of the people from various backgrounds who live there. Yet this form of biographical approach might be more suitable for the end of an exhibition, as a kind of afterthought and perspective to the future, rather than as an integral part of any narrative of the history of European integration. Indeed, the initial report by the HEH expert committee (Sachverständigenausschuss 2008) has already suggested that visitors should be encouraged to express their views on the (future of the) EU including, for example, the question of its further enlargement to include a country like Turkey, at the end of the future permanent exhibition.

Nonetheless, visitor testimonies as a biographical approach have one major advantage, and this is their potential for bringing out the contested nature of European integration and the EU; without any political control by curators following the example of 'Big Brother' in George Orwell's novel *1984*, such visitor testimonies are bound to produce a multitude of different views of 'Europe' and of the EU, including critical or negative ones. Such a pluralistic approach to generating and using visitor testimonies would most likely not only make this form of biographical approach much more credible in the eyes of visitors compared to any strategically manipulated selection; it would also reflect adequately the decline of the so-called permissive consensus about the greater good of integration without citizens taking much interest in it, and the evolution of the EU towards a trans- and supra-national polity in which issues become much more politicized and contested just as in the political systems of the member states (e.g. Kaiser, Leucht & Rasmussen 2009).

### **Biographical Approaches to Representing European Integration (History)**

The current process of transnationalizing narratives in history museums and exhibitions forms part of a larger search for new narratives – narratives that chime

more with our contemporary experience of the nation-state as bounded and limited in its capacity to act purposefully with a view to providing its citizens with internal and external security and welfare. To some extent, this search for new narratives extends beyond museums to other cultural forums. Thus, the European Cultural Foundation has started a programme, *Narratives for Europe*, for example.<sup>4</sup> Any more transnational narratives of this kind will have to address the history of the present-day EU in one form or another, however. The EU has not been the only driving force behind processes of transnationalization. However, it has contributed very significantly to taming nation states and making their borders much more porous. For the founding member states, it has been at the core of their shared history for more than fifty years already.

This poses the challenge to museums of how to narrate what at first sight appears to be a fairly boring institutional history without much drama. The three biographical approaches discussed in this article promise a way out of this dilemma for curators. Whereas contemporary historians have on the whole emphasized the importance of structural factors for European integration such as the economic benefits of market integration or the importance of the Cold War and United States support for the present-day EU in its early years (Kaiser & Varsori 2010), the focus on individuals is an attractive option for museums. It has at least the potential for engaging the visitors with private stories and through the destinies of individuals. Even the founding fathers narrative could be made much more dramatic than in *C'est notre histoire!*. Thus, it could document Schuman's escape from German internment, Adenauer's interrogation by the Gestapo, the secret police of the National Socialists, and Spaak's work for the Belgian government in exile, for example. This narrative of great men could also employ other means of visualizing their role in the origins of European integration, especially television and radio footage.

Quite apart from the question of its historiographical validity, however, the founding fathers myth as a museum narrative has one crucial downside: it is difficult to enlarge beyond the founding member states. Unlike in the American experience of the western frontier and expansion, the 'core Europeans' have not created tabula rasa (such as by leaving a trail of thousands of dead Red Indians) to extend their 'Empire' (Zielonka 2006). Rather, in the struggle for transnational narratives of shared history they have to acknowledge and accommodate different collective memories and memory cultures in countries from Sweden to Poland, whether they are influenced by the national welfare state myth and greater degrees of Euro-scepticism as in Scandinavia, for example, or the widespread preoccupation with suffering under Stalinism in East-Central Europe (Leggewie 2011). Wherever possible, co-opting what may be termed the EU's enlargement fathers like the Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González or the Polish President Lech Wałęsa may help to update the founding fathers narrative for the enlarged EU of 27 member states. This would involve trying to encompass not just the origins of

European integration, but also the subsequent democratic transitions and the EU's spatial expansions.

Yet it may not only be historically more appropriate and normatively more honest, but also more effective for museums and exhibitions confronting sceptical visitors to opt for narrative pluralism. Personifying the narration of European integration while avoiding strategic choices to praise EU policies would almost inevitably produce such narrative pluralism. However, even narratives of 'great men' have potential for bringing out the diversity of experiences and preferences – for example if leading politicians like the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill or the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme were included – politicians, who either supported 'core Europe' integration, but opposed their country's participation as in the case of Churchill, or who fought for a kind of 'Europe' quite different from the present-day EU as in the case of Palme.

It is of course doubtful whether those responsible for new museum projects and exhibitions or revisions of existing museums are sufficiently open-minded about tolerating or even, promoting the integration of conflicting narratives of the history, motives and objectives of the present-day EU. For the moment, it appears that at least the normatively driven projects like the Musée de l'Europe and the HEH are in search of their own romantic narrative of European integration. In their narration, the valiant pro-European forces from the 'founding fathers' to Commission President José Barroso and the former EP president and initiator of the HEH plan, Hans-Gert Pöttering, are fighting the likes of Margaret Thatcher and Geert Wilders who have hoped, or are still hoping, to radically transform or even abolish the EU. Yet, they – and those who support their diverse alternative views of 'Europe' and its contemporary history and future – are just as much part of the history of European integration as Barroso, Pöttering and the so-called founding fathers.

**Wolfram Kaiser** is Professor of European Studies at the University of Portsmouth. His publications include (with S. Krankenhagen and K. Poehls), *Europa ausstellen. Das Museum als Praxisfeld der Europäisierung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2012); (ed. with A. Varsori), *European Union History. Themes and Debates* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010); *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Musées-Maisons des pères de l'Europe, Pressekonferenz des Netzwerks der Häuser der Gründerväter Europas anlässlich der Einführung des Projekts „politischer Tourismus“, 5 May 2010; Halleluja Europa!, *Financial Times Deutschland*, 5 May 2010; Plans unveiled for 'political tours' of EU founding fathers: [http://www.theparliament.com/no\\_cache/latestnews/news-article/newsarticle/plans-unveiled-for-political-tours-of-eu-founding-fathers/](http://www.theparliament.com/no_cache/latestnews/news-article/newsarticle/plans-unveiled-for-political-tours-of-eu-founding-fathers/) (accessed 11/07/31).
- <sup>2</sup> [http://visitbrussels.be/bitc/static/front/img/db/ContentArticle\\_408/img\\_3368.pdf](http://visitbrussels.be/bitc/static/front/img/db/ContentArticle_408/img_3368.pdf) (accessed 11/07/31).
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.mondial-congress.com/locationfinder/pdf/Europeum.pdf> (accessed 11/07/31).
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.eurocult.org/content/narratives-europe> (accessed 11/07/31).

## References

- Anderson, Benedict (1983): *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.
- Baring, Arnulf (1982): *Im Anfang war Adenauer. Die Entstehung der Kanzlerdemokratie*, Munich: dtv.
- Berger, Stefan & Chris Lorenz (eds) (2010): *Nationalizing the Past. Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bergmann, Klaus (1997): "Personalisierung, Personifizierung", Klaus Bergmann & Aleida Assmann (eds): *Handbuch der Geschichtsdidaktik*, Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyer, 298-300.
- Boswell, David & Jessica Evans (eds) (1999): *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums*, London: Routledge.
- Jong, Steffi de (2011): "Bewegte Objekte. Zur Musealisierung des Zeitzeugen", Sibylle Schmidt, Sibylle Krämer & Ramon Voges (eds): *Politik der Zeitzeugenschaft. Zur Kritik einer Wissenspraxis*, Bielefeld: transcript, 243-264.
- Kaiser, Wolfram, Stefan Krankenhagen & Kerstin Poehls (2012): *Europa im Museum. Europäisierung als kulturelle Praxis*, Cologne – Weimar – Vienna: Böhlau.
- Kaiser, Wolfram & Stefan Krankenhagen (2010): "Europa ausstellen. Das Museum als Praxisfeld der Europäisierung", Michael Gehler & Silvio Vietta (eds): *Europa – Europäisierung – Europäistik. Neue wissenschaftliche Ansätze, Methoden und Inhalte*, Vienna – Cologne – Weimar: Böhlau, 181-197.
- Kaiser, Wolfram & Antonio Varsori (2010): *European Union History: Themes and Debates*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kaiser, Wolfram, Leucht, Brigitte & Morten Rasmussen (2009): *The History of the European Union: Origins of a Trans- and Supranational Polity 1950-72*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kaiser, Wolfram (2007): *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kushner, Tony (2001): "Oral History at the Extremes of Human Experience: Holocaust Testimony in a Museum Setting", *Oral History*, 29:2, 83-94.
- Leggewie, Claus (2011). *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt*, Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Lynch, Frances M.B. (1997): *France and the International Economy: From Vichy to the Treaty of Rome*, London: Routledge, 1997.
- Malmberg, Mikael af (1994): *Den ståndaktiga nationalstaten: Sverige och den västeuropeiska integrationen 1945-1959*, Lund: Lund University Press.
- Manners, Ian (2002). "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40:2, 235-258.

- Mazé, Camille (2008): "Von Nationalmuseen zu Museen der europäischen Kulturen. Eine sozio-historische und ethnographische Annäherung an den Prozess einer 'Europäisierung' der ethnologischen und historischen Nationalmuseen", *Museumskunde*, 73:1, 110-126.
- Milward, Alan S. (1984): *The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-51*, London: Methuen.
- European Parliament (n.d.): *The European Parliament Visitors' Centre. Mission Statement* (PE 364.251/BUR/REV.2), Brussels: European Parliament.
- Poidevin, Raymond (1986): *Robert Schuman, homme d'État, 1886-1963*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.
- Sachverständigenausschuss, Haus der Europäischen Geschichte (2008): *Konzeptionelle Grundlagen für ein Haus der Europäischen Geschichte*, Brussels: European Parliament.
- Schwarz, Hans-Peter (1986): *Adenauer. Der Aufstieg: 1876-1952*, Stuttgart: DVA.
- Tempora (2007): *C'est notre histoire. 50 ans d'aventure européenne*, Brussels: Tempora.
- Thiemeyer, Thomas (2010): *Fortsetzung des Krieges mit anderen Mitteln. Die beiden Weltkriege im Museum*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Zielonka, Jan (2006). *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Interviews

- Benoit, Isabelle, Tempora, interview, Brussels, 14 October 2009.
- Dumoulin, Michel, Professor, Université Louvain-la-Neuve, interview, Louvain-la-Neuve, 7 October 2009.
- Kleinig, Alexander, Director, Visitors' Centre, European Parliament, interview, Brussels, 29 October 2009.
- Witte, Els, Professor, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, interview, Brussels, 6 October 2009.