

LOCAL MEMORIES IN A NATIONALIZING AND GLOBALIZING WORLD

1750 up to the present

University of Antwerp (Antwerp)

Date: October 15-16, 2009.

Application deadline: November 1, 2008.

Please send your abstract of about 500 words to local.memories@ua.ac.be.

The conference will be held at FelixArchief (Oudeleeuwenrui 29, 2000 Antwerp).

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The Center for Political History, the Center for Urban History (University of Antwerp) and FelixArchief (Antwerp City Archives) are inviting papers for their upcoming conference.

In academic discourse since the 1950s, the concept of ›collective memory‹ has migrated from the field of the social to that of the cultural sciences. Maurice Halbwachs' intuition that collective memory was essentially a pre-existing social fact structuring individual past-relationships, gave way to the recognition that social memories are more or less intentionally construed with the aim of creating and consolidating identities. It was in this constructivist vein that the concept became successful among historians, thoroughly influenced by the cultural turn. Their focus was on the way memories were forged through stories, monuments and other cultural artifacts, that came to serve as *lieux de mémoire* within specific collectivities. Among these collectivities, nations have received the lion's share of the historians' attention. In spite of a recent re-orientation to the memories of other – most often smaller – ›milieux de mémoire‹, the central premise has remained that intellectual and political elites deliberately produced memories, which were consumed by the masses. Even when it is admitted that ›consumption‹ can consist of active and creative appropriation, the overall top-down perspective seems to be largely unquestioned.

The conference opts for a more dynamic view of the creation and transmission of memories. It focuses on the ways in which memories were recurred to and used in the everyday discourses and practices of groups at a local level. These groups can be defined along different lines (socio-professional, geographic, generational, religious, ethnic, etc.) and have various extensions (a neighborhood, a village, a town, a region); moreover, the discourses and practices can bear upon the most diverse aspects of life and take on the most diverse forms (textual, oral, visual, material). Not the straightforward creation of master narratives about the group's own past will be the main concern of the conference, but the way in which these groups more or less consciously – and more or less successfully – combined diverse, sometimes even conflicting memories. Doing so, the organizers hope fully to re-inscribe the concept of memory into the field of social history.

The period that will be investigated – from 1750 until today – is characterized by the rise and the expansion of the nation state, and by the competing process of globalization. The efforts that were made during this period to create homogeneous national memories will serve during this conference as a background to the study of local memories. Did these local memories resist the growing prominence of national memory, did they incorporate aspects of it, or did they exist and develop without any interference of ›the national‹? And how did local memories interact with globalizing processes such as colonization and migration? Within this general framework, papers should address one of the following themes:

- the deliberate creation of institutions for the preservation and transmission of local memories (local museums, associations, courses in primary schools on local history, citizen initiatives, etc.).
- local forms of historiography, without or within the academic sphere
- the presence of the past in ritualized forms of community building at a local or regional level (celebrations, liturgies, monuments, etc.)
- the presence of the past in non-ritualized, group-specific practices and discourses (the transmission of professional skills, name-giving, etc.)
- the recurrence to the past in conflicts between groups or in acts of local resistance
- the transmission (and alteration) of traditions as a way of preserving group-specific memories in changing contexts
- the experience of the local past by individuals, through the study of ordinary writings, oral sources or their material heritage