SHORT GUIDE TO PLANNING A CROWD-SOURCING WEBINAR

Preface

EUROCLIO has since 2018 employed an online crowdsourcing strategy to expand the source collections available on historian.eu. This short guide explains the procedure for setting up a webinar for the collecting of sources. The document has been produced within the specific context of EUROCLIO and the Historiana platform but could be employed elsewhere with minor adaptations.

What is a Webinar?

A Webinar can be an online presentation to an audience, a video conference, a recorded lecture, an interactive workshop, or presentation using a seminar format. It can be pre-recorded or combine recordings and live interaction. It can also include polling of participants, exchange of comments through a text-based 'Chat' feature and Questions and Answers as in an online video conference.

Webinars can be delivered through free software programs such as Skype and Google Hangouts and we have used these in the past for small online meetings. Our first Webinars were delivered using BlueJeans, which is not free. But while visual and audio quality is good it has fewer features than other software programs on the market and the numbers of participants are relatively small. We have now moved to another program, **Zoom**, and the first EUROCLIO Webinar using Zoom was held on 13 May 2019 and was run by Bridget Martin on 'Reading Visual History'. Zoom can host up to 100 interactive participants and many more attendees if their participation is less interactive. Interaction does not need to be restricted to presenter-participant inputs. Participants can also interact with each other.

What is crowdsourcing in this context?

'Crowdsourcing' is probably best-known as a means of obtaining funding for a project proposal from a large number of people through the Internet. But it is increasingly used to describe any means of obtaining goods and services of all kinds (including information) from a 'crowd' or large group of people via the Internet.

In our case that 'information' comprises historical evidence or sources. We opted for this to enhance the type and range of digitalised historical sources that we could draw upon given that those of us engaged in developing Historiana have limited finite resources in terms of numbers of volunteers, available time, fluency in a range of languages and knowledge of historical contexts in a large number of countries.

So, what **sequence of actions will you need to take** in order to prepare for a crowd-sourced Webinar on Historiana:

1. Selection of a topic

Our first suggestions for Webinars have tended to be topics on which lend themselves to large-scale Units or Modules, e.g. the European Renaissances, Russian Revolution, Post-WW1 Peace Treaties, Industrial Revolutions, etc.

Inevitably, the crowdsourcing process is rather random; i.e. you cannot be sure in advance who will particpate, where they come from, what interests them in the chosen topic or how involved they wish to be as source contributors. So, the more focused the topic is, the more likely the sources sent in will combine to create a coherent collection. In her evaluation

paper, Louise argues that "*It would be easier for the coordinators as well as for the understanding of the contributors, in my opinion, if only one key event was chosen as the focus of the crowdsourcing. Thus the source collection could expand on the transnationality and multi-perspectivity, but be more coherently focused on one occasion.*" [Louise Sträuli, Lessons Learned from Crowdsourcing…., p.1]

While agreeing with the overall principle here - keep the topic fairly narrowly focused – there is no reason why this topic should always be an event. That is clearly appropriate for a number of historical topics, but not in all cases. Sometimes it might be more appropriate to think of a single theme, or a geographical region, or a decade, or even a genre that is important in understanding an historical theme, development or period.   For example, it might be painting, sculpture, architecture, ideas, trade, communications, travel, etc.

In other words, once you have decided on your period, key moment in time or historical development select a focus which is likely to:
- highlight key points of interest in a broader theme or topic;
- have symbolic value for people living through a particular time or development (or later);
- shed light on the diversity to be found in that theme or topic (i.e. the transnationality and multiperspectivity).

So, for example, the Fall of the Berlin Wall is just one event in a whole sequence of events that demonstrate the breakdown of Soviet Communism in the 1980s. It may not even be the most significant event. Some historians will choose to point to developments in Poland or Hungary rather than East Germany. BUT, the Berlin Wall was a symbol of the faultline across Europe in the Cold War and so the reaction of not just Germans on both sides of the Wall, but also people in Eastern Europe, the West and on other continents which were within the spheres of influence of the two superpowers are highly significant. They help to tell us a lot about international attitudes to the Cold War and people's hopes for the future.

The same three bullet points should also inform the selection of a topic for Renaissances, Peace Treaties, Reformations, etc. Remember, we can always broaden our coverage of these themes through Timelines and Source Collections. We do not need to think of the Webinar as the **only** means of gathering sources on a given theme, so the crowdsourcing does not need to be comprehensive.

2. Produce a Mission Statement for the Webinar.
Once you have decided on a topic for an Historiana Webinar you need to write a short Mission Statement (1-2 pages at most). The Mission Statement performs four functions:
1) It helps you, the coordinators of the Webinar, to clarify your thinking before you start developing the more detailed information package that will accompany the Webinar.
2) It serves as a publicity leaflet for EUROCLIO to post online in order to attract participants.
3) It helps those who opt to participate to prepare for the Webinar.
4) It provides a useful aide mémoire for the contributors as they begin looking for sources in their own countries and an aide mémoire for yourselves and the trainees as you process the sources, select the ones you want to use and create the final Source Collection.

For examples of such Mission Statements, please consult our webpages and event listings for the past webinars.

3. Agree on the aims underpinning the completed Source Collection

To quote Bridget Martin's Manual:

> "*Each source collection should have a specific purpose. The introduction for the source collection explains this rationale to educators so that they can easily identify ways to use it in the classroom. It is thus important to clearly state what the source collection can help students understand or which historical thinking concept(s) it can support them to develop.* "

Our experience so far is that you need to be clear about the aims of the Source Collection described in your Mission Statement **before the Webinar** and find some time during the introductory presentation to outline these aims to the participants. The main aim is likely to be some version of:

> **To set the** *[chosen event, moment, theme or development]* **into a wider international context than is usually portrayed in school textbooks and to explore the different ways in which people – in the political elites, th mass media and amongst the general public – perceived and responded to what was happening during this time.**

In other words, we highlight the importance of source collections being:

> **TRANSNATIONAL** - access to sources from other countries that would be difficult (and time consuming) for teachers and students to find or themselves.
> **MULTIPERSPECTIVAL** – recognising that not everyone sees an event in the same way or from the same perspective and that combining perspectives helps us understanding the complexities and the limitations of the evidence that eye witnesses, officials, journalists and historians draw upon.

Something like this can be done in 2 or 3 Powerpoint slides which will appear on screen during the Webinar presentation.

However, it will also be important at this point in the presentation to explain the educational aims of the selected Source Collection. In addition to being *Transnational* and *Multiperspectival* the Collection should also:

> **PROMOTE HISTORICAL THINKING THROUGH ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING** – i.e. students analysing and comparing historical sources rather than relying solely on the textbook account.

To quote Bridget Martin's Manual:

> "It is....important to clearly state what the source collection can help students understand or which historical thinking concept(s) it can support them to develop. For example, a source collection might be focused on:
> - Creating a sense of time
> - Understanding everyday life
> - Presenting a cast of characters (key individuals)
> - Comparing and contrasting
> - Historical representation and interpretation
> - Historical significance
> - Change and continuity
> - Cause and consequence

This process will also help you to decide how best to structure the content of the Source Collection.

4. Decide how you intend to structure the Source Collection

It is also essential that you make this decision **before** the Webinar rather than wait to see what kinds of sources are sent in. You need to explain the structure during the Webinar because this will help to guide the contributors when they are searching their national and media archives, etc. for sources that would meet the aims of the overall source collection.

The nature of the topic should help to determine the best structural framework. If it is a major turning point in history, like a global war or a revolution, then it may be that the best way of structuring the Collection will be around a chronological series of events.

On the other hand, an events-based structure might not work so well if the topic is centred on a major transnational social, cultural, religious and political upheaval, such as the Enlightenment or the Reformation. Certainly it could be structured around key events or key persons but it might be preferable to structure it around how people in different countries responded to the central ideas and beliefs emerging at this time.

When the topic is a single event that has had implications and repercussions for people in many countries then it may be that the best way of structuring the Source Collection is around a set of Key Questions. This is what we have decided to do for the Webinar on the Fall of the Berlin Wall. BUT I doubt if this could be a universal framework for structuring every Source Collection. It works well for a single event or moment in time but will it work as well for a multi-layered, multi-dimensional historical phenomenon such as the Renaissances? Or, would it be necessary to focus down to something more tangible such as:

- How painting developed in different ways, at different paces and in different parts of Europe during the C15th – C16th?
- How new practices in medicine spread across Europe?
- 'How humanism in northern Europe set the seeds for religious reform but did not have the same effect in Italy?
- How printing transformed not just art and literature but also the artists and the writers by gradually reducing the power of patronage, and did this work to the same degree throughout Europe or only in the north?

In each case these kinds of key questions would still need to be broken down to reflect diversity of nations and perspectives.

Whichever structural framework you choose for a given Source Collection it will be important to check that it is likely to generate sufficient diversity of evidence in terms of transnationality and perspectives, otherwise there is a risk that all of your contributors turn to the same Digital archives and resources regardless of where they are located and that would rather defeat the object of the exercise.

5. Produce a short presentation (between 5-10 minutes maximum) of the kinds of sources you are looking for.

I would recommend using the editorial team and/or the trainees to collect some sources from their own countries chosen to reflect the range of source types and content that we would like them to also look for in their countries.

For the Webinar on the Russian Revolution we took one of the six Key Events – the February Revolution – and produced a set of sources showing how politicians, mass media, organised

labour and ordinary people reacted to news of a people's revolution, the Tsar's abdication and the creation of a Provisional Government expected to hold free elections to a constituent assembly later in the year.

For the Webinar on the Fall of the Berlin Wall the editors have collected source material on how the political elite, the mass media and ordinary people reacted to the news of the crossings between East and West Berlin being opened up in France, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States – either because they have the relevant languages or because they have access to useful archives in those countries.

During works on European Renaissances we conceptualised the distinction between the search questions and analytic questions. The **Analytic questions** (ex. What was new in the renaissance? Where did the renaissances happen?) Should be used when editing and organising already submitted sources. The webinar presentation should present possible contributors with the **Search questions – more specific inquiries that clearly communicate what kind of sources we are looking for.** Examples for Renaissance collection would include: Was there a distinctive artistic (or architectural) style emerging in your country that reflect the influence of the Renaissance? What are the evidence of developments in astronomy or physics or medicine emerging in your country during the Renaissance era? Search Questions (rather than Analytical Questions) would provide a steer for the contributors on what to look for. The Analytical Questions about timing, diversity and similarities, continuity and change, etc will provide the steer for the contributors to write their context documents and for the editors and trainees who put all this material together into a coherent Source Collection.

NOTE 1: It is not necessary that all of these sources should be visual. Text-based sources may be more relevant and will encourage Webinar participants to look beyond the images that are employed in their textbooks.

NOTE 2: Your presentation in the first half of the Webinar will need to be completed at least three weeks before the due date of the Webinar and sent to whoever in the Secretariat is your contact person for this Webinar. This will ensure that any video and/or powerpoint presentations which you plan to use will run as smoothly as possible.

6. **Ensure there is time in the Webinar to explain the procedures that we would like contributors to follow when collecting sources and then sending them to EUROCLIO.**

During the online presentation for your Webinar there are some key points you need to stress in case participants might want to ask questions before deciding whether or not to become contributors. Some version of the following paragraph from the Communications Plan gets to the heart of what we need to tell the participants:

Please, make sure that the material you share with us is:
- Copyright cleared (either Free for Re-Use or Free for Non-Commercial Use)
- Followed by an indication of where it was retrieved from
- (in case of a visual source) followed by an indication of who is the owner of the image/video, and of who made it
- (in case of a source in a language different from English) followed by a short description of the content in English

-	(in case making reference to an historical figure) followed by a short biography of the historical figure involved.

7. Decide if you want to gather any background information from all of the participants that might be helpful when constructing the final Source Collection

For example would it be useful to know how many participants teach history in secondary schools and to which age groups would they teach this particular topic (if at all); how many teach at University level and in what courses they teach this topic; how many have already researched this topic; when teaching the topic do they use sources from other countries or just from their own; [if they are teachers] how much time do they have within their history course or curriculum to approach this topic; and so forth. For this kind of general polling we can use something like Mentimeter which will show the results instantaneously on screen.

This might also be the right moment to ask participants to register if they would like to be contributors. This could be done using the Chat feature during the Q & A session at the end.

8. Question and Answer time at the end of the Webinar
There should be at least 15 minutes at the end of the Webinar for participants to ask questions. It will be important to ensure that someone on the team is ready to 'chair' this and to ensure that the Q &A session is not dominated by one or two persons.

Bob Stradling
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