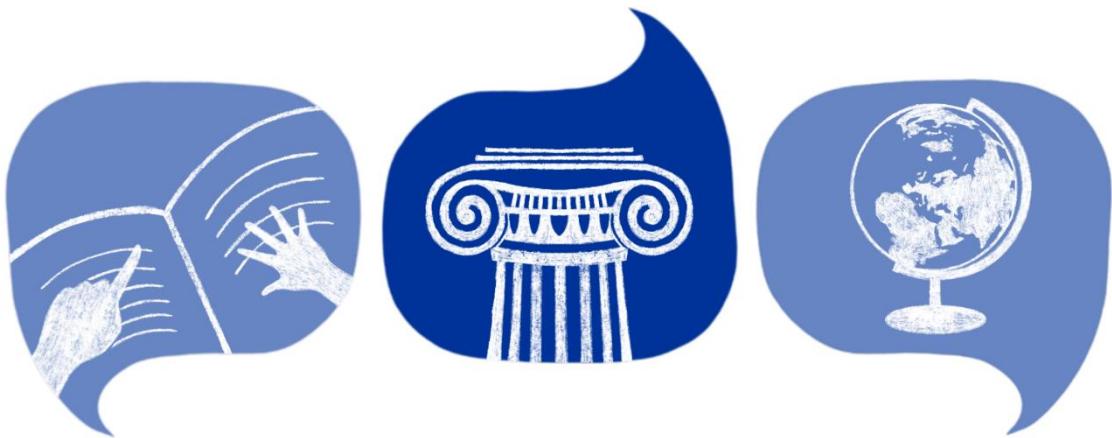




## EuroClio 28th Annual Conference



# What is History for?

History and the present world

Bologna, 28 April to 01 May 2022



Co-funded by the  
Europe for Citizens Programme  
of the European Union

## CONCEPT NOTE

EuroClio – the European Association of History Educators and Clio '92 - the Association of Research Groups on History Teaching and Learning are excited and honoured to launch the 28th EuroClio Annual Conference: "What is History for?". The Conference, which will see members of the EuroClio community get together for the first time after the 2020-2021 Covid19 Pandemic, will take place in Bologna, Italy, from 28 April to 01 May 2022.

The association CLIO '92 was formed by a group of history teachers in 1998 with the aim to deepen and boost the theoretical and applied research on issues of teaching and learning of history. Their ambition is to keep the history taught strongly linked to the history of the experts. His positions on the teaching of history have occurred in the theses published in 2000 in the first issue of "The Notebooks of Clio", updated in the national assemblies of the shareholders are held annually and published on the website of [www.clio92.it](http://www.clio92.it).

EuroClio, the European Association of History Educators, is an international Non-governmental organisation that promotes the development of responsible and innovative history, citizenship, and heritage education by promoting critical thinking, multi-perspectivity, mutual respect, and the inclusion of controversial issues.

Together, we will welcome 75+ motivated history and citizenship educators from all across Europe. We will offer a programme full of active workshops, keynote lectures, networking and discussion sessions and a rich cultural programme. The programme will focus on the theme: "What is History for?", and will make use of educational materials developed by Clio '92 and EuroClio, as well as act as a platform for the sharing of new initiatives on history education.

This concept notes serves as a guide to the training themes and aims.

## Table of contents

Table of contents .....	2
What is history for?.....	3
Subthemes .....	5
Why Bologna? .....	6
Conference aims .....	6
Concretely, this conference will result in: .....	6

## What is history for?

“History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions, and so on, like fish on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him.”

E.H.Carr - What is History? (1961)

### A rather hot topic

On Friday 12 June 2020, just five days after the statue of Edward Colston had been toppled and thrown into Bristol's harbour, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted “We cannot now try to edit or censor our past. We cannot pretend to have a different history”<sup>1</sup>. Following this line of thought, in February 2021 the *Telegraph* ran an article titled “University censorship is fictionalising history”<sup>2</sup>, in which UK Minister of State for Universities Michelle Donelan was quoted comparing the process of decolonising the curriculum to censorship practices in the Soviet Union or in China.

On the other side of the Atlantic, in September 2020, Donald Trump hosted the very first White House Conference on American History. During this Conference, which faced severe criticism from the American Historical Association and the Organisation of American Historians<sup>3</sup>, Trump explicitly took a stance against several educational projects focusing on the promotion of multiple perspectives, such as the 1619 Project initiated by the *New York Times*, as attempts to rewrite history and erase the “legacy of 1776”.

At the same time, in continental Europe we are witnessing not only to the resurgence of a nostalgia for the communist past in several communities in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe<sup>4</sup>, but also to the increasing success of populist and nativist parties that, appealing also to the historical consciousness of their electorate and promising the return of a glorious past, have succeeded in securing positions of power in the parliaments and councils of ministers of many liberal democracies, including in Italy, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and the Netherlands<sup>5</sup>.

At the time when we are writing this concept note (early November 2021), the list of topics that are currently at the forefront of national and international politics and that see history and historical interpretations as a part of the debate could be further extended to encompass LGBTQI+ rights; Climate Change (after all, COP26 is ongoing as we type); the anniversary of the dissolution of the Soviet Union; Brexit; the recent German, Bulgarian, or Dutch elections; the Capitol Hill Attack of January 2021; the increasing tensions in Hong Kong and Taiwan; the Migrants and Refugees influx

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/12/we-cannot-edit-our-past-boris-johnsons-statue-tweets-explained>, last accessed 10 November 2021

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/02/27/censoring-reading-lists-bad-soviet-union-fictionalising-history/>, last accessed 10 November 2021

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-statement-on-the-recent-white-house-conference-on-american-history-\(september-2020\)](https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-statement-on-the-recent-white-house-conference-on-american-history-(september-2020)) and <https://www.oah.org/insights/posts/2020/september/oah-statement-on-white-house-conference-on-american-history/>. Both were last accessed 10 November 2021

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/15/european-public-opinion-three-decades-after-the-fall-of-communism/>, last accessed 10 November 2021

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.euroclio.eu/2021/09/28/the-allure-of-authoritarianism-and-modern-populism-a-keynote-lecture-with-prof-takis-pappas/>, last accessed 10 November 2021

in Europe and the United States; the tensions at the border between Poland and Belarus; the Canadian Indian Residential School System and its long lasting consequences; and many, many more.

To quote Helen Carr and Suzannah Lipscomb, today:

“History is hot stuff. It is the focus of hot-off-the-press news, the subject of heated debate [...] and some people express fears that it is being stolen. But how hot are we on what history actually is?” (p.5)<sup>6</sup>

In a twenty-first century when history is constantly being re-written to include the voices of people whose absence and perspectives are made more and more visible, also thanks to the discovery or analysis of new sources, there are several definitions of history available, each connected to a different function ascribed to this subject. For this reason, we believe that it is more beneficial and relevant to talk about why we teach history and, why not, why and how we should rewrite history, as opposed to trying to provide a static definition.

In practice, instead of focusing on the question “what history actually is”, during our Annual Conference in Bologna we will focus on the question “what is history for?”.

### A difficult question to answer

It will not come as a shock to anyone, but this is not an easy question to answer:

Looking in the latest university publications on this topic, asking the question “what is history for?” to the members of the EuroClio community<sup>7</sup>, or even a simple internet research will yield very different results, that can be broadly divided in<sup>8</sup>:

National and Identity related purposes: history, in this case, is a tool to promote a sense of national identity or group belonging. This use of history is strictly connected to the rise of the modern Nation State in the XIX century, and still advanced today in many history curricula across the world;

Civic purposes: history, in this case, aims at the promotion of a peaceful society, where diversity is valued and diverse people live together without “awakening the wounds of the past” (p.60). In this case, history is the tool that shows us our shared past, how we got here, and how we can build a future on a shared narrative of (world) events;

Scientific or critical purposes: here, the teaching and learning of history results in the development of critical thinking, historical thinking skills, and an understanding and valuing of cultural diversity and of the impact of world events on different local communities.

---

<sup>6</sup> Carr, H. and Lipscomb, S. (Eds.) (2021) *What is history, Now? How the past and present speak to each other*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

<sup>7</sup> It is not a case that we are writing this concept note 1 month after the World Congress of School History Teaching, where we discussed the topic “History: why and for whom?”, or a mere two weeks after having shared with all EuroClio members a call to let us know “what is history for?” in their countries. We will present the results of this call to action during the Annual Conference.

<sup>8</sup> We have decided to borrow Charles Heimberg’s classification as advanced in the essay “why teaching history today?” (“perché insegnare la storia oggi?”), published in the bulletin of Clio ‘92 in June 2021 (pages 59-64). Additional resources are mentioned in the bibliography at the end of the Concept Note.

During the Annual Conference, together with all the participants to the event, we will depart from this simple classification of the purposes of history to further dive into and discuss not only the broad question “what is history for?”, but also *what is history for us* (members of the EuroClio Community, History/Citizenship Educators, Human beings living in the 21st Century), *what is it important to talk about history and about how we teach history now*, and *how do we use history as a tool to promote multiperspectivity, a better understanding of the present, and the development of democratic competences*.

## Subthemes <sup>9</sup>

**Theme 1: History as a tool to promote diversity.** In the last five years, we have assisted to multiple debates on how can history become a tool to promote diversity and inclusion, starting from making the history lesson more representative and inclusive: how do we fill the blank spaces left in our curriculum, such as the role of women or indigenous people in the past; the events of the First and Second World War outside of the European fronts, or the decolonisation process seen from the eyes of the local communities; ...?

**Theme 2: History as a tool to reflect on the present.** Despite it is by now widely known that saying that history helps us understand “how we got here” is an oversimplification of what history is and does<sup>10</sup>, it is true that by looking at past events and how they came to be, we can help our students learn how to “improve the present”<sup>11</sup>. As part of the Annual Conference, we will learn how to help students reflect on themselves, on the challenges today’s societies are facing and on what we need to overcome them. What can we learn from the past that can help us today? How can we learn it?

**Theme 3 : History as a tool to encourage the development of competences for democratic culture<sup>12</sup>.** History can be used to help students develop skills (such as critical thinking and understanding of change and continuity), values (such as human rights and cultural diversity), attitudes (such as civic mindedness and openness to cultural other-ness), and critical knowledge of themselves and the world. During the conference, we will present several examples of how we can use history to help our students become active and responsible citizens that value and promote human dignity.

---

<sup>9</sup> Please note that the sub themes might be further refined in the coming weeks!

<sup>10</sup> For an interesting argument on why “how we got here” is a very simplistic vision of what is history for, check out <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/head-head/what-history>.

<sup>11</sup> You can find some more details about this here: <https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/what-is-history-for/>

<sup>12</sup> For a complete list of the Competences for Democratic Culture, see: Barrett, M.D., 2016. Competences for democratic culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies. Council of Europe Publishing.

## Why Bologna?

We have asked the members of Clio '92 why Bologna is the right place for us to start discussing *what is history for*. Here is what they told us:

[Bologna is] One of the most beautiful and inspiring cities of Italy, where the first European university has been founded in 1088 AD, has much to offer in terms of intellectual, cultural, and historical legacy.

Here, some decades ago, started a reflection about the methods and aims of history teaching that deeply influenced the Italian school system. At the core of this innovation was the idea that history teaching could consist in a part of a content's acquirement and in a part of a skill's development.

Teachers of any school degree, from primary school to academia, took part at this process of renovation.

## Conference aims

- To **engage** in a dialogue between history, geography, heritage, and citizenship educators from across and beyond Europe.
- To **equip** teachers with the tools to bring new perspectives and resources in the classroom to make their lessons more representative and inclusive.
- To **share** educational initiatives which help students acquire key competences to become kind, active and caring human beings.
- To **exchange** innovative tools, methods and professional knowledge with all other educators in Europe and beyond to support teaching locally and in their own countries.
- To **disseminate** and explore the implementation of innovative history teaching resources and guidelines produced by national and international NGOs and intergovernmental organisations.
- To **strengthen** synergies between EuroClio and history, citizenship, geography, and heritage educators in Italy and around the world, in order to strengthen the capacity building and professional development of local educators.
- To **reflect** on how we approach the educational / democratic / social system in our local contexts, and specifically on what we can do to work within it or on it to make it better.

## Concretely, this conference will result in:

- A 3-5 pages' collection of resources and initiatives that teachers can refer to in developing teaching materials that connect local and global histories.
- A concrete step that each of us will take in our classrooms / local contexts / museums / families / etc. that will help us bring about a little change.
- A list of recommendations on how to make historical material inclusive, representative, and diverse.

## References

To prepare this Concept Note, we have consulted the following online resources:

American Historical Association, *AHA Issues Statement on the Recent "White House Conference on American History"* (September 2020), 14 October 2020, available at:

[https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-statement-on-the-recent-white-house-conference-on-american-history-\(september-2020\)](https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-statement-on-the-recent-white-house-conference-on-american-history-(september-2020)) (last accessed 10 November 2021)

Author Unknown on The School of Life, *What is History For?*, available at:

<https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/what-is-history-for/> (last accessed 11 November 2021)

Barrett, M.D., 2016. Competences for democratic culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies. Council of Europe Publishing, available at:

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806ccc07> (last accessed 16 November 2021)

Chakandar Sengoopta, Faridah Zaman, Francesca Morakis, and Marcus Colla on History Today, *What is History? Four historians consider the most fundamental question of all, one famously posed by E.H. Carr almost 60 years ago*, History Today Volume 70 Issue 8 August 2020, available at:  
<https://www.historytoday.com/archive/head-head/what-history> (last accessed 11 November 2021)

Christopher Hope and Louisa Wells on The Telegraph, *University censorship is fictionalising history, says Universities Minister*, 27 February 2021, available at:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/02/27/censoring-reading-lists-bad-soviet-union-fictionalising-history/>, last accessed 10 November 2021

Organisation of American Historians, *OAH Statement on White House Conference on American History*, 25 September 2020, available at:

<https://www.oah.org/insights/posts/2020/september/oah-statement-on-white-house-conference-on-american-history/>, last accessed 10 November 2021

Peter Walker on The Guardian, *'We cannot edit our past': Boris Johnson's statue tweets explained*, 12 June 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/12/we-cannot-edit-our-past-boris-johnsons-statue-tweets-explained> (last accessed 10 November 2021)

Richard Wike, Jacob Poushter, Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, Janell Fetterolf, Alexandra Castillo and Christine Huang at the Pew Research Centre, *European Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/15/european-public-opinion-three-decades-after-the-fall-of-communism/>, last accessed 10 November 2021

Ralitsa Angelova on EuroClio, *The allure of authoritarianism and modern populism: A keynote lecture with Prof. Takis Pappas*, 28 September 2021, available at:

<https://www.euroclio.eu/2021/09/28/the-allure-of-authoritarianism-and-modern-populism-a-keynote-lecture-with-prof-takis-pappas/>, last accessed 10 November 2021

We have also consulted the following publications:

In particular, we have consulted:

Carr, H. and Lipscomb, S. (2021) *Prologue: ways in.* In Carr, H. and Lipscomb, S. (Eds.) (2021) What is history, Now? How the past and present speak to each other. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. pp 3-16.

Frankopan, P. (2021) *Why global history matters.* In Carr, H. and Lipscomb, S. (Eds.) (2021) What is history, Now? How the past and present speak to each other. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. pp 17 - 32.

Heisember, C. (2021) *Perché insegnare la storia oggi?* in various authors Il Bollettino di Clio - Utilità e inutilità della storia. Numer 15 - Giugno 2021. pp. 59 - 64.

Riley, C.L. (2021) *Why history should always be rewritten.* In Carr, H. and Lipscomb, S. (Eds.) (2021) What is history, Now? How the past and present speak to each other. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. pp 280 - 295.