



Call for Papers

**STUDENT CONFERENCE 2020**  
**WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT HISTORY**  
**Historiographical reflections and perspectives**

February 17-19 2020  
Department of Political Sciences, University of Pavia

**Deadline: September 30, 2019**

The proposals for reflection will be divided into five thematic panels:

- 1. Construction of identity and memory.** The past as a symbolic resource and the relationship between identity and memory in historical and modern societies;
- 2. To interpret history through philosophy and political doctrines.** Categories and methods of historical research filtered through the lenses of philosophical and political thought;
- 3. What sources for the historian?** The "traces" of historical research, from archive to oral sources, the use of images, photographs, artistic artifacts, up to social networks;
- 4. Historical trajectories: from micro-stories to World History.** Methodological questions related to the redefinition of the perspective of investigation, theoretical boundaries, limits and interpretative possibilities;
- 5. Environmental history of the modern and contemporary age.** The analysis of environmental phenomena through ecology, climatology, earth sciences, with reference to different epochs and geographical areas.

Candidates must submit by the **deadline of 30 September 2019:**

- **Contribution proposal:** maximum length 500 words. The proposal should contain, in the header, the reference to the panel (number and title) for which it is presented;
- *Curriculum Vitae et Studiorum*.

**Documents have to be sent to: [studentconference2020@unipv.it](mailto:studentconference2020@unipv.it)**

**1) Identity building and memory construction**

**Moderator: Luca Bellia**

The past, nowadays, is a symbolic resource of great value for societies and political groups, especially in the process of building and consolidating their identity. The memory of historical events is an irreplaceable element in political and social narratives, often assuming the connotations of a battlefield between one group and another. The functions carried out by memory are manifold: from a form of legitimation of institutions, passing through the aggregating function that the past deploys



in large and heterogeneous social groups, such as Nation states, to the reference to alternative models of life in respect to contemporary ones.

Therefore, identity is inseparably connected to memory, or rather to the use that is made of it, and to the interpretation of history that is provided. In this sense, memory and identity are related in a process of political elaboration in perpetual evolution. The task of historians, and more generally of social scientists, is becoming increasingly difficult because the past transcends the object of study and is perceived as the exclusive heritage of social groups, touching on emotional cords that make the work of the scholar always more challenging.

The panel intends to investigate the various forms of the relationship between identity and memory in contemporary historiographical debate. The candidate is asked to discuss the aspects of this link, also through case studies, and its repercussions on historiographic research.

## **2) Interpreting history through the lens of philosophy and political thought**

**Moderator: Enrico Ciappi**

The philosophy of history represents an "appeal to the universal participation of thought in all that is human" and in all that has happened in the past. With this panel we accept Hegel's appeal and invite scholars to propose new research, both philosophical and historical-critical, relevant to the development of the conception of history and historiography in the course of the contemporary age. Philosophy offers valuable tools for reading and interpreting history, allowing us to recognize and use with order and rigour the conceptual characteristics of the historiographical method, such as the individuality or uniqueness of historical facts, their causal correlation or the meaning that events possess in an absolute or relative sense.

This interweaving of theoretical and practical experiences, of reflections and actions, is articulated both as methodological systems, that is, as complex theoretical structures, more or less directly oriented towards praxis, and as conceptual categories, that is, ideal structures that organize theories and allow their comparison.

Obviously, philosophers and historians have not thought of the same problems through the same categories. We therefore invite you to underline the coexistence of the history of thought with geography and the chronology of thought, in order to illustrate both the evolution over time of intellectual traditions that innervate the reflection on history, as well as the specificities, relevant and recognizable, with which each of the great geographical areas of the world develops and interprets them.

The need for this reflection stems from the conviction that political thought is a concrete thought, actively involved in the world, both as a critique of existence, that is, as a de-construction, and as a construction, as a project to build a 'better' social order able to satisfy criteria of legitimacy different from those of the present order. In the wake of these visions, we invite to reflect on the meaning of history and historiography in today's social context. Beyond its simplistic and improvised worst declinations, a discussion of this theme can be a fruitful source of confrontation between professional historians and a privileged channel of communication with the rest of society.

## **3) The "traces" of history. What sources for the historian?**

**Moderator: Carlotta Marchi**



The methodology of historical research imposes a strict critical analysis of the sources: the process of choosing, interpreting and using them is, in fact, one of the key points in the work of the historian. The historiographic debate has long dwelt on the limits of the process of sources' identification: what can be considered as such, what are the interpretative tools, what are the risks and problems involved. Over the years, the concept of "source" has been revised, expanded and modified: one thinks, for example, of the debate on oral sources or on the historical significance of images and art; to bibliographic and archive research has been added the analysis of photographs, artistic artifacts, oral testimonies, even television commercials: useful and necessary tools to reconstruct historical narratives and to understand the representations and perceptions of a given historical period.

The enlargement of the number of sources presupposes a continuous interpretative process that historians cannot ignore; hence the need to subject the research to a critical review that takes into account a plurality of factors: the period of production, the actors involved and their aims, the instruments used, the contact with technological innovations and modernity. Think of the changes occurred in recent years: in the era of social networks, we must ask ourselves to what extent and in what way it is permissible to include and use photos, posts and opinions in historical research. The umbrella of history contains a series of disciplines, which use and make their own different and multiple tools of investigation; it is the task of the historian, therefore, to encourage the intersection of disciplines, as well as of sources.

Starting from Peter Burke's proposal to try to identify the sources as "traces of the past in the present", the panel aims both to investigate at a methodological level the concept of source, the plurality of traces, tools, limits and difficulties of interpretation, and to discuss concrete case studies. Opening up to ongoing, completed and study proposals, the aim of the panel is to encourage exchanges between young scholars and their different interests and methodologies.

#### **4) Historiographical trajectories: from microhistories to world history**

**Moderator: Francesco Casales**

At the fading of the 80s Edward Said suggested that 'historical writing is after all writing and not reality'. In so saying the Palestinian scholar was entrenching the turning point – that he himself had contributed to shape – at that moment deeply affecting historical studies on a world scale.

Since the early 60s to the 80s and beyond, the historian's craft had in fact begun to experience a massive reshaping. The inoculation of linguistic concepts in the methodological expertise of the historian – such as those of discourse and enunciate; the implementation of the analytical category of 'Orientalism'; the re-discovery of the Gramscian theory amongst cultural scholars; the new attention conceded to micro-histories as both political and methodological standpoints in telling counter-histories of class, gender, and racial dominions; all this contributed to the formation of what are now relatively established as the most explored trajectories of historical studies.

But are they that firm? And how is so? Even though probably well established at a strictly academic level, the radical stances of these historiographical theories and methods seem to have sometimes lost their *raison d'être*. Do these theories still represent a valuable but alternative approach to the study of the past? If that is not the case, how – and when – did they lost this capacity? Did they ever stand the chance to be politically effective?

In this panel we aim at deepening theoretical and methodological issues related to these more or less recent historiographical traditions. Papers will therefore be chosen in respect to their capacity to build a new understanding of both the historiographic trajectory chosen by the participant (therefore



proposing a self-reflection over the discipline or the scholar trajectory) and/or the critical employment of the discipline's tools in carrying out an original research on one or several specific case studies.

## 5) Environmental history of the modern and contemporary age

**Moderator: Chama Kaluba Jickson**

In recent years there has been a growing interest in environmental issues, in a context of increasing urgency due to the major climate and ecological changes that are affecting the planet Earth.

Among the sciences that most address the analysis of these phenomena obviously are ecology, climatology, hydrology and the whole series of Earth sciences in association with the sciences of the atmosphere. Their aim is to plan programs to limit and, where possible, to prevent the consequences of the impact of human activities on the environment.

However, research in this field has also been carried out in a diachronic direction with the aim of understanding the evolution of human impact on the surrounding environment, thus considering the consequences of activities such as agriculture, industry, but also hunting, fishing and harvesting. This is how environmental history - which Carolyn Merchant described as "together one of the oldest and newest fields in human history" - firstly developed.

In this sense, however, environmental history also considers in a broad and varied way the perception of the human being matured in different historical periods in the presence of the natural dimension. A perception that emerges in a wide range of typological sources: some written, others material and linked to everyday life.

The panel brings together proposals that address issues of environmental history moving in a dimension of balance between the use of written and material sources, referring to different eras and geographical areas.

Candidates must submit their application **by 30 September 2019**. Under penalty of exclusion, the following documents must be attached to the application:

- **Abstract:** maximum length 500 words. The proposal must contain, in the header, a reference to the panel (number and title) for which it is submitted;
- **Curriculum Vitae et Studiorum.**

The materials must be sent to the following e-mail address: [studentconference2020@unipv.it](mailto:studentconference2020@unipv.it)

Contributions will be evaluated anonymously; the selected candidates will be contacted by e-mail as soon as possible. Participants admitted to the Student Conference will have to send by **15 January 2020** the paper on which they will base their speech (minimum 20,000 - maximum 40,000 characters).

The Student Conference will be held in **Aula Foscolo at the University of Pavia from February 17<sup>th</sup> (2 pm) to February 19<sup>th</sup> (1 pm) 2020**.

Travel and accommodation costs will be borne by the participants; the organizing committee will provide, for participants who request it, accommodation solutions in colleges or facilities.

A welcome *aperitivo* and lunch will be offered on the first day by the organization; the remaining meals will be paid for by the participants.



For further information don't hesitate to contact us at:

e-mail address: [studentconference2020@unipv.it](mailto:studentconference2020@unipv.it)

or check the website of the *Student Conference*: <https://studentconference.unipv.it>

**Direction committee:**

Luca Bellia – Third year PhD student in Contemporary history

Francesco Casales – First year Phd student in Contemporary history

Enrico Ciappi – First year PhD student in History of international relations

Carlotta Marchi – Second year PhD student in History of Africa