

Session 2: Research-agenda's: questions or answers ?

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The most critical point of view possible at this time is that the current academic discipline of WWII is developing towards being an applied science at best: purely catering to societal interests and dominated by actors from outside the academic discipline. A harsh assessment would be that the field has no longer sufficient legitimacy as such, and thus may be a victim of its own success? It may now have reached the point that it is unable to innovate its own particular set of questions, approaches and separate longer term goals.

This sessions tackles the questions WWII historians ask: which questions and approaches should define the new research agenda, to which purpose, and what kind of answers do we expect them to provide?

- How exactly do we assess the interconnectedness? of present-day and future social demand (in its broadest sense) for our work on the one hand, and the advancement of academic research on the other? Is the current situation really fundamentally different than the one during the 'golden era of WWII-historians' in the 1960s-1980s?
- From the beginning, the institutionalization of the production of narratives on the Second World War has served purposes of fostering fundamental moral and political notions (democracy, freedom, human rights, nationhood). This may have changed over time, but has not exactly diminished. If we accept that a critical stance towards current fields such as memory education or commemorative policies and memory legislation is required, in what concrete ways should such a critical position reflect on the kind of questions we ask in our fundamental research ?
- Does the field need new paradigms and if so, should such a paradigmatic shift constitute a move 'inward' – free from any short-term societal demands – or on the contrary a bold move 'outward' (towards non-academic actors or transnational history). In this context, the recent Cambridge History Manifesto might be an interesting point of departure for debate. Herein, a return of the *longue durée* and grand narratives approach is defended, albeit in the explicit support of a more public role of the historian. May the programmatic purpose of presenting well-informed 'disruptive narratives' be the challenge that WWII history needs? Or, on the contrary, would this 'flight' into the *longue durée* (cf. Fernand Braudel) lead to total detachment from the manifold WWII-histories that develop outside of the academic field and to detached specialism?