



RSPH Seminar Applied History and Current Affairs

Supervisors: Dr Harm Kaal (Radboud University), Dr Stefan Couperus (University of Groningen) and Prof. Beatrice de Graaf (Utrecht University)

Date: 24 February 2023, 13-17.00pm

Location: Spinhuis, Oudezijds Achterburgwal 185 (Amsterdam), room 2.18

Please register before 2 February 2023

This seminar has a dual goal. First of all, it invites PhD candidates to reflect on the links between their research project, their research methodologies, and current affairs. Students are asked to rethink the relevance and the methodologies of their project from the perspective of current social and political concerns. What is the 'big question' that you are trying to respond to? Second, in interaction with people working in the sphere of policy-making, heritage, the press and think tanks candidates reflect on how they can develop methods of 'applied history', how their research can be considered 'usable history' for others outside academia, and/or how they may present their academic skills and knowledge to the world beyond academia, also with an eye towards their post-PhD-career.

In her introductory talk professor De Graaf will reflect on the various roles of historians in public debate and commissioned research projects, based on recent experiences with commissioned work herself, for example in the committee for Intercountry Adoption. Which skills and insights do historians bring to the table? Where to draw the line between (applied) historical research and policy recommendations or political interpretations? This will be followed by a plenary discussion about how candidates see their own role as historians outside of academia and in the public sphere. The discussion will be guided by prepared statements. The final part of our interactive seminar is dedicated to a discussion of applied history, again based on candidates' prepared notes.

Readings

- Graham Allison & Niall Ferguson (2016), *Applied history manifesto*: <https://www.belfercenter.org/project/applied-history-project#!manifesto>
- Harm Kaal & Jelle van Lottum (2021), 'Applied History: Past, Present, and Future', *Journal of Applied History*, 3 (1-2), 135-154. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/25895893-bja10018>
- Yannick Balk, Georg Frerks & Beatrice de Graaf (2022), 'Investigating Historical Abuses, *Journal of Applied History*' (published online ahead of print 2022). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/25895893-bja10020>

in Dutch:

- See also this forum, with a range of fascinating contributions to the Applied History manifesto that was launched in the NRC Handelsblad, <https://www.historici.nl/manifest-pas-toe-doe-mee-applied-history-in-theorie-en-praktijk/>

For further reading

- Violet Soen & Bram De Ridder (2021), 'Applied History in the Netherlands and Flanders: Synergising Practices in Education, Research, and Society', *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, 136(4), 27–57. <https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.7117>
- Robert Crowcroft (2018), 'The Case for Applied History. Can the study of the past really help us to understand the present?', *History Today* 68:9 <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/feature/case-applied-history>
- J. Guldi & D. Armitage (2014), 'Introduction'. In: Guldi & Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 1-13, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/history-manifesto/introduction/2B0F7EA5D852C49CB8B9838123B67B12>

Preparation

In order to prepare for the seminar, we ask you to:

1. The current climate of polarized public debate prompts a reflection on how you, as a historian, want to position yourself in this, being informed by academic (historical) knowledge and skills. A historian's presence in the public sphere might be subsumed under a range of "registers" or "personae". One can take an activist, political and critical stance based on one's expertise, stick to a more reflective scholarly persona stressing one's role as an academic historian, become actively involved in commissioned research and related policy discussions or reach out to the broader public by popularizing historical research. Which of these (or other) registers or personae would you prefer and why? In all of these cases academic historians find themselves in a context in which they have to negotiate and/or cross the boundaries between "academia" and "the world beyond". Which risks are involved in taking a more public role (by engaging with public debate in (digital) media, be it by writing op-ed, by joining a policy council or publishing a popular article, among others) and how do you see yourself dealing with those risks?
Write a short statement (no more than 1 A4) in preparation for the discussions during the seminar in which you reflect on these questions. For inspiration, one could browse through the Twitter timeline or op-eds of historians like Mary Beard, Niall Ferguson, Leo Lucassen, Beatrice de Graaf, Karwan Fatah-Black, Geerten Waling, Olivette Otele, Anton Jäger, Henry Rousso, Simon Schama, Timothy Snyder, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Barbara Engelking, Samuel Moyn and many more.
2. In Belgium and the Netherlands applied history (finally) seems to be finding its momentum. Leuven-based historians recently initiated [Corvus Historical Consultancy](#) and in the Netherlands historians across Dutch universities supported an 'applied history manifesto' (in [Dutch](#)) published in NRC-Handelsblad in May 2020. Recently, Utrecht University launched the [Klimaat Helpdesk](#) for which historians have provided instrumental input. In 2019, Dutch

historians launched an academic journal dedicated to applied history published by [Brill](#). Historians in the Low Countries are drawing inspiration from examples in the USA and Britain, among others. In the USA the [Belfer Center](#) at Harvard University is leading the way (Allison & Ferguson, 2016), in Britain back in 2002 Cambridge historians founded the [historyandpolicy.org](#) platform. Moreover, academic historians have become accustomed to writing 'knowledge utilisation paragraphs' as part of their applications for NWO and FWO funding. This seminar helps you to position yourself in this context and make the case for the added value of the skills, knowledge and insights you, as a historian and expert, bring to the table.

Based on the reading for this seminar, we ask you to write a short paper (800-1000 words) in which you discuss the following questions.

- a. how could I bring the results of my historical research to bear on contemporary problems and challenges?
- b. who would my target audience/public be and how could I reach them?
- c. which skills, knowledge and insights do I as a historian bring in?
- d. and how do I convince others of the value of these skills, knowledge insights?
- e. in what terms can I best articulate the societal impact of my findings (e.g. knowledge application, contribute (contextual) understanding, provide a new perspective)?

Please send both assignments to bureau@onderzoekschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl by 13 February.

Registration

Participants need to register at bureau@onderzoekschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl before 2 February 2023. If registration exceeds the group limit, third-year PhD candidates have priority.

Requirements and credits

1 EC: Preparing assignments and presentations for the seminar; active participation in the discussion (see the PhD curriculum for more information on credits).