Since 2010 »EGO | European History Online« is accessible online <http://www.ieg-ego.eu>. This open access platform examines 500 years of modern European history by transcending national, disciplinary and methodological boundaries. EGO is a history of Europe covering the central aspects of human society and human activity which focuses on communication and transfer. It links academic articles to illustrations, written sources, statistics, animated and interactive maps as well as audio and film documents. Nearly 200 articles have been published so far. Towards the end of the build-up phase stretching over several years, an international symposium set out to discuss and document the achievements of EGO for the historical sciences. The concept and realisation of EGO were to be critically appreciated and options for refinement to be discussed.

The symposium organized by the Leibniz-Institute of European History (IEG) at Mainz (as the EGO publisher) was guided by the question how the multi-perspective approach of European History Online has been implemented in practice. It covered three dimensions of perspectivity: (1) The disciplinary backgrounds of the specialist editors and authors, (2) the degree to which they are embedded in research traditions which are specific to a particular country or language, and (3) the possibilities and challenges which the medium of the internet presents for an “interconnected”, multimedia history of Europe.

The introductory notes (by members of the EGO editorial board), and the comments (by external scholars with no institutional connection to the IEG) have been documented on the EGO website <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/ego/news-and-events/symposium-2013>, as well as the extended discussions that have, for lack of space, been omitted from this conference report.

Section 1: (Multi-/Inter-/Trans-) Disciplinarity

The first section asked what specific perspectives are introduced to EGO by the individual historical disciplines, in what ways the participating disciplines profit from the concept of the transferts culturels on which EGO is based, and how these disciplines work together scientifically.

In his introductory note HELMUTH TRISCHLER (Munich) defined EGO as more of a multi-disciplinary than an interdisciplinary project, and one that mobilizes the specific perspectives of the disciplines that are relevant to historical research on Europe. He took the disciplinary backgrounds of the specialist editors, who cover the broad spectrum of disciplines which study history, as one indicator and notes that historical studies with its various subdisciplines is – as is to be expected – predominant. He viewed the fact that the perspectives and results of the disciplines represented in EGO are aggregated rather than integrated as understandable in view of the scale of the project. The limits of EGO become particularly apparent – Trischler noted – when one applies the criteria of the broader concept of transdisciplinarity to EGO – transdisciplinarity as the principle of integrative research that connects academia with society, and academic knowledge with practical everyday knowledge. Trischler conceded here that it would require a dispro-
portioned investment of resources to create the interactive dialogic spaces required to facilitate such a two-way osmosis.

For IMMACOLATA AMODEO (Lovenodi Menaggio), European History Online stands for the elevation of comparative and transfer-history approaches, which replace national historical perspectives in EGO. In contrast to Trischler, she identified an extension beyond the disciplinary boundaries of historical studies, which dominate EGO, particularly into economics and political science approaches. Overall – Amodeo concluded – the various historical disciplines that participate in EGO are subsumed into a general cultural history. She argued that “transdisciplinarity” can be understood as an approach which is “beyond the disciplines”, and which requires the study of “Europe” to be treated as a task that cuts across the academic disciplines. She also pointed out that particular topics in EGO – such as European migration – require research which crosses disciplinary boundaries. In addition, encyclopaedic works were more suitable for covering the entire spectrum of topics and disciplines.

Section 2: (Multi-/Inter-/Trans-) Nationality

European History Online aims to decentralize the viewpoint on European history through cooperation between authors and specialist editors from diverse academic and national backgrounds. In what ways does the editors’ national background influence the selection of topics and authors? What are the prospects and limits of the programmatic bilingual range of EGO? How do (non-) English native speakers receive the translation of German-language articles? Are there any conceivable alternatives to the concept of “translation”? These questions sketched out the topic boundaries of the second section.

As an introduction, LÁSZLÓ KONTLER (Budapest) gave a statistical overview of the countries and regions of origin of the Editorial Board, as well as of the geographical distribution of the authors (their institutional affiliations). The EGO specialist editors recruited authors from 16 countries (on three continents). The specialist editors themselves are working in eight different European countries. Overall, Kontler identified a predominance of German-speaking academics, who are responsible for three quarters of all of the articles published thus far. Furthermore, the specialist editors recruited over 60 per cent of the authors from their own country (of residence), and thus from their own national academic culture. Kontler immediately qualified this quantitative evidence of a limited internationality by stating that one cannot object on principle to editors contacting colleagues in their own country or even at their own university, if these colleagues are proven experts on the topic involved. Ultimately, Kontler concluded, the substance of the articles and the interlinking of the content of the articles are decisive. For future generations of students who wish to think outside of the borders of their own country and language, the seminal EGO articles on the theories and methods of a transcultural history of Europe will be – in Kontler’s view – particularly valuable, regardless of the degree of formal institutional internationality or transnationality involved in their production. During the discussion, it became clear that most of the EGO authors have worked in a number of countries, speak multiple languages, and therefore do not approach their topic with a particularly national perspective.

Neither did MARCO JORIO (Bern) in his commentary view the nationality or the native language of the authors as being itself an obstacle to a pan-European perspective on the respective subject matter. In practice, the “national lens” does of course often affect the depiction of events, Jorio conceded. His commentary focused on the challenge of “interculturality” which a multilingual academic publication presents. Here Jorio took up a point made by Kontler, who saw the “programmatic bilingualism” of EGO articles as being primarily pragmatic – research which has the ambition of being received globally must be globally accessible, and this – Kontler pointed out – is only possible in English. However, Kontler found that the decision to also publish most of the EGO articles in German has a programmatic signal effect, as the maintenance of non-English-speaking academic discourses and cultures is indispensable for the maintenance of global communication. Jorio explored the question of interculturality more deeply with examples from his many years of experience as the chief editor of the trilingual (and partially quadrilingual) Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz. He described how the different cultural, economic, political and legal structures of the various linguistic regions of Switzerland present at times insurmountable obstacles to describing a subject matter adequately in three or four languages. Jorio listed a number of solutions. These “language specific” differences can be (1) addressed in an article, (2) they can be presented in multiple articles for the purpose of comparison, or (3) the various perspectives can be integrated into a single article (through co-authorship). Jorio argued that, when choosing authors, preference should be given to experts who can research “across linguistic boundaries”; and the articles should be evaluated by ex-
erts on the different linguistic regions. Jorio also stated that the translations often give rise to improvements to the original entries – the entries of the HLS are translated in nine different directions. It would be unrealistic, Jorio conceded, to demand that European History Online with its pan-European scope be similarly comprehensive. However, subsequent editions of EGO articles could, Jorio suggested, be evaluated by specialists from particular linguistic regions and their commentaries appended to the articles.

Section 3: (Multi-/Inter-/Trans-) Mediality

EGO has set itself the aim of “fully utilizing” the multimedia potential of the internet by linking text articles with images, source texts, statistics, maps, as well as audio and video clips. But how do the academic texts actually work with the visual and audio elements? Where do the multimedia elements prove to be mainly illustrative in nature, and where do they further develop the argument in the text? Do the authors write their articles with one eye on the hypertext and multimedia options? Does EGO give rise to different texts from those in printed survey works, or is it only possible to communicate academic knowledge – regardless of the aims regarding hypertext – in the form of linear texts? These were the issues the third section of the symposium dealt with.

In his introductory note, JÜRGEN WILKE (Mainz) differentiated between two dimensions of mediality in European History Online – a mediality with regard to the content, which understands the media as a factor in historical processes, and an instrumental mediality which focuses on the multimedia capabilities of the internet, by means of which these historical processes are to be made accessible. Wilke also distinguished between a narrower and a broader concept of media; most of the articles in European History Online are based on the broader concept. Wilke stated that “mediality”, i.e. the question of the channels through which certain content (ideas, technologies, practices) are transferred and thus changed, is more relevant to some EGO articles than to others. Consequently, some EGO articles discuss media intensively while media are only peripherally relevant to other EGO articles. Wilke argued that EGO articles are essentially discursive academic treatises in a text format that is prestructured in terms of its content. The multimedia elements complement the texts without dominating them, in Wilke’s view. The multimedia elements also vary from article to article in terms of their quantity and variety, Wilke noted. Usually taken from “traditional” historical sources, they primarily perform – according to Wilke’s impression of what he concedes is a continuously developing project – an illustrative function. There are however articles – Wilke noted – in which the multimedia elements take up the progression of thought of the text and develop it further. The visualization strategies are – according to Wilke – primarily dependent on the disciplinary background of the authors. How these strategies affect the readers’ perceptions of the articles remains an open question.

ALEXANDER BADENOCH (Utrecht) developed Wilke’s observations on multimediality further. He pointed out that the core unit of EGO comes from “print culture” – the academic essay with a linear, text-based argumentation, with quotations and endnotes, as well as an external process of evaluation. Due in particular to its origin in “print culture”, a website like EGO is in a position – according to Badenoch – to fully utilize the bewildering array of digitally prepared and presented academic resources in an interpretative framework by (re) constructing contexts of meaning and creating new ones. Badenoch evaluated the multimedia implementation in EGO by means of a typology of the functions of digital historical objects, which can appear as artefacts of social processes and relationships, as representations, as the objects in historical collections and, in particular, as sources in historical narratives. Badenoch stated that they could not perform the function of sources if they are mainly used illustratively “outside the text”. For the future, he called for the relationships between the text, the image and the image caption to be strengthened, for the objects to be introduced more clearly as representations with different strategies of reception, for greater cognisance of the contexts in which the objects emerged and were collected, and for the multimedia elements to be linked to one another. To this end, the authors could – Badenoch suggested – be given greater involvement in the process of the selection of multimedia content, ideally in a collaborative process between authors from different disciplines, and – subsequent to initial publication – in a dialogue with the users.

From the perspective of the organizers, the commentaries and discussions of the symposium have yielded a range of valuable suggestions, which will be relevant to the operation of European History Online during the third-party-funded project phase and beyond. Given the financial constraints of the regular operations phase, during which the maintenance and updating of the existing content will be the main priority, the scope for implementing some of the suggestions is limited. Some ideas
are not possible given the conceptual design of EGO, and thus remain suggestions for future projects. Additionally, all participants were aware from the start that this symposium – due to the nature of the project itself – can only be a snapshot evaluation. As EGO is designed as a "living document", the editors at the IEG stated they were confident to take on board – and implement, as far as possible – further suggestions over time.

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Helmuth Trischler (Deutsches Museum, Munich / EGO-editor for the History of Science and Technology): Introductory note
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Section 3: (Multi-Inter-Trans-) Mediality
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Alexander Badenoch (University of Utrecht): Comment

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