

Romain Faure – Examples from International Textbook Revision

Just like the other participants, I would really like to thank the organizers of this conference for inviting me to join this discussion. I am particularly glad to have the occasion to see my colleagues from Washington again even though we haven't been separated for too long.

I will contribute to our discussion on societal projects and societal leadership in reconciliation by drawing on one particular field of international reconciliation: textbook revision. Here, I will mainly focus on the case of Western Europe, between 1945 and let's say, the middle of the 1960s. What I intend to do here is to identify some characteristics of textbook revision during that period that might hopefully help us to better understand some mechanisms of societal initiatives in Europe. This question is interesting not only from a historical, but also from a contemporary perspective since, as we have already noticed, European experiences have been regarded as models for other parts of the world for about 30 years. For that reason, I will also finish my talk by making a few comments on today's Asian textbook revision.

First let me start with a very short definition of international textbook revision since some of you might not be familiar with this idea. Textbook revision consist of cooperation between two or more countries that aims to change the content of history textbooks used in primary and secondary education. Such cooperation has taken varied forms since its beginning in the interwar era, with both bilateral commissions and multilateral conferences issuing joint recommendations for textbook authors and editors. Especially since the 2000s, binational and

multilateral projects have evolved that seek to go beyond such recommendations and publish their own teaching materials, be it as online resources or as joint textbooks.

Revision projects have sometimes been supported and financed by governments, other times they have been funded entirely privately, and in most cases they have been based on joint ventures between governmental and non-governmental organizations. Revision projects can be classified in the category of societal reconciliatory initiatives on at least two accounts. First, they always involved representatives of the civil society, most commonly historians and teachers. Secondly, they really much embodied the idea that reconciliation cannot only be achieved by bilateral state diplomacy but that it has to reach a broad part of society – in this case, entire generations of students.

In a sense, the years between 1945 and 1965, which are the years I focus on, form a kind of golden age of textbook revision in Western Europe. In those twenty years, forty different revision projects were launched that involved west European actors. The FRG was the most active country. It took part in bilateral commissions with more than 15 other nations, including 10 in Western Europe: the UK, France, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Sweden. But it is worth noting that there were also bilateral textbook commissions beyond Germany, for example between Belgium and the Netherlands, or between France and Italy. This period was also marked by important multilateral forums that were arranged by UNESCO or the Council of Europe. These twenty years are often remembered as a kind of golden age, particularly because they witnessed a crucial breakthrough in the field of textbook revision, a breakthrough that

inspired so many projects afterwards. This event was the adoption by the Franco-German textbook commission of recommendations on history textbooks. This adoption occurred in 1951, that is to say only 6 years after the end of the war and 12 years before the ratification of the Elysée-Treaty in 1963, a very important Treaty in the history of the Franco-German reconciliation. These Franco-German Recommendations were followed by numerous other ones until in different constellations, for example between the UK and Germany, France and Italy and so forth.

The fact that so many European textbook commissions were founded and yielded results only a few years after the end of the war is somewhat puzzling. It's even more puzzling since, for example, the relations between German historians and their European counterparts in the context of the *International Committee of Historical Sciences* were still strained at that time.

If we want to explain this, we need to take several factors into consideration. Today we concentrate on the leaders or the actors of reconciliation so let me try to see what the actors had to do with this successes.

In my dissertation, I asked the following question: Why were the actors involved in textbook revision willing to take up cooperation with their former enemies, particularly with Germany, and why did they even carry on this cooperation for a long period of time?

The first factor has something to do with the trajectories and the positions of these actors. In my work, I examined the biography of sex leading actors of textbook revision in the 1950s and 1960s. Two of them

were Belgians, the other were German, French, Norwegian and British. I found out very surprising similarities. These similarities were not, as I first had expected, in terms of generation. The two older ones were born at the end of the 19th century and had fought World War I. But the youngest ones were born 20 to 25 years later and hadn't experience the trench warfare. Neither were the similarities political or religious. Some of them were member of social democratic parties, other ones were rather right-wing conservative. A very important Belgian revision leader defined himself as an atheist whereas his French colleague was very much engaged in the Catholic Church.

What was striking to me was that these six central actors of textbook revision had very similar professional trajectories and equivalent professional positions in their respective countries. They were historians but they didn't belong to the central intellectual figures of the time. I can name them and I am sure that only a few people here will know them. They were called Edouard Bruley, André Puttemans, Émile Lousse, Haakon Vigander and Edward Dance. The last one might be an exception since a German research institute carries his name: Georg Eckert. Rather than being well known intellectuals, these people whose name we have long forgotten, held in the 1950s and 1960s key positions in the historians' associations of their respective countries. And due to their positions in several other associations and committees, they were also mediators between different professional fields, in particular between university and school, between politics and education, but also between the national and the international arena.

I argue that these similarities in professional position are an important reason explaining why they very soon developed close relations. They

got along very well because they looked at problems in very similar ways. They had a thorough intellectual background but they were also very pragmatic. They had good networks in the historian community of their countries and were able to win over both “progressive” and “conservative” historians to their revision projects.

This was my first point: Cooperation in the field of textbook revision during the 1950s and 1960s was cemented by similar professional identities among leading actors.

A second point that I want to stress here is that sustained cooperation was allowed by the fact that the leading actors interacted very regularly. As a consequence, mutual trust emerged between people who had fought each others a few years before. Let me take an example. Georg Eckert and Édouard Bruley didn't only meet during the sessions of the Franco-German textbook commission, which they were both a member of. They also collaborated in revision projects in the context of UNESCO, of the Council of Europe, of the so called Speyer historians meetings, of the International Association for History Teaching and so forth. That is to say that they were able to develop common points of view but also to struggle from time to time since they know they had been cooperating successfully before. Again: Regular interaction in different context enhanced mutual trust between former enemies.

I would even go beyond this argument and state that the leading actors in the field of European textbook revision formed a kind of transnational community. Admittedly, this community was never properly institutionalized and it had moving boundaries. But a very important thing is that it wasn't linked to only one institution. It wasn't something like the

Consultant Board of UNESCO on textbook revision. On the contrary, this community worked simultaneously for a wide range of institutions, be they bilateral commissions, NGOs or international organizations. As a result, it developed its own agenda that sometimes differed from the objectives set by the political sponsors of textbook dialogue.

At this point, I would like to ask to what extent this historical approach to West European textbook revision can shed some light on current textbook activities going on in Asia. It's of course delicate to draw a comparison between both situations. The political, cultural and societal conditions of textbook revision in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s and in Northeast Asia today don't have much in common. Yet, reading about textbook revision in Asia, I can't help but being struck by the fact that the development of textbook dialogue between Japan and China as well as between Japan and South Korea seems to be dictated almost completely by the political agenda. If one takes a closer look at the chronology of Asian textbook dialogue, it is perfectly clear that this chronology strictly follows the sequences of textbook controversies stirred up by politicians and the media. There's been a huge textbook controversy starting in Japan at the beginning of the 1980s and it has been followed by a first wave of textbook dialogue that tried to appease it. About 15 years later, we observe the exactly same pattern. A controversy flares up between Japan and its neighbours. It sparks international dialogues, which attempt to alleviate the tensions. And in both cases, after a few years, textbook dialogues are abandoned. I might be wrong here but I hardly see any transnational community of textbook revision actors trying to give shape to historical dialogue beyond highly politicized controversies. And this even in the case of Japan and South Korea, two societies characterised by strong civil societies and strong societal ties. But this

pessimistic conclusion might be wrong and I would be very happy if someone could challenge it.

Thank you very much!