Programme Specification:

Cultural Dynamics

1. Overview of HERA and its objectives – will be prepared by NWO

2. Development of HERA Joint Research Programmes – will be prepared by NWO

3. Rationale for the programme

— General Objectives

The programme *Cultural Dynamics* aims to look at culture as a process rather than as a product, as a praxis rather than a pragma. These cultural processes and practices are to be addressed as *complex dynamic systems*, the focus being specifically on the way in which cultural exchanges and dynamics cross between social strata, between countries, and between media. Culture is to be studied, not as the output of a given society, community, or generation, but as a form of traffic between societies, communities and generations.

— Academic status quaestionis

The last quarter-century has seen important changes in the study of culture and identity. Culture is now no longer seen as a *condition* of social life, but as a *part* of it. Scholars have increasingly stressed the fact that culture ('high' as well as 'low') is subject to continuous socially-determined shifts and changes. The artistic or literary canon is now studied as a multiplicity of different canons, each of them valid for different countries, different sub-cultures or social groups, all of them overlapping and interlocking, with *exchanges* between them. Cultural canonicity has come to be studied, not just as the power of a given text (or painting, or musical composition) to maintain its prestige over time, but rather as its capacity to translate itself to new audiences, new media, new

meanings. In the process, the distinction between 'high' culture and popular culture has largely vanished, also as a result of the rise of new media with a great potential for social dissemination and reproduction. Cultural history flows across the rapids of media revolutions: the original Gutenberg revolution; the emergence of cheap bulk printing in the nineteenth century; the rise of photography, of sound recording, of film and video recording; the availability of digital storage and instantaneous mass accessibility. As a result, the study of culture now takes account, not only of the conditions of cultural production, but also of cultural dissemination and appropriation. Culture obtains its meaning, indeed its various meanings, in the *function* it has for its audiences and participants.

Culture-oriented studies over the past twenty years have accordingly undertaken a huge process of inventorizing the identitarian function of culture, and (certainly among European scholars) specifically its national-identitarian function. All branches of the human and cultural sciences, from archaeology and folklore to linguistics and literary study, from the various historical sciences to art history and music history, have been engaged on an enormous reassessment of the way in which various aspects of the cultural field have been implicated in the articulation, construction and 'invention' of collective (primarily national) identities. This functionalist revolution, linked to the trend towards 'deconstruction' (i.e. the demonstration that identities and meanings are in many instances *constructs* disguised as *givens*) has by now run its course. The task for researchers is now to collate insights from various parts of Europe, and from various disciplines, and to move from specialist analysis towards interdisciplinary and transnational synthesis.

Some signs indicate that the first examples and outlines of such syntheses are being developed even as this proposal is being put forward.
– The formula of the Lieux de mémoire or 'sites of memory' has found broad repercussion in various European countries. The commemorative function of culture, e.g. in historical painting, has been the topic of numerous exhibitions in leading European museums. The interaction between cultural memory and tourism, and what is now known as "the heritage industry" has been put on the scholarly agenda.
– The study of nationalism and national thought has shown an increasing trend towards international comparison. Whereas national movements were traditionally studied piecemeal, on a country-by country basis, a noticeable trend is emerging to see nationalism as an exchange of ideas and inspirations, and to study the way national movements in one country were influenced by examples from abroad.

– Generally, transnationally comparative studies (history of literature, of linguistics, of the European libraries and universities etc. etc.) are beginning to be conducted on a new basis. No longer juxtaposing a modular array of individual countries, studies now chart exchanges and patterns that are on the whole regardless of borders as they exist nowadays, and that occur regionally in and between metropolitan centres, their catchment areas, and the traffic and dissemination corridors linking them.

– Linking the two above-mentioned fields of study is the question of national neighbourhood. The study of national identities, representations and stereotypes, and of the rhetoric of national character thematizes the situatedness of nations amidst their neighbours as a formative experience. Studying the constant interaction between the nation's self-image and its view of others, i.e. the way in which national identity takes shape in contradistinction to an Outside, offers a promising working ground, particularly in Europe. Concepts like cultural transfer or histoires croisées are gained in popularity. Patterns of cultural exchange are now being analysed on the basis of system theory, network theory and "innovation/diffusion" models.

— European context and added value

Europe's modernity project is now at a new juncture. The rise of the nation-state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to a conceptualization of culture in predominantly national terms; there is still a strong tendency to see culture primarily as a modular array of national cultures and to study historical and cultural developments on a national basis. This paradigm is now being overtaken, not only by academic developments (as outlined above) but also cultural patterns themselves. Globalization and global mobility are creating multicultural and multi-ethnic societies everywhere; religious loyalties are cutting across, and competing with, national loyalties; recent communication patterns (mass media, internet) are triggering the development of a 'network society' and causing increasing individualization. Europe is moving towards a 'liquid modernity' (Zygmunt Bauman, 2000) or 'second modernity' (Ulrich Beck, 1992).

The cultural cohesion of the 'nation-state' is, in these circumstances, no longer a given. The state is still the main sponsor of cultural traditions and heritage: by means of education, by providing an infrastructure (academic research, museal and archival conservation and display), and by virtue of its guardianship of public space with its heirlooms, buildings, city-scapes and landscapes. But the state is nowadays buffeted by a tumultuous and contentious debate on what 'culture' means, to whom it belongs, and whom it includes or excludes. To properly study the dynamics of culture in this context, its mobility across national boundaries will have to be foregrounded and thematized.

4. Research Topics

a. Collective identities before and after the nation-state: Types and rhetoric.
This topic covers a long historical period, from the feudal-dynastic beginnings of state centralization up to and including contemporary debates around the evaporation of national sovereignty and the rise of post-national identities. European state formation begins with the centralization policies and consolidation strategies of medieval kings coping with the cultural differentiation and fragmentation of their realms. Such policies were legitimized and rationalized by common origin myths of origin, tightly linked with dynastic legends. From these tentative beginnings we can trace later and even contemporary entities known as England, France, Norway, Poland, Hungary or Rus'. The medieval, dynastic roots of nation-formation involved myths and self-images and a differentiating discourse of collective characters and identities ascribed to these emerging states and nations. That discourse stratified in the early-modern period and still forms the basis of all current stereotypes concerning a nation's character, soul or psychological identity.

Although processes of othering and exoticism are to some extent a long-term anthropological constant, they are also shaped by changing historical contingencies by and discursive and rhetorical convention. They can be encountered at the macro-level (in the historically ingrained, stereotypical distinctions between civility and barbarism, Christian Europe and its infidel/pagan/heathen counterparts), as well as at the national and regional level. Similar processes also take place between genders, religious denominations, social classes etc. These processes have traditionally been studied as the discursive repercussion of underlying social realities; they can and should also be contextualized as part of a traffic of cultural dynamics, migrating from context to context, from genre to genre, shifting in shape, function and valorization, leaving contested reception trajectories in their wake (e.g. Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*), and implicated in literary and representational trends and fashions.

b. Culture as self-reflection: The dynamics and institutions of remembrance and canonicity.
Societies remember their past, not just in the form of 'official' academic history-writing, but through a whole variety of practices. While collective memory may feed into formalized historical narratives, it is also kept alive in more or less informal commemorative practices, landmarks, ritual re-enactments, the historical accuracy of which is often at odds with the insights of academic historians. This leads to remarkable

social debates on subaltern histories, recalcitrant versions of the past, and a popular historical consciousness that is often heedlessly or deliberately counterfactual. At the same time, the historical commemoration of the past is manifesting itself in public space by way of monuments and the monumentalization of landmarks, this in turn generating either 'secular pilgrimages' or an entire tourism industry. Analysis has demonstrated that this process is often a reductive one: landmarks tend to attract and conflate different commemorative functions, and the complex and contradictory nature of the past is collapsed into a limited number of easily understandable symbols and material fragments. Thus, the popularization of the past leads to its trivialization. Educational objectives are increasingly overshadowed by commercialization.

As cultural practices are beginning to slip from the grasp of the nation-state, and are themselves affected by patterns of globalization and localization, these processes alert us to the fact that in fact culture never was 'national' by default, but became nationalized as it was contextualized in the frame of the emerging nation-state, i.e. from the late eighteenth century onwards. The emergence and subsequent erosion of national cultures in the last two centuries now begins to present itself as one of the more exciting challenges for large-scale interdisciplinary history. The process of cultural canonization or the 'cultivation of culture' involved the developing infrastructure of the modern state, with the centralization of libraries and archives, the reorganization of universities and academies, the professionalization of the humanities and philologies, and the rising sociability of an educated middle class; it involved the ideological emergence of romantic nationalism and national thought, with its interest in cultural identity rooted in language, folklore, and ancient and medieval history. The process was all-encompassing (affecting all aspects of public life and all cultural fields, from architecture and music to language politics and education, from literature and painting to commemorations and festivals). It was also hugely successful in two respects: it aided the process of state formation in Europe (consolidated by the end of the First World War); and it became so ingrained in the public perception that throughout most of the twentieth century, culture was widely perceived to consist naturally, spontaneously, of separate national canons, and the national cultivation process that had led to this canonization model had been lost sight of.

The proper understanding of this process of national culture canonization (or cultivation of culture) presents a vast and highly promising topic with an obvious civic dimension, in that it is directly linked to the way people have been taught to view their traditions and cultural identity.

c. Cultural practices between 'high' and 'low', local and global, performance and ownership.

There has been a scholarly interest in popular culture from the days of Herder and Romanticism onwards; oral epic and folktales were collected, influencing literary production, and folk music has exercised a steady influence on 'classical' music from Weber, Chopin and Glinka to Bartók and Theodorakis. This exchange between 'high' and 'low' culture at first took the shape of a cosmopolitan 'high' culture taking inspiration from the demotic bedrock of the nation. This canonization of popular culture in national terms involved fixing its fluid, shifting practices into a static unchanging canon; as a result, what we know today as 'traditional' folk culture is often a projection of its state as it was recorded in the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, the rise of mass media and mass dissemination has inverted the terms of the high-low relationship. Popular culture is now less traditional and more cosmopolitan, from soap operas to rap music, challenging the national organization of 'high' culture. At the same time, local traditions persist, interacting with the global rather than with the national level. The public valorization and 'canonicity' of culture has likewise undergone great changes and has resulted in a blurring of the 'high'/'low' distinction, with commercialism adding a new factor. Problems of canon formation in modern culture must therefore address the blurring divisions between separate national canons, between high and low culture, and between genres (given the increasing tendency towards intermediality with the rise of new genres and media: film, television, the graphic novel, historical re-enactment societies, online gaming etc.). In this of all areas, commercialism and commodification pose an unprecedented challenge. In the smallest villages, the TV set's remote control gives access to a global culture.

The relationship between culture and participants is often felt to be one of 'ownership' – a two-way ownership where it is possible to say "this belongs to me" as well as "I belong to this". Who owns culture? For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the moral rights of cultural producers (artists, writers) were in the ascendant, leading, not only to the cult of the individual artist as creative genius, but also to copyright conventions and the notion of intellectual property. Nowadays, the easy reproducibility of information and culture is putting this idea under pressure. Culture can be 'sampled' and shared by all its users, through photocopying, downloading, scanning and otherwise. However, while culture is more accessible than ever before, it is also, to an unprecedented degree, owned by private and corporate proprietors. What does this mean for cultural practices, for the status of the artist? A long-term historical analysis of

notions of authoring and 'belonging' may offer valuable perspectives on a thorny political issue.

Such an analysis may also offer insights on the question of how culture is financed. The financing of culture, once a question of private sponsoring, has become increasingly a state affair funded by tax payers; recently, however, a trend has become noticeable for a retrenchment of the state's financing role, a return to private funding, but with commercial enterprises increasingly acting as corporate sponsors. Should culture be left wholly to the invisible hand of the market place? Are there cultural forms or fields in which a national or European dimension ought to be maintained against commercial pressures, and if so, which (e.g., cinema) are these? What insights does history have to offer us concerning the various ways in which cultural practices have been, and can be, financed?

The idea of collective ownership also affects the use we make of public spaces: as landmarks, as memory sites, and places of congregation and social intercourse. Modern urban and rural planning often faces the contradictory imperatives of innovation and conservation. Space itself is a valuable resource in modern Europe: as natural landscape, as historical landmark, as living ambience. The cultural investment of public spaces, particularly of urban spaces, is a complex process of appropriation and adaptation. Buildings can be restored, replaced or refurbished; churches or palaces can be made commercially viable by being turned into office or apartment buildings, museums or shopping malls. Alternatively, other landmarks may be considered exempt from interference because of their high symbolical prestige in the public's cultural or national consciousness. Decisions take place in a direct confrontation between logistic planning, commercial-economic initiative, and citizens' identitarian need for cultural continuity.

5. Networking and knowledge transfer

The complex dynamics of cultural processes, as outlined in the above topics, will need to be addressed internationally and by experts working in different languages and different cultural media/fields. The results of such collaboration can bring patterns, values and attitudes into focus that are of urgent relevance to European and national policy-makers in the areas of education, community relations, international affairs and public opinion. In all these areas, cultural dynamics is intimately bound up with, but rarely adequately apprehended as part of, "identity politics". Europe's cultural infrastructure at national and transnational level (museums, monument and conservation policy, cultural and

historical literacy programmes, community relations) would also benefit from the insights of such research. An important field of dissemination could lie, not just in the form of academic publications, but also in the media of education (school books and educational packages) museological planning and television production/programming.

Research Questions

The following examples of possible research questions divide roughly into three clusters, along the division of the three research topics. Since these research topics are markers of emphasis rather than strict compartmentalizations, each research question listed below should be placed in the perspective of all three research topics.

- What was the organizing power of cultural factors (language, historical memory, secular ritual, myth) in the various periods of European state formation?
- What drives the propagating power and mobility of culture? How does the self-propagating dissemination of culture relate to the geographic specificity of its social frameworks?
- What role is played by cultural self-reflection in the dynamics of culture? What role do notions (self-images, stereotypes) of national identity or specificity play in the conceptualization and international spread of culture? How do such notions relate to other forms of cultural identification (religion, gender, race, class, age-group)?
- How does cultural canonicity perpetuate itself over time, in changing circumstances and amidst changing available media?
- How does the rise of new media, from the stained-glass window, polyphonic music and the printing press to television, the internet and computer games, affect cultural themes, forms and tastes?
- Given that culture is influenced by social setting, how does it in turn influence its social ambience, e.g. in the form of public manifestations of cultural or historical remembrance, tourism, museum policy, public policy concerning museums and landmarks, city planning, school curricula etc.?
- How do different versions or interpretations of the past compete? How do they underpin opposing ideological evaluations? How does academic investigation relate to popular remembrance and myth? What demarcations can be made between factual and fictional, speculative, counterfactual and counterfeit versions

of the past, ranging from academic history-writing to The Da Vinci Code and Holocaust negationism?

- What is the civic and cultural position of popular (everyday) culture and migration culture? How does it negotiate its functions of identity-affirmation or, alternatively, exclusion? How does the adoption of popular culture in high culture negotiate the registers of traditionalism and avant-garde? What cultural self-reflection processes are operative in popular culture? How does popular culture take account of high culture (imitation, carnivalesque subversion, etc.)? What forms of hybridizations occur in the triangle high culture - autochthonous popular culture - immigrant culture?

- What was/is the status of popular culture in processes of nation-building and globalization?

- How has the notion of cultural ownership and the financial value attribution of culture shifted over time, and how do these shifts relate to the rise and fall of different media and reproduction technologies? What is the future of cultural ownership in a digital world? What is the past development and the future of the respective roles of cultural creators, sponsors, participants and consumers?

- What is the history and future of the performativity of culture? Is this performativity located in individualist creation, small-scale conviviality, large-scale sociability or commercial performance and mediatization, and how do these scale-sizes relate given the rise of the internet (blogospheres etc.)?

6. Collaboration beyond the HERA network – will be prepared by ESF

7. Programme structure and management – will be prepared by ESF

8. Instructions for outline proposals – will be prepared by ESF