



Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms (SPIN): The first year

SPIN became operative on 1 December 2008. By that time, a three-tiered approach had already been decided upon: SPIN was to study the international and intermedial spread of cultural nationalism in the long nineteenth century in three ways:

- [1] By making sources available digitally
- [2] By facilitating scholars, bringing them together, and indicating new perspectives for comparative research
- [3] By preparing a synoptic European encyclopedia.

The first year has been largely dedicated to concretizing these ideas and initiating their implementation.

[1] Source availability

A website has been set up with the help of dedicated personnel (an IT expert and 2 student-assistants), under the URL www.spinnet.eu. The site not only carries information about the activities of SPIN and its approach and theoretical underpinnings, but is also intended to become a major location for on-line resources, both textual and visual. The type of activities covered (sculpture, painting, poetry etc.) has been selected on the basis of the “cultivation of culture matrix” which is itself presented and explained on the SPIN website. Textual resources: key documents in cultural-nationalist manifestations will be digitized and put online. Special emphasis will be given to texts not easily covered by programmes such as google books because of linguistic or typographical difficulties.

As a pilot project, the proceedings of the Germanisten-meetings called by Jacob Grimm in 1846-47 are being digitized, in a project entrusted to the University Library of Amsterdam, with the help of the Duitsland-Instituut Amsterdam and Amsterdam University Press, and in close collaboration with Dr. Katinka Netzer of Bochum University. Further possible corpuses include the 1848 Slavic Congress of Prague and documents surrounding the 1817 Wartburgfest.

Also, an anthology of nationalist verse is being placed online. It is intended to run to ca. 750 poems, i.e. an average of 15 poems from each of the ca. 50 European languages. This presentation takes the form of a searchable database. It has been decided to present this database online with the

help of Wikimedia software adapted for SPIN purposes. The resulting presentation is easily searchable, can easily accommodate clickable hyperlinks and combine text and images. It also has a familiar “feel” and ease of accessibility because of its resemblance to Wikipedia. Unlike Wikipedia, however, the material presented on the SPIN website cannot be altered except by registered SPIN users. We therefore call them “Spikis” rather than “Wikis”.

A number of other “Spikis” have been set up besides the verse anthology, in order to develop a structure for online presentation of various visual corpuses. A pilot project, a database of national hero-figures portrayed on European banknotes, is now practically complete with ca. 450 images online. Databases on history-paintings and on national-commemorative monuments in public spaces have been set up structurally and are now in the process of being populated. We have obtained the help and advice of Dr Monika Flacke of the Historisches Museum at Berlin for this. In the future, this online presentation of resources and sources for the study of cultural nationalism in Europe will be further completed. Cross-links between the various Spikis and enhanced searchability across them (i.e. between banknotes, monuments and writings) will be developed. Not only will the existing databases be further populated, at a later stage additional databases may be set up to present public buildings and murals, specific corpuses such as poems surrounding the Rhine Crisis of 1840, and text excerpts from authors like Ernst Moritz Arndt - well known in a generic sense, but little known in their specific writings.

[2] Facilitation

Exploratory workshops have been planned to take place in SPIN's second year. The initial series of planned workshops covers most of the fields in the “Cultivation of Culture” model: language activism, the nationalization of literary canons, the history of folklore studies, and the preoccupation with music (in this instance, the European vogue for male choirs). In addition, a multidisciplinary workshop on cultural and national appropriations of the Rhine has been planned for Autumn 2010.

These workshops are to bring together scholars from various parts of Europe so as to stimulate transnational research into national consciousness-raising. An initial workshop was held in November with distinguished participants from Budapest, Prague, Athens and elsewhere. On that occasion, the first SPIN lecture was delivered by John Breuilly of the London School of Economics. Miroslav Hroch has been found willing to deliver the second, in November 2010.

A postdoctoral stipend has been awarded to Dr Krisztina Lajosi for exploratory work on a comparative research project on nationalizing trends in European classical music from Smetana to Sibelius. Another stipend will be awarded to Dr Sandrine Maufroy during Spring 2010 for work on the European impact on F.A. Wolff and the “Homeric Question”.

It is envisaged that these initiatives will lead to grant applications with some of Europe's national and international funding agencies. Findings will be published in a dedicated series published by Brill, “The National Cultivation of Culture”, the first three volumes of which are now in press with further volumes commissioned and in preparation.

[3] Encyclopedia

In the first half of 2009, a conceptual approach was elaborated on how to cover the spread of Romantic Nationalism in Europe without merely accumulating items and events from various

individual countries. A three-section formula has been decided upon, part one covering cultural trends (from language interest to educational debates), part two modes of sociability and institutions (museums, reading societies etc.), part three itemizing individuals who functioned as nodal figures in the international or intermedial spread of ideas, topics and trends. A contents management system was devised and set up, an Editorial Board with leading experts from the relevant culture-historical specialisms invited, and various advisory scholars approached to help regarding specific countries and cultural communities. Also, a list of c. 750 individuals for Part Three was preliminarily selected, and the first entries have been commissioned to authors. Reputable publishers have shown interest; negotiations will be concluded in the next quarter.

Much of the work in the following year will be in the nature of implementing and consolidating the initiatives set out in this first year. We hope that in the process, SPIN can come to rely on the support and collaboration of a growing number of scholars in various countries and specialisms.

Joep Leerssen, 16 December 2009.