

Ambient History: Anthropological Study of Participation in Historical Performances in Poland

The project embraces research on audiences of historical reenactments organized in various local communities in Poland. The main aim of the project is to investigate how representations of history appearing in the closest ambience of members of those communities are created, experienced and used, both by them and by other ambience participants: local authorities, cultural leaders, historical reenactors and tourists.

Historical reenactments, although extremely popular, are not the only form of manifestations of history in ambience. The sphere is reached also by contents of historical policy, collective and cultural memory, or visions of cultural heritage. They all influence each other and simultaneously are modified for particular purposes: promotion of a region, attracting tourists, strengthening local or national identity, commemoration of local history. Moreover, they all enter ambience, inspiring scientific reflection on what happens with history, when it is tangibly, directly present in people's space and avoiding contact with it is rather difficult. To answer this question, drawing inspiration from Matthew Engelke's notion of "ambient faith" (2012) I propose a new scientific approach focusing on ambience and ambient history, which re-conceptualizes hitherto understandings of private and public spheres in reference to history. Thanks to this approach not only discourses on the past become the subject of analysis, but also its embodied representations, sensually and directly experience by ambience participants.

Within the project fieldwork will be conducted with the use of ethnographic method by two people in ten localities in Poland. The main criterion of selecting these localities is close cooperation between local authorities, inhabitants and reenactors, since I intend to present not only experiencing history in ambience, but also processes of construing its visions. Interviews will be conducted among others with tourists coming to chosen localities, thus they as well influence the character of ambient history and its possible uses.

At the basis of preliminary research I have selected ten localities to conduct research there: Mława and the Battle of Mława 1939; Łabiszyn and "Łabiszyn Meetings with History", Mława and the Battle of Mława 1939; Łabiszyn and "Łabiszyn Meetings with History", Sochaczew and the Battle of Bzura River 1914; Ossów with Battle of Ossów from 1920; Gryfino and Market Garden Operation 1944; Bydgoszcz Fordon and the Battle of Arnhem 1944; Wolin and the "Festival of Slavs and Vikings", Santok and the battle of Santok from 967, Koronowo with the battle of Koronowo 1410 and Bieczyna with medieval history representations.