

## **1. The objective of the project**

The objective of this project is to sociologically analyze the memory of Auschwitz (the camp complex) in present-day Polish society. The project will deal with social memory understood in terms of the multi-disciplinary research field of memory studies. The analysis will focus on the “collected memory” of three collectivities: (a) Polish general public, (b) Polish school students, and (c) Polish visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. It will also concern “collective memory”, i.e., patterns of memory manifest in people’s beliefs and opinions, commemorative rituals and speeches, exhibitions and memorials, educational material, and media content. The project will analyze: (a) the state of the Polish memory of Auschwitz in 2020, i.e., 75 years after the liquidation and liberation of the camp; and (b) the transformation of this memory since earlier research. The state and transformation of Auschwitz memory in Polish society will be analyzed in the context of changes of social memory and the politics of memory in Poland as well as Europe and the world. In the Polish dimension, these will be the changes of the social memory of the Holocaust and World War II resulting from the decreasing role of “communicative memory” and the increasing role of “cultural memory,” and the policies of the government of the Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* or PiS) and President Andrzej Duda, in particular their *polityka historyczna* or “historical policy” and changes in education. In the European and global dimensions, the project will take into account the processes regarding Holocaust memory—its universalization, cosmopolitanization, internationalization, and Europeanization—that have been analyzed in the social sciences, and the ongoing changes of the national memories of World War II, the Holocaust, and Auschwitz outside Poland. The aim of the project will be to develop a sociological theory capturing the social mechanisms of the constitution, persistence and transformation of social memory in a changing domestic and international political setting.

## **2. The research to be carried out**

The project will comprise: (a) manifold own empirical research; (b) the secondary analyses of the existing data; (c) the comparison of the results obtained in own research with those of the earlier projects; (d) an ongoing literature review; and (e) theoretical investigations.

The own empirical research will consist of: (i) surveys of samples of the three collectivities—the general public, the students of primary schools, and visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, adult and young; (ii) focus group interviews and/or in-depth interviews with members of these collectivities as well as with teachers, guides, experts, educators, and curators; (iii) studies of commemorations and their media coverage, museum exhibitions, school curricula and textbooks, and local practices and products of commemoration involving participatory observation, visual sociology, and content analysis.

## **3. Reasons for choosing the research topic**

Auschwitz and the memory of it are highly significant for people in Poland, wider Europe and the world. There is no comprehensive study of the (present-day) Polish memory of Auschwitz in the context of Holocaust memory and World War II memory, a study that would offer not only a description but also a theoretical explanation. There is (as yet) no scholarly study of the consequences of PiS government’s and President Duda’s “historical policy” for Polish social memory, a study that would contribute to the knowledge of how nationalism and right-wing populism impact social memory. Empirical research into the Polish memory of Auschwitz as well as Holocaust memory and World War II memory conducted so far lacks mutual connection and theoretical grounding, e.g. in the theories of Holocaust memory. The theories of Holocaust memory, esp. Alexander’s on universalization and Levy and Sznajder’s on cosmopolitanization, have not been developed in or applied to the Polish context or the context of Auschwitz. This project that will continue and develop the research conducted so far will aim to fill in these cognitive gaps. It will contribute to the development of sociology and the multi-disciplinary field of memory studies.