

Evoking the Past: Anthropological Approach to City-walks Dedicated to the Memory and Heritage of Krakow Jews

The proposed project focuses on city walks with a guide performed in Krakow. Pilot studies conducted in 2017-2019 prove that this type of urban activity is becoming more and more popular. City walks are not only an interactive way of transmitting and acquiring knowledge but also play an essential role in shaping ideas about the past. In research, the focus will be primarily on the observation, description and analysis of walks that deal with the issues of history and memory related to the Jewish inhabitants of Krakow and history of World War II. The project will be presenting a personal perspective of the people taking part in the described activities, especially the inhabitants of Krakow. The research will direct how knowledge of World War II is shaped, passed on and acquired today. An essential aim of the project is to create a catalogue of walks and to map out space in terms of what places and related stories appear in the narratives.

City walks are an increasingly popular phenomenon among researchers, who undertake analyses of both their different types (city walks, heritage walks) and the walking activity itself. The common denominator of the research is the interest in walking as a human activity in space. In Poland, this topic has not yet been recognised as reliable anthropological research, which would allow us to deepen the analysis and provide a general resemblance of the phenomenon, situating it in the local context.

The research will be combining queries with the use of tools used in anthropological research, i.e. participatory observation carried out during walks and in-depth ethnographic interviews conducted among both the organisers and participants. The library, archival and Internet research will allow collecting an underlying source database, which will be a reference point for the analysed narratives of the guides. The research is divided into several phases. During the first stage, observations will be made in several museums in Krakow. The aim of this stage is to determine the main ways of narrating about how Jews lived during World War II in Krakow. Next, interviews with participants and organisers of the walks will be conducted, which will take place during the walks. The main research question will be an attempt to determine the motivation of the participants in choosing this type of activity, as well as their first impressions and feelings appearing in relation to a particular space. I will then continue the in-depth interviews in order to determine the knowledge about the past of the interviewees, the attitude towards the Jewish history of Krakow and the broader history of the city, including World War II, as well as what are the ideas and stereotypes related to the Jewish minority. The project investigates whether the walk has changed something in the knowledge and ideas of the interlocutors concerning the above issues. At the same time, I will conduct an intensive exploration of urban space related to the past of the Jewish residents of the city. Based on the walks, the descriptions of routes and places which have been selected by the guides will be described as important for the narrative they present. Photographic documentation of the walks and notes from the narration of the guides will be provided. This approach enables to elaborate on the relationship between the narration presented and the space in which it is embodied, and also reveal which of the threads of the past are considered relevant by the guides.

The emphasis on the perspective of people taking part in city walks, especially interested in Jewish culture, will contribute to in-depth studies on Polish-Jewish relations in their grassroots dimension. The material obtained as a result of the research will be a valuable source of knowledge, not only about the ideas of history but also about the stereotypes and emotions associated with Jewish history. The research objectives will also allow us to explore issues related to the still current issue of identity and ways of building it in relation to Jewish communities, which is present in various debates on contemporary national identity. Research on the attitude to the history of Krakow's Jews will help to answer the question to what extent the history of World War II and the Holocaust is now considered a shared history and integrally included into a family, local, and national history. Location of research within two broad interpretative frameworks, memory studies and critical heritage studies, will allow for highlighting the new possibilities of using the above theories concerning an individual, not an institutional, perspective. This approach to the subject will also enable the outputs of research to be placed in a broader context of the contemporary ways of experiencing the past and shaping the ideas about it.