

## **Between subordination and emancipation. Cultural history of photography of peasants in the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia (1846–1905)**

**The main objective of the project is to present the transformation of the identity of the Polish peasantry from the visual perspective, selecting photography as the main medium depicting changes.** I am primarily interested in the nineteenth-century photographs of peasant men and peasant women on the Polish lands taken by professional and amateur photographers as well as peasants themselves. The use of photographs and the practice of photography have different meanings depending on the socio-cultural context. A photograph, treated as a personal document and created by peasants themselves, constitutes a significant source of knowledge about the self-understanding and changes in the self-perception of the peasantry members. On the other hand, a photograph taken by professional photographers from outside the presented culture, frequently had an ideological dimension and, despite its scientific application, it could be also used for political interests of the intelligentsia and landed gentry. Investigating the tension between the subjectification and objectification seen in photography, what is more, **the tension between the subordination and emancipation** of Polish peasants seen from visual perspective is key to the project. Therefore, apart from broadening the knowledge on the socio-cultural aspect of photography, the analysis of the nineteenth-century photography of peasants constitutes also an act of extraction of the (micro)history of subordinates. The photographic portraits of peasants show the slow way, full of contradictions and obstacles, to the emancipation of this group. Their analysis, using the socio-cultural context, opens up to a new, visual perspective in the historical research on the social changes of the peasantry.

The key questions for the project are the following: **How were the changes in the identity of the peasantry reflected in photography? What was the role of photography in the emancipation process of the peasantry?** What were the ideological dimension of photos of peasants created in a “top-down” manner by professional photographers? How did peasant men and peasant women present themselves on photographs? How did the first peasant photographers present their own culture? How did photography contribute, on one hand, to the consolidation of the peasantry and, on the other, to the deepening of the social diversification inside the group?

The research will be grouped by three areas: **changes in the working sphere** (the area concerns tradition and change, the abolishment of serfdom and the transformation of the working culture and economic emigration), **changes in education** (the area concerns the relations between photography and the folk press, the fight with illiteracy, the promotion of reading and the improvement of the educational level among peasants), **changes in politics** (the area concerns the photography of peasants in the context of peasant rebellions, national uprisings, the politics of memory and the revolution of 1905). The abovementioned changes were crucial for the (self)emancipation processes of peasants during the analysed period. The right to own land and the effects of one’s work, right to education and political rights are social freedoms, for which social activists, but mostly members of the peasantry themselves, fought for peasants.

The conducted research will be within the scope of cultural history. Photography will be thus treated as **a social representation and the field of cultural practices**. Photography is also understood as an agential medium which supports identity formation processes. An important research perspective used in the project are **microhistory** and **subaltern studies**. The application of this methodological approaches will be particularly relevant in the study of tensions between “top-down” social elite activities and “grass-roots” Polish peasant practices.

In my project, I will use materials gathered during domestic and abroad queries in archives and museums. The main source material will be photographs. Their meanings were associated with other images, and thus the research will involve working with other **visual** sources, such as press illustrations, drawings, postcards, albums, handwritten maps of villages, theatre stage design, iconography of national and international exhibitions. Regarding the **text** materials, I will work with: peasants’ letters, memoirs, notes, press materials and literature.