

Diasporic Public History

The project aims at (1) conceptualizing diasporic public history as a field of research and practice; (2) identifying its goals, achievements, challenges and needs; (3) developing criteria for evaluating the impact of divergent practices of diasporic public history, in reference to reception and agency of their public(s) situated in various times and spaces.

The growth of the volume of international migration in recent years has led to establishing new or re-invigorating existing diasporic communities worldwide. Their members take care of their specific culture, transfer knowledge about their place of origin to the new generations, try to justify their social status in the host society by manifesting their historical roots and their contributions to the development of the host- (and sometimes also home-) society. Such grassroots public history activities are supported by or confronted with migration- and diaspora-related policies of both home and host countries. Home countries take pride in the achievements of their diaspora but also nurture ethnic pride in the diaspora – for prestige, but also for financial or political gains for the home country. From this point of view, attachment to the home country's heritage is regarded as a desirable component of ethnic identity. In host countries it may be perceived both as an asset in maintaining multicultural society and a challenge for its cohesiveness. The practices of diasporic public history thus play important – and varied – roles for diasporic communities and for the mainstream societies they interact with. Scholarly reflection aimed at deconstructing somehow hidden landscape(s) of diasporic public history may help more adequately approach, assess and manage existing practices and more effectively plan and design the prospective ones.

Originating from the studies on the Polish diaspora and in particular Polish American ethnic group, it aims at going beyond the Polish experiences, at comparing and connecting public history practices in a variety of diasporic communities in multiple local contexts, and at drawing conclusions that may be applicable in designing, arranging, promoting and allotting resources for upcoming endeavors and thus addressing both academic and societal needs. With the help of publicly shared on-line space, it will make it possible to showcase, compare, connect, comment, assess, adapt existing practices – between all interested actors, within and outside the diasporic communities. Additionally, two videogame sequences and a mobile app specifically dealing with diasporic public history will be developed as research tools. A selection of practices, both bottom-up initiatives and top-down, professional/institutional actions, representing the variety of forms of diasporic public history will be analyzed from the *by, for, with, about* diaspora perspectives in order to find regularities and trends that can be generalized for both theoretical (academic) and practical purposes.

From the perspective of public history, the research questions will relate to the areas of: (1) Production. What is being done in relation to the diaspora and the past? Who is involved? What are the roles? What are the tools? What are the topics covered? (2) Reception by and engagement of the public. How are the above-mentioned practices perceived? How do they engage (with) the public? What groups of the public? (3) Impact profiles of public history activities. What was the impact? Why did the activities succeed or fail? How did they meet or miss genuine interests and potential of their intended publics? How to rationally use the resources in the practices of diasporic public history to make them most impactful? What are the constraints to be taken into consideration in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating such practices?

The perspective of diaspora studies will be applied to the contents covered and spheres of life impacted by diasporic public history, with factors such as forming and transforming individual and collective memory of migration and settlement, cherishing the heritage of the place of origin versus acculturation/assimilation in the host society, problematizing identity, complicating notions of belonging, maintaining relations with other diasporic communities, facing generational changes and impact of large-scale historical processes on diasporas and on public history.

The resulting conceptual model of diasporic public history will include references to its goals, tools, actors, agendas (open and hidden), pragmatic and ethical issues and address its specificity versus other types/subfields/genres of public history. It will be presented in conference papers and journal articles, and in a scholarly monograph co-authored by the project participants and invited contributors.