

Public History International. Beyond school? Comparative Perspectives

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The heterogeneous field of public history is gaining importance for both the academic history sciences and history school education. This raises the question to what extent public history should be firmly integrated in nowadays school education. The term public history covers various expressions of history in the public field (*geschichtsvermittelnden Produkte*)¹, reaching from classic institutions like archives and museums to films, magazines, the internet or even social media. Since students encounter historical narratives in their everyday lives, these products influence their individual and collective perception of the past, determining also their historical consciousness obtained in history lessons. With the aim to investigate interrelations between public history and history school education and its consequences from a transnational perspective, the editors of *Public History Weekly*, Marko Demantowsky (Editor-in-chief, Basle), Serge Noiret (Chair, Steering Committee IFPH), Walter Rohrer (International Affairs, PH FHNW) and Mills Kelly (Member of the Advisory Board) organised the international conference „Public History International. Beyond school? Comparative Perspectives“, taking place on 2-3 October 2015 in Basel. The conference identified various correlation points of mutual influence and developed possible solutions and strategies to deal with them in a responsible and educationally valuable manner. The overarching impact of politics and particularly national narratives played a significant role as well.

MARCO DEMANTOWSKY (Basle) opened the conference with enhancing prevailing problematics of the vague and internationally varying character of today's public history, particularly in terms of definition, theory and methodology. Pointing out the remarkable difference between US-American and

German-speaking conceptual developments, attention was drawn to the necessity of institutionalisation through closer cooperation of history sciences and public history in the German-speaking field. Assuming that the struggle for pluralism and individualism has become the basic narrative of Western societies, the integration of public history in history school education requires accepting that public history is a complex identity discourse, going beyond the idea of being an umbrella concept only.

DAISY MARTIN (Stanford) chaired the first panel titled „Public History in the classroom.“ ROB SIEBÖRGER (Cape Town) opened with the presentation of two predominant curricula narratives in South African history education: the representations of the Great Trek and of Robben Island. He showed that main national narratives absorb other heterogeneous, minor narratives, being more complex in terms of sources as well as less linear and „catchy“ in terms of „plotline“. Fostering multiperspective narratives in school education was formulated as worthwhile goal, even if the „sake of interest“ may not be necessarily fulfilled. CONRAD ARENDES (Heidelberg) issued the contested relation between academic history sciences and public history, referring back to the problem that public history as dynamic process has not yet established a genuine „brand.“ Its integration in history school education would require enhanced cooperation in order to make students an active part of public and epistemologically well-founded research processes, becoming professional historians in practice. CHRISTOPH KÜHLBERGER (Salzburg) raised the idea to investigate objects in children rooms as indicator of their „material historical culture“ in order to understand their individual approach to the past, thus their development of historical thinking. Since public narratives do not always follow academic standards, it was argued that history sciences and history school education must strengthen students' ability to question these narratives in order to deconstruct, critically reflect and

¹ See Zündorf, Irmgard: *Zeitgeschichte und Public History*, Version: 1.0, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 11.2.2010, URL: http://docupedia.de/zg/Public_History?oldid=106468.

evaluate individual perceptions of the past. DAISY MARTIN (Stanford) emphasised that integrating public history narratives in history lessons would be an opportunity to shift and acknowledge students' ideas of the past, enhancing their ability to critically reflect and question their everyday life. This would make them „citizen historians.“

ROBERT PARKES (Newcastle, Australia) chaired the second panel titled „School as an institution of public history.“ MARIO CARRETERO (Madrid) identified national narratives as key interactions between students and public history and he showed to what extent national and patriotic rituals structure school education in Argentina. Elaborating on Argentinian students' understanding and usage of standard features of national master narratives – for instance patterns of in- and exclusion, identification or territory – Mario Carretero emphasised to what extent the concept of nation is dominating students' perception of the past and the present, especially bipolar friend-enemy categories. MARCO ZERWAS (Basle) provided a historical summary of the development of different manifestations of public history in Germany. He marked the emergence of the Federal President's History Competition in 1973 as significant part of the public history movement as well as for today's public history boom. The History Competition was a) linked to the emergence of micro and social history as academic research areas and was b) an opportunity to promote historical research in both schools and public. The historical summary was very useful to reconstruct the development of today's public history and further, it could be a fruitful starting point to investigate empirically to what extent the competition has an impact on students' historical consciousness. MICHELE BARICELLI (Hannover) spoke about schools as powerful public history agents, identifying recent partnerships between schools and museums, archives, mass media and local political authorities as new market for customised public history. This development would result in a) the increase of social and political prestige of history sciences and b) the opportunity for schools to investigate the inconvenient aspects of local and regional history, since political authorities are forced to

engage in dialogue with students. In his comment, ROBERT PARKES (Newcastle, Australia) hinted at various conflict areas, highlighting possible clashes between emotionally attaching narratives, circulating freely in the field of public history, and school narratives, rather aiming at enhancing students' critical-reflective questioning. In order to promote international perspectives, the nation-specific variety of approaches to both public history and history education must be considered. Particularly, the question to what extent school as public history institution may help to overcome national perceptions of the past appeared to be very fruitful.

ALIX GREEN (Preston) chaired the third panel titled „School in Public History.“ PETER GAUTSCHI (Lucerne) demonstrated to what extent history policy exerts influence on history education in order to fortify its societal and political position and he used the example of the Swiss People's Party. Gautschi emphasised the importance of every individual history teacher a) to recognise political interferences with and the exploitation of history education and b) to take responsibility for such political pressure on history education. In terms of history education in Austria, THOMAS HELLMUTH (Salzburg) elaborated on the periods of democratic indoctrination after 1945 and of active citizenship since the 1980s. In order to strengthen students' awareness and reflection of their present-day societal and political existence, Hellmuth emphasised the importance of enhancing students' interest in history *beyond functional thinking*. JAN HODEL (Basle) argued that archives and their relation to both school education and the public have been changing significantly, namely from closed institutions of preservation to transparent and publicly accessible spaces. This development would lead to competition between both fields, since only one target group (students) would be accessed. In her comment, Alix Green (Preston) raised the central problem of the paradox of today's history, being significant as political means to shape civic identity and, at the same time, being increasingly marginal as academic discipline. As soon as history education would be conceptualised independently from political usability, history as social science might

lose its relevance because it serves no political functionality anymore.

MILLS KELLY (Fairfax) chaired the roundtable discussion titled „The future of public history – what shall we teach perspectively?“ ALEXANDER KHODNEV (Yaroslavl) elaborated on the politics of history and memory in different periods of the Russian past and present, showing a) the close entanglement of school education, public history and politics and b) the clash between official politics of standardised memory, academic history sciences and society’s demands. Since history would have mainly served as significant instrument of legitimising political and ideological power, he identified the question what content to teach as central issue, as well as the clarification of significant status questions concerning public, academic and educational historians. CORD ARENDES (Heidelberg) pointed out the necessity to institutionalise the field of public history as academic research area, demanding to anchor the cooperation of research and teaching in school curricula. Students must be enhanced to *produce* history on an epistemologically valid basis. The ethic dimension in terms of what to teach was characterised as *the* significant challenge of the future. CHARLOTTE BRÜHL-GRAMER (Nuremberg) characterised the problem how to conceptualise and systematise public history theory as central future issues as well as she drew attention to the challenge to integrate these concepts in school textbooks and curricula. At the same time, she referred to the necessity of teaching students not only to do public history but also to *deconstruct* public history narratives. This aspect was very essential, since it is of crucial importance, following relevant theories of history didactics, to convey to students that historical narratives are always subjective and constructed. MILLS KELLY (Fairfax) rightfully emphasised the fundamental problem of prevailing dichotomy between public and academic history and he demanded to take the teaching of *digital skills* seriously. Arguing that these might be the skills of future historical research, he made clear that students should learn how to use them properly. Since public history „in the field“ – for

instance guided tours on historical sights – often develop around the mystic spirit of the place, there is almost no critical dimension of historical research. This discrepancy must be seriously considered when teaching public history at schools.

As conclusion, the future of teaching public history was issued and the necessity to systematise and conceptualise both content and theory of public history was identified as central challenge, „docking our past“ to the present and future. This includes the integration of archives and museums, academic history sciences and teacher training in order to pave the way for mutual enrichment. The aim must be to overcome the dichotomy between public and academic history and to help students to become responsible citizens, understanding that history is a dynamic process of critical reflection based on questioning and historical evidence. For this purpose, teaching public history must not become a „post-modern potpourri“ of deconstructed, pluralistic narratives, since the consideration of political dimensions is of crucial importance to a) educate politically mature adolescents and b) to prevent the risk of history sciences abolishing themselves through getting lost in post-modern pluralism. Assuming that both history education and policy serve the purpose of providing society with identity orientation, the question arose to what extent prevailing Western orientation needs have become much more complex and divers than national explanation patterns. Both academic and public history have to respond to these challenges of today’s orientation needs. At the same time, the question was raised to what extent people may strive for clearer political perspectives in their history school education in order to ensure stability. The international dimension of contributions has shown that orientation needs are strongly dependent on each countries’ political, social and cultural structures. In terms of recipient research, the idea of people resisting prevailing master narratives was very enriching because it revealed the fact that individuals can resist certain narratives, which includes a form of resistance against prevailing politics. This leaves the audience with the question to what extent the individual and emotional dimension of public

history can actually be standardised and institutionalised in history school education.

For future developments, the significance of working and collaborating transnationally was clearly identified, meaning to go beyond sole international information exchange and to design common research projects and networks. This would ideally also cover dimensions of school education, namely the teaching of history. Bringing students together in forms of exchange programmes appeared to be a fruitful approach.

Conference Overview:

Introduction

Marko Demantowsky: Our understanding of „Public History“ in international perspective

Public History in the classroom

Teaching, learning, and understanding of Public History in schools as challenge for students and teachers

Comment / Moderation: Daisy Martin (Stanford, USA)

Rob Siebörger (Cape Town, South Africa) Teaching, learning and understanding of Public History as a challenge for students and teachers

Cord Arendes (Heidelberg, Germany)

Christoph Kühberger (Salzburg, Austria)

School as an institution of public history

Influence of schools on local public history Interactions of schools with museums, memorial institutions, broadcasting institutions etc.

Comment / Moderation: Robert Parkes (Newcastle, Australia)

Mario Carretero (Madrid, Spain) Master narratives about the nation. How school history and patriotic rituals interact

Marco Zerwas (Basle, Switzerland) The German Federal President History Competition. A public history occasion

Michele Barricelli (Hannover, Germany) The Past is Ours. Schools as Powerful Public History Agents

School in Public History

History policies, political opinion making and

ideas on school and its history lesson as projections of sustainable history power

Comment / Moderation: Alix Green (Preston, GB) School in public history. Concluding remarks

Peter Gautschi (Lucerne, Switzerland) History Education in the Focus of the Swiss People's Party

Thomas Hellmuth (Salzburg, Austria) National integration and bourgeois performance thinking. „Public history“ and history teaching in the second Republic of Austria

Jan Hodel (Basle, Switzerland)

Roundtable

The future of public history – what shall we teach perspectively?

Moderation: Mills Kelly (Fairfax, USA)

Alexander Khodnev (Yaroslavl, Russian Federation) History in Russian schools. The politics of memory

Cord Arendes (Heidelberg, Germany)

Charlotte Bühl-Gramer (Nuremberg, Germany)

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