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## PUBLIC HISTORY ENTERING POLAND<sup>1</sup>

### HISTORIA W PRZESTRZENI PUBLICZNEJ W POLSCE

**ABSTRACT:** The article presents the short outline of history of public history in the USA and in Poland, referring to Barbara Franco's definition that it is history for the public, by the public, with the public, and about the public. Emphasizing the role of the public, it focuses on these four aspects, addressing issues of the relationship between the past, the public and other stakeholders, and relating them to the ways of dealing with history that respond to changing external conditions, that take into account local specificities, but at the same time are a universal experience.

**KEYWORDS:** public history, Poland in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, museum boom, historians, grassroots activities

### For the public. History as commodity. Historians-businesspeople

To describe public history, scholars tend to refer to its process of emergence rather than to strict definitions, methodologies, or other theoretical assumptions.<sup>2</sup> They usually refer to the USA of the 1970s as the cradle of this trend, although

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<sup>1</sup> The first version of this article was published in Polish as Joanna Wojdon, *Historia w przestrzeni publicznej*, [in:] *Bliska historia. O badaniach historii lokalnej i regionalnej*, ed. Przemysław Wiszewski, Warszawa 2018, pp. 187–200. Cf. *Historia w przestrzeni publicznej*, ed. Joanna Wojdon, Warszawa 2018 – the first Polish book devoted entirely to the idea of the public history, its theoretical and practical aspects, and implementation of its particular components. Since then two books were published that explore the ideas presented here in more detail: *Public in Public History*, ed. Joanna Wojdon and Dorota Wiśniewska, New York 2021 and *Public History in Poland*, ed. Joanna Wojdon, New York 2021.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. James B. Gardner, Paula Hamilton, *The past and future of public history, Developments and challenges*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Public History*, Oxford 2018, pp. 1–4.

the origins of public history can be found in the social changes following World War II and in the formation of a post-industrial consumer society. Some even go back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when criticism began to be levelled at academic history, which was increasingly confined to “ivory towers”, or allude to even earlier periods before academic history became distinct and professionalised. After all, “since time immemorial” societies have had various forms of “recalling” and telling about the past, in stories, poetry and songs. It was also commemorated – in monuments or celebrations. Naturally, the term ‘public history’ was not used at the time.<sup>3</sup>

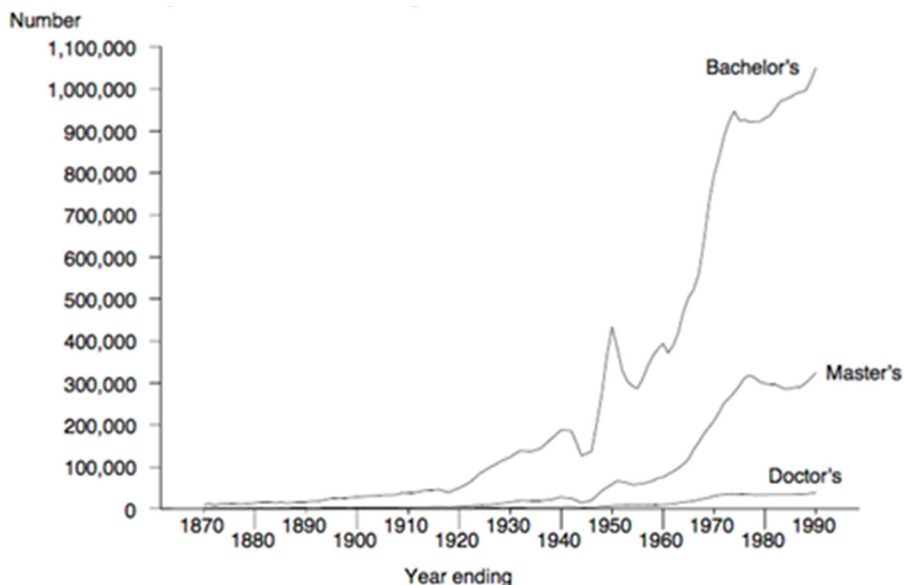
After World War II, American society experienced a confluence of such mutually interacting factors as increased average educational attainment, wealth, mobility, and access to public services, all of which entailed changes in lifestyle. In the USA, the beginning of a rapid increase in the number of people with higher education was associated with the post-war G.I. Bill, a law that gave demobilised soldiers low-interest loans to pay for college tuition. While in the academic year 1929/1930 less than 1.2 million Americans enrolled in college, and in 1939/1940 less than one and a half million, in 1949/1950 this number reached almost 2.5 million, and the trend was upward, reaching, in the academic year 1959/1960 more than 3.5 million, with a much lower rate of growth of the total population of the USA (1929 – 122 million, 1939 – 130 million, 1949 – 150 million, 1959 – 177 million). This tendency, after a temporary pause, continued in subsequent decades, and the increase in the number of college degrees earned is reflected in Figure 1 below, covering the years 1869–1990.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History*, Iowa City 2002. See also Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments and National Parks: Toward a new genealogy of public history*, Amherst 2012.

<sup>4</sup> *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, ed. Timothy Snyder, Washington 1993, p. 67, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf> (accessed July 15, 2018).

**Figure 1. Bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees conferred by institutions of higher education: 1869/70 to 1989/90**



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Studies of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; and U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, various issues

The widespread higher education brought an increased interest in the past, both in one's own family and more broadly – in the locality, region, country, and also civilization. This was further fostered by the celebration of “round” anniversaries of many historical events. The bicentennial of the USA in 1976 played a particular role in drawing the attention of the entire society to the past, all the more so because the formula of its celebrations assumed involvement of local communities and schools, and encompassed mass events and showbiz productions.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, technological developments and rising social affluence observed during the exceptionally long post-war prosperity meant that people began to have more money and leisure time to spend on various forms of entertainment. These factors fostered the development of the entertainment industry – from radio and cinema, which were already thriving before the war, through television, which experienced a boom after World War II, to entertainment related to computer

<sup>5</sup> Tammy S. Gordon, *The Spirit of 1976: Commerce, Community, and the Politics of Commemoration*, Amherst 2013.

technology (video games, virtual reality), characteristic of the 1980s and 1990s, as well as huge music or sports shows, present in the public space all the time.

Various branches have widely drawn on history as a source of inspiration, such as music, movies, literary fiction, amusement parks, video games or Internet memes. Sometimes one can also observe a relationship flowing in the opposite direction, when the entertainment industry shaped the public's historical consciousness. For example, after the release of the movie *Braveheart* (1995), there was a clear increase in the number of Americans proudly manifesting their Scottishness; even if they were not of Scottish descent, they declared their interest in Scottish history.<sup>6</sup>

The entertainment industry has benefited from the latest technological advances – it would not exist in its current form without the invention of sound and image recording or without computers, and in recent years, the Internet and cellular network. They provide the means both for the production of attractive forms of historical content and for its reception and use. They also changed and keep changing the role of the public, especially in the last few years, when, in the era of Web 2.0, Internet users' comments have become a natural complement to texts created by professionals. Wikipedia entries are created by enthusiasts, and an ordinary cell phone gives better opportunities to take pictures or film than anyone was able to do at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A little earlier, the same happened with the spread of motorisation, which influenced a dynamic development of tourism, including tourism connected with history (also local one). The possibility of easy access by car facilitated the success of a model historical park created in post-industrial textile Lowell, Massachusetts, now considered the cradle of this branch of public history.<sup>7</sup> Mobility in general is a major factor boosting the development of public history. It ranges from family trips in cars, through school bus tours to museums and open-air historic sites, to more recent air travel and luxury cruises – all of which bring crowds of visitors, directing their interest toward countless exhibitions, museums, historical parks, and memorials.

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<sup>6</sup> Duncan Sim, *American Scots: The Scottish Diaspora and the USA*, Edinburgh 2011, pp. 59–60, reports that there were 85 organisations of Americans of Scottish descent in 1986 and 205 in 2000, despite the lack of an influx of a larger wave of immigrants from Scotland.

<sup>7</sup> See Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment. Public History in a Post-industrial City*, Amherst 2006.

Civilizational changes – social and technological – have thus facilitated the creation of a market for public history audiences. On the other hand, service providers have emerged, willing to make money on this market, often with the help of specialists: museum workers, tour operators or other public historians, i.e. people who can convince the public that it is worthwhile to take advantage of their offer and come to a museum or a concert, watch a movie, play a game, visit an old mining town or a knights' tournament, and buy a t-shirt or a mug with a historical motif. Their main task is to make their clients satisfied and willing to return and/or recommend the service to others. Such specialists combine historical knowledge with managerial and interpersonal skills. They need to acquire the ability to communicate historical content in an understandable, accessible and attractive way. It is not enough for them to know the established historiography, because they still need to know and understand the needs of their audience, to be aware of changing trends of tastes, and to use the achievements of technology and psychology.<sup>8</sup> For example, historical quizzes on television or mobile apps operate on the people's desire to demonstrate their factual knowledge about the past while museum stores base their business on customers' need to collect and sentimentalize.

We can see from the above that the commercialisation of history is the essence of American public history. It can also be observed on the example of museums. Of course, museums are not a recent invention – on the contrary, they are one of the oldest forms of public history, as places intended by the mighty (especially monarchs) to shape the images of the past in the minds of their subjects, i.e. the public, and they enjoy unflagging public trust.<sup>9</sup> However, in recent years museums have been undergoing significant changes to better match their offer to visitors' tastes. For many institutions, the number of visitors determines their to be or not to be – either directly through ticket purchases or indirectly through attendance and the level of satisfaction with the offer, which are arguments in applying for subsidies. An employee of a museum must not only be a specialist in the content of the materials stored in it, not only know how to properly preserve these materials, but also should be able to effectively attract visitors.

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<sup>8</sup> Faye Sayer, *Public History: A Practical Guide*, New York 2015 provides sets of key characteristics and skills for different profiles of public historians.

<sup>9</sup> Alan S. Marcus, Jeremy D. Stoddard, Walter W. Woodward, *Teaching History with Museums. Strategies for K-12 Social Studies*, New York 2017, pp. 9–10, 27–30.

These trends reached Poland with some delay, but they fundamentally changed the functioning and perception of history museums.<sup>10</sup> The breakthrough year was 2004, with the opening of the Warsaw Rising Museum,<sup>11</sup> the first major narrative museum, in the creation of which World War II veterans were involved. They had participated in the Uprising in their youth, but during the communist period they were marginalised in the society and in veterans' organisations. The insurgents were appreciated only after the fall of the communist system, although their number was already significantly smaller. What is characteristic is that these people decided that the shape of the museum should be determined less by their expectations and more by the needs and habits of the visitors. It was as if they spontaneously expressed this basic principle of public history: "for the public".

The Warsaw Rising Museum was absolutely innovative in Polish conditions. Pathos, showcases, silence, and solemnity are absent. Visitors can hear the hustle and bustle and see people moving around according to their own chosen routes, sometimes at a brisk walk or run. Moreover, individual halls have diverse scenography and the exhibits can be searched for and touched in various nooks and crannies. Since the Warsaw Rising Museum turned out to be an attendance and financial success, it was soon followed by other institutions of this kind, not only in Warsaw (here, especially the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews<sup>12</sup>) but also in other cities.

Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk attracted international attention. Originally, it aimed to showcase the universal, all-human experience of war – which, however, did not meet with the understanding of Poland's nationally-oriented cabinet ruling after 2015. The museum became the subject of public controversy and court cases.<sup>13</sup> Despite some changes and shifts that have been made to the exhibition, it is still fascinating as a multifaceted story about World War II as seen from the perspective of ordinary people. Actually, it is a collection of many such stories seen from different points of view. That is why visitors can return there many times and always find something new for themselves, which is one of the characteristics of contemporary museums that use mechanisms

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<sup>10</sup> This process is presented in detail by Paweł Ukielski, *New Historical Museums in Poland*, in: *Public History in Poland*, ed. Joanna Wojdon. New York 2021, 50–66.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.1944.pl/en> (accessed July 15, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> <https://polin.pl/en> (accessed July 15, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Paweł Machcewicz, *The War That Never Ends: The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk*, Berlin–Boston 2019.

developed within the framework of public history – not to let the public get bored and fully satisfied, but to leave them feeling unfulfilled and keep encouraging them to visit again and again.

At the same time, the European Solidarity Centre<sup>14</sup> opened its doors nearby, exactly on the spot where the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity” was born during the workers’ strikes of 1980. Its history and achievements, from 1980 to the fall of the communist system, are the subject of a permanent exhibition. The target public of both mentioned museums are visitors not only from Poland but also from abroad. Both museums try to tell Polish and universal history to people who do not really know anything about it, but are interested in the past.

In neighbouring Gdynia, the Emigration Museum<sup>15</sup> has opened, dedicated to the migrations of Poles from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. The emphasis on overseas emigration results from the location of the museum – in the building of the former Maritime Station (Dworzec Morski), from which transoceanic ships used to depart, including the famous “Batory”, on which thousands of Poles sailed to America before air traffic became widespread.

In turn, the historic bus depot in Wrocław, where in August 1980 a strike broke out in support of Gdańsk shipyard workers, houses the Depot History Centre (Centrum Historii Zajeźdźnia),<sup>16</sup> whose permanent exhibition tells the post-war history of the city. Together with the Museum, the “Remembrance and Future” Centre functions as a research centre specializing in the post-war history of the Western and Northern Territories, incorporated into Poland after World War II at the expense of Germany, and in oral history. It is the publisher of the leading Polish academic journal dedicated to the theory and practice of oral history, “Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej” (Wrocław Yearbook of Oral History), with articles in Polish and English.<sup>17</sup>

One notable addition deserves to be made in 2023: The Sybir Memorial Museum in Białystok in north-eastern Poland opened in 2021. Its permanent exhibition is devoted to the history of Polish presence in Siberia, from Tsarist deportations into Russia to Soviet repression and crimes but also voluntary Polish settlements

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<sup>14</sup> <https://ecs.gda.pl> (accessed July 15, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> <https://polska1.pl> (accessed July 15, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> <https://zajezdnia.org/en/> (accessed July 15, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> <https://wrhm.pl/wrhm> (accessed July 15, 2018).

and business operations. On December 5, 2023 the Sybir Museum was announced the laureate of the Council of Europe Museum Prize 2024.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from museums, it is not difficult to notice other public history-related phenomena and processes in Poland, similar to those in the USA. Historical supplements to weekly magazines and novels about medieval dukes of the Piast dynasty by Elżbieta Cherezińska are bestsellers. A flagship series of television shows “Sensacje XX wieku” (Sensations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) were broadcast already in communist times, and its host Bogusław Wołoszański became an iconic figure popularizing history, the subject of parodies and Internet memes. Historical motifs can be found in the literary fantasy saga *The Witcher* and a series of video games based on them. It brought its producer, CD-Projekt, worldwide commercial and image success. Steady profits, although on a smaller scale, are earned by selling the so-called “patriotic” clothing – hooded jumpers or t-shirts referring to Poland’s historical victories, especially military ones, including hussar wings or national symbols. Similarly as in the rest of the world, museum stores take advantage of the public’s interest in such assortment, selling various gadgets referring to the content of exhibitions or, more broadly, to past events.

These processes in Poland began several decades later than in America, and in fact, it is only after 1990 that we can speak of a rapid increase in the number of students at universities and of the dynamic development of automotive and tourism, including historical tourism, which is also emerging as a research field.<sup>19</sup> Despite this delay, I would identify the beginnings of Polish public history in the 1970s and 1980s, as in the USA, with the activities of the democratic opposition and the dissemination of historical narratives alternative to the official, ideology-loaded message. The KARTA Centre, the Weeks of Christian Culture, the independent

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<sup>18</sup> <https://sybir.bialystok.pl/en/muzeum-pamieci-sybiru-najlepsze-muzeum-w-europie-2024/> (accessed December 16, 2023). The website states: “*The museum works with the strong narrative of deportation, reducing research-based material to the essentials, working with strong spatial images that give a voice to the selected authentic objects. The museum’s ability to convey history through workshops, events, media, publications and new formats is impressive and brings it to a broad audience.*” – the committee representative for the Museum Prize, Constantinos Efstathiou, said about our Museum. The Council of Europe Museum Prize is the most important prize awarded every year since 1977 to one the best museum in the particular year in Europe. It is given to institutions which contributed to human rights compliance in a significant way, expanding the knowledge and understanding contemporary social problems as well as culture unification through encouraging intercultural dialogue or overcoming social and political boundaries.

<sup>19</sup> See Armin Mikos von Rohrscheidt, *Historia w turystyce kulturowej*, Warszawa 2018; *Turystyka w edukacji historycznej i obywatelskiej*, ed. Mariusz Ausz et al., Lublin 2016.



publishing movement – these were the Polish precursors of public history. That is why Polish public history is characterised by a greater political admixture (which is also present in other countries), and its roots may be connected with the British vision of public history as, above all, grassroots history in accordance with the beliefs of the public.

### ***By the public. Collectively written history. Everybody is a historian***

One's interest in the past seems to be a natural trait of humans. Historical epics are among the oldest literary forms in various cultures. If we treat the film *Blade Runner* as a voice in the discussion about history, then in its view, memory of the past is the essence of humanity, distinguishing humans from even the most perfectly constructed androids. People remember the turns of their own lives, and they pass these stories on, from generation to generation, orally or in writing. Public history values such activities. In the British version of public history, its essence is not business, but the activities of ordinary people, amateurs, aiming at learning about and popularizing the past – especially of their own persons, groups, environments, and local communities.

Also in other countries, many people are fascinated with genealogy. In the USA, for example, the film and book *Roots* about slaves' descendants triggered a real boom of searching for the roots of one's family, which benefited not only archives, but also travel agencies offering trips to Africa. According to a report by the U.S. National Archives, as many as 21% of the queries on its website relate to genealogical research.<sup>20</sup>

People write down their memories – for their own family and friends, or with the intention of publishing them in print. They make videos, run blogs and create other forms of disseminating information about the history of their family, town, school, or workplace. The more devoted establish community archives and chambers of memory or local museums related to a given period, place, event, or social group, where they collect documents and memorabilia, saving them from being discarded and forgotten. They also organize exhibitions, meetings, picnics, and conventions. Reconstruction groups meticulously recreate the conditions of life hundreds of years ago, in an effort to experience the past anew. In the age of the

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/metrics/reports> (accessed July 15, 2018).

Internet and mobile network, it is increasingly easy to organize and communicate, exchange experiences, conduct research, and disseminate findings.

There is no doubt that non-institutional history is an expression of genuine interest and commitment by non-professionals to learning about the past. It also provides them with an opportunity to broaden and deepen both their knowledge and their skills, and fulfils a number of social needs.<sup>21</sup> This means, as Harold Skramstad of the Ford Museum in Dearborn, cited by Tammy Gordon, stated: "History is too important to be left to historians alone".<sup>22</sup>

Of course, amateurs can make mistakes in their searches; they can carry them out not systematically, being subject to longer or brief fashions. But do not professional historians also succumb to similar influences? Do they not undertake research on commission from publishers, in response to competitions announced, in the hope that their works will receive more attention in the year of the anniversary of the events they write about? As early as 2005, a study of the credibility of Wikipedia, a grassroots initiative, and the professionally run Encyclopaedia Britannica, showed similar credibility between the two publications, with a slight advantage for the latter.<sup>23</sup>

In Poland, under communism, official institutions were not allowed to delve into certain areas of research, so those fields were necessarily left in the hands of amateurs, supported by those professionals who were willing to risk their careers (and sometimes their personal freedom) by engaging in completely or partially illegal activities. It was thanks to their involvement that oral accounts were collected from those war veterans who actively fought the communist regime, documents of the anti-communist opposition were collected, and historical sources and studies were published outside the reach of censorship. One can say that an information circuit dealing with the past, independent from the authorities, has been formed – an independent public history.

Thus, professional historians can co-create the amateur releases on history and support their development, as well as observe and study them. They can inspire

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<sup>21</sup> Tammy Gordon singles out the following tasks that small local museums set for themselves: representing the local community to the outside world, creating connections between older and younger generations, building a sense of a shared past, as well as earning money from tourists, T. Gordon, *Private History in Public. Exhibition and the Settings of Everyday Life*, Lanham 2010, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> Introduction to: Gordon, *Private History*, p. xi.

<sup>23</sup> Jim Giles, *Internet encyclopedias go head to head*, "Nature", 2005, 438, pp. 900–901.

the public and involve it into various activities. For example, they may try to reconcile conflicting local memories or engage volunteers in popularisation work.<sup>24</sup>

In today's Poland, professional historians employed by institutions such as state archives or museums attach increasing importance to establishing cooperation with amateurs – history enthusiasts and ordinary people who, in various circumstances, have had or are dealing with history.

While in the 20<sup>th</sup> century archives appeared to be bastions of knowledge, guarding their treasures against unauthorised access, where even professional researchers had to seek permission and justify the need to explore the collections, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can observe how these institutions are opening up to a wider public. They organise exhibitions and lessons for students, meetings and lectures, participate in “nights of museums”, as well as attach importance to their presence on the Internet (through websites and social media). They also issue publications intended for young people and the so-called general readership.

Museums create collections of memorabilia or accounts of “ordinary people” to be included in the exhibitions. Young people are particularly encouraged to talk about the past with their parents and grandparents, and sometimes to bring exhibits.

It is advisable for the staff of these institutions to keep ethical issues in mind and to sensitize their public to these issues – from the property and copyright rights associated with the materials provided to the potentially inconvenient details of the biographies of the older generation. This is all the more true given the publication of guides where professionals or experienced amateurs offer practical advice to beginners on how to organize research (e.g., genealogical), whom to turn to for help to, and how and where to obtain materials, including when, for example, due to draconian fees, one is unable to access scholarly articles from academic databases.<sup>25</sup>

Professional public history does not ignore history studied “by the public”; on the contrary, it tries to appreciate it and include it in institutional projects. This guarantees the interest of the public, increases its engagement, and is a condition of success of many undertakings, from ensuring attendance to obtaining materials stored in closets and attics or in the memory of witnesses.

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<sup>24</sup> Gordon, *Private history*, pp. 39–40 ff.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Rosemary Chorzempa, *Polish Roots = Korzenie polskie*, Baltimore 1993; *An American Association for State and Local History Guide to Making Public History*, Lanham 2017.

### ***About the Public. History of the neglected, marginalized and others. Who doesn't have a history?***

Classical academic history tended to focus on the presentation of political and military history of well-to-do, politically active white men. Common sense suggests, however, that they were not the only ones who made the past. Already Marxist historiography told us to write the history of the exploited strata – peasants and workers – and to look for their presence in the sources of the past.

In the 1960s and 1970s, public and academic debate increasingly demanded that the role of women and children, ordinary people, as well as ethnic and sexual minorities be recognized. The post-colonial turn in humanities has drawn attention to the history of former colonies of European countries, which in pre-colonial times often did not use writing, and thus – in light of the classical definition – did not have a pre-colonial history. Following Gayatri Spivak's voice, instead of trying to force the description of the past of these communities into patterns adopted for the world of Western civilization, some researchers decided to look for alternative historical sources and research methods, such as oral history or analysis of material remains and also civilizational relics of the past – e.g., customs, beliefs and convictions.

Public history is eager to incorporate such non-classical sources and research methods into its work because they remain close to the public: people and their experiences. With such a broad approach to the study of the past, historical reconstructions can be a research tool that allows us to explain socioeconomic relationships or technological processes and, through empathy, can make us better sense the mentality of past societies. Moreover, such research demonstrates that history does not have to fit into the narrative patterns of grand national political history, because, for example, as oral historians claim, everyone is the best expert in his or her own life story,<sup>26</sup> and life consists of more than just grand politics. Oral testimonies enrich our knowledge about underestimated areas of the past, and the stories of individual people do not have to be an exemplification of national history. Already in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, competitions were organized concerning diaries and memoirs. Oral accounts were also collected, especially from representatives of groups that tended not to write memoirs, and for this reason were generally

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<sup>26</sup> E.g. Michał Kierzkowski, *Historia mówiona – próba definicji pojęcia*, "Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej", 4 (2014), p. 10.

marginalized by academic historiography (see the section “About the public”). Nowadays, it is common for history museums to include recordings of witness accounts of history in their exhibitions.

In doing so, public history is interested not only in what happened in the past, but also how it is remembered, commemorated and communicated to different audiences – in other words, how the memory of past events functions in public sphere. Incidentally, the term ‘audience’ is not an adequate description of those participating in public history. This word, like in the academic or school model, implies a one-way communication from the historian-expert to the audience-public, while the essence of public history is communication in both directions. The term ‘public’, or plural ‘publics’, is, therefore, more appropriate in this context.

By touching upon the problem of memory, we enter more deeply into the discussion between public history and classical academic history. As Maurice Halbwachs claimed, history (scientific, objective) begins where memory (subjective, deformed) ends. In this distinction, grassroots public history, based on human memory and amateur research, loses the value of being scientific. However, post-modern historiography departs quite decisively from its positivist roots. Among its key achievements are: Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* and research into how they function; Hayden White’s narrativist turn, which challenged the objectivity of historical research by arguing that it is impossible to objectively state “how things were” and that any narrative about the past – including academic ones – is a subjective story that reflects the realities of the present and the views of the author; the postcolonialism of G. Spivak and the growing interest not only in the oppressed peoples of the colonies, but also in other groups (such as women, children, ethnic or sexual minorities) and in the problems hitherto marginalized (e.g., the history of food and clothing, of entertainment and sports – not only the games, but also, for example, the behaviour of fans).

With such an evolution of traditional history, it absorbs the objects of public history research which it has so far ignored or marginalized. At the same time, every historian can be, at least sometimes, a public historian when they address their findings to non-professional audiences, or when they work for government or commercial clients, rather than confining themselves exclusively to the academic world.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Fabio Spirinelli writes in his blog about the “accidental public history practiced by many historians, <https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/thinking/climbing-out-ivory-tower-jumping-society-some-thoughts-public-history> (accessed July 15, 2018).

### ***With the public. Users of history***

So is public history simply part of history? And are there public historians? Having outlined the civilizational changes, the grassroots movements of researchers of the past, and the quest for history by those who were deprived of it, let us turn to the fourth source of public history: the oversupply of educated American historians holding doctoral degrees in the 1970s. Whereas previously the doctorate was considered to open the door to an academic career, by the 1970s it turned out that barely one in ten promoted PhD graduates could expect a job at a university.<sup>28</sup> Robert Townsend reports that in 1971, 2,481 people applied for 188 university posts in the USA. Over 1,000 PhDs in history were promoted annually – an effect of the excessive expansion of doctoral studies in response to the educational boom of the first post-war years, which, however, was soon corrected by the market and students began to choose majors other than history, while doctoral programmes remained, forcing their graduates to make significant efforts to find employment.

Young educated humanists began to seek employment elsewhere – and they found it in the booming museums and national parks, as well as other government agencies that employ historians, or in the commercial sector. Their work was initially seen as an inferior career path. After all, they were not engaged in historical research, but in popularizing it – in other words, using what the academy had developed.

With time, however, the specificity of public history began to be recognized – no longer as a path for those who failed in the academic world, but as a separate discipline. It was recognized and appreciated that activities in public space are not just reproductive popularisation, but creative tasks that require professional preparation, sound factual knowledge, and interpersonal and organisational talents. First at the University of California Santa Barbara, and later at other universities as well, public historians began to be taught so that they would not have to learn only from their own mistakes. Public history graduates, unlike those graduating in many other humanities fields, had no problem finding jobs in the profession, which brought new applicants to the university programmes and reinforced a sense of professional distinctiveness. Public history programmes had a significant practical component:

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Townsend, *History in those hard times: Looking for jobs in the 1970s*, “Perspectives on History”, September 1, 2009, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2009/history-in-those-hard-times-looking-for-jobs-in-the-1970s> (accessed July 15, 2018).

internships, work experience, projects – also as part of regular classes. There was also a strong emphasis on ethical issues: maintaining the credibility of the message irrespective of financial and political pressures, the need to deepen one's own knowledge and skills, but also, for example, not using one's privileged position (e.g., in access to archival materials), maintaining reliability and being resistant to substantive pressures from the principals, as well as respect for the audience.<sup>29</sup>

In Poland, the only master's degree programme dedicated to public history and using this name so far has existed since 2014 at the University of Wrocław. At other universities, there are specialisations within history studies, or majors dealing with public history or its selected aspects, but under different names.<sup>30</sup> At the University of Wrocław, students gain knowledge of history during seminars dedicated to "historical debates", focusing on the most controversial topics of particular historical periods, from the Middle Ages to the present. During the first semester, they are introduced to each of the five specialisations offered: popularisation, archive management, publishing, historical memory and politics, and interpretations of history. As one can see, the first three are more practical in nature, while the others are more theoretical. The former are definitely more popular, which confirms the demand for practical knowledge. Each of the specialisations includes seminars and a specialisation project as well as a professional internship. All students participate in writing workshops and in "introduction to historical journalism" classes.

The curriculum also includes an introduction to oral history. Another workshop subject is e-history, which implements the use of electronic tools useful in the work of a historian moving in public space. Due to the lack of a sufficient number of didactic hours, historical films and "history in entertainment and media" are watched and analysed rather than created by the students themselves. Moreover, there are

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<sup>29</sup> The classic study on the professional ethics of public historians is Theodore Karamanski, *Ethics in Public History. An Anthology*, Malabar 1990.

<sup>30</sup> I wrote more about it in the article: Joanna Wojdon, *Historia w przestrzeni publicznej*, "Klio. Czasopismo poświęcone dziejom Polski i powszechnym", 34 (2015), 3, pp. 25–41. Another unique academic undertaking in the field of public history, carried out in Wrocław in cooperation with the International Federation for Public History, is the Public History Summer School. Its first edition took place in 2018, gathering over forty researchers and practitioners from around the world. See Małgorzata Rymśza-Pawłowska, *Notes from the field. University of Wrocław's Public History Summer School*, history@work, August 31, 2018, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/notes-from-the-field-the-university-of-wroclaws-public-history-summer-school/> (accessed July 15, 2018); Fabio Spirinelli, *Climbing out of the ivory tower; jumping into society: some thoughts on public history*, <https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/thinking/climbing-out-ivory-tower-jumping-society-some-thoughts-public-history>, July 12, 2018 (accessed July 15, 2018).

“managerial” subjects, i.e. a course on public relations, entrepreneurship and project management as well as classes on fundraising and grant management. Thanks to the cooperation with the Depot History Centre, each year the managerial classes produce a professionally made outdoor exhibition, presented for several weeks in an open space in Wrocław city centre, so that it can be seen by ordinary passers-by. Apart from the exhibition, students also make podcasts, websites and board games, as well as conduct activities for pre-schoolers and guided tours.

The entire course of studies is concluded with a master’s thesis, which in its form is a traditional dissertation of a scholarly nature, but its subject matter often refers to public history. So far, for example, there have been works about historical themes in rock music, in historical memes or in legends; about the topics evoking conflicts of memory around the anti-communist resistance in Poland (1944–1953) and about students’ expectations towards history museums. In each case, substantive emphasis was put on the public and its role in the creation or reception of narratives about the past.

### **Conclusion. The past, the public and public history**

Interactions between the past and the public form the core of public history. They sometimes involve professional public historians, i.e. individuals who are trained in academic history and in dealing with the public, who develop their offer in accordance with people’s needs, interests and expectations.<sup>31</sup> They invite the public to participate in their undertakings or they join the endeavors undertaken by other stakeholders, from amateur researchers and other enthusiasts of the past to commercial companies and state-sponsored memory institutions. Public history may exist without historians, but it does not exist without the public. Poland is no different in this regard.

### **STRESZCZENIE / SUMMARY**

Artykuł przedstawia krótki zarys historii i teraźniejszości public history, głównie w USA i w Polsce, odwołując się do klasycznej definicji Barbary Franco głoszącej, że jest to historia dla ludzi, przez ludzi, z ludźmi i o ludziach. Wychodząc od amerykańskich

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<sup>31</sup> See Joanna Wojdon, *Public historians and their professional identity*, “Public History Weekly”, April 2, 2020, <https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/8-2020-4/public-historians-video-games/> (accessed April 5, 2020).



i brytyjskich korzeni public history w drugiej połowie XX w., przedstawia elementy jej polskiej specyfiki, w tym związki z polityką i XXI-wieczny boom muzealny. Kładzie nacisk na rolę przemian społecznych i cywilizacyjnych dla rozwoju różnych form public history. Porusza kwestie relacji między przeszłością, publicznością i innymi interesariuszami oraz historykami, odzwierciedlone w praktycznych działaniach, teoretycznych refleksjach oraz programach studiów. Podkreśla kluczową rolę publiczności, która wyróżnia public history od innych obszarów i form uprawiania i popularyzowania badań historycznych.

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