
7. Public history¹

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INTRODUCTION

Making public history (PH) is about historians engaging with the past in public and taking care of citizens' knowledge in ways that are different but complementary to traditional academic history.² In most cases, when engaging in historical research within universities, one is not looking at its societal impact. "Making history" remains an individual research practice with the purpose of producing a written manuscript based on original sources, narrating a past event exclusively for the peers. The public impact and the civic usefulness of such a research and collective process of knowledge production are not contemplated.

PH methods should be shared within communities as useful critical instruments of an interactive process of knowledge-building and cultural and social reappropriation of identities. Analytical depth, complexity, ethical approaches, and contextualization are part of a process of mutual education between public historians and their targeted communities potentially improving social cohesion.

In one of his *Dialogues*, Plato showcases this kind of mutual education process, describing how Socrates engaged with his interlocutors in a collaborative process of questioning. Through asking targeted questions, Socrates allowed his interlocutors to reveal a deeply hidden away knowledge. This process of revealing and delivering knowledge, memories, or experiences has been called maieutic. This refers to the capacity of giving birth to what individuals were not aware of knowing, a method used by Socrates to offer more concrete definitions to theoretical and normative concepts. Such a process was dual, and Socrates used his authority to drive interlocutors in the collaborative creation of an applied social knowledge.

The PH process of knowledge production, hermeneutics, and diffusion of such a knowledge in the public sphere, is akin to how public sociology (PS), specifically "organic sociology," engages with different audiences that must be clearly identified (Burawoy, 2005, pp. 7–8). PS and PH apply common methods when professional sociologists or historians work in the public sphere with specific social groups. They both study social needs, memories, and identities, and develop forms of social activism within communities. PS and PH also identify social goods and civic knowledges (such as the knowledge of the past), built and shared with the public, and aim at the social and cultural self-improvement of minorities (sexual, ethnical, political, religious, and so on). They develop a critical and self-understanding approach to their present reality that goes together with the improvement of democratic practices from below. The process of dialoguing and the sharing of authority between practitioners and communities foster the production of original sources. These include data and multiple forms of expert and non-expert knowledge, narratives, and memories that allow for a better understanding and interpretation of the present. Oral history and ethnographical methods are crucial in such an interactive and applied process of knowledge creation within communities in the case of PH.

When a public sociologist such as Michael Burawoy (2016) decided to become a steel worker to study the workplace chain of production, he intended to understand and study the

social, political, and cultural identity of his fellow co-workers. Through ethnographic methods and interactive dialogues with the workers belonging to such a social group, he built a mutual trust and shared his own authority. The methods he used were very similar to how public historians work within their communities. Burawoy went deeply into the analysis of social behaviours and social consciousness within this specific community, through an intimate and self-experienced understanding of the working process in the steel industry.

Likewise, Italian filmmaker Roberto Minervini in 2018 documented a forsaken United States, telling the story of marginal communities through direct sensitive contacts and shared experiences. The documentary, *What You Gonna Do When the World's on Fire*, tells the story of members of the survived group of the Black Panthers. Only after living within the community for a year, forming close connections with its members, was he able to start filming a powerful “out of the box” social and historical narrative of the Black Panthers’ community. This “slow-release” process showed the community that Minervini was trustworthy and genuinely trying to understand their complex cultural and social context:

I am a guide for the characters in their own story. By listening to them, I help them and put them in a position to tell their stories ... I did ease the conditions of a story that was already there to play out ... Standing aside does not mean disappearing but implies a degree of trust. (Stellino, 2018, p. 77)

Such an “immersive” maieutical dialoguing method with members of the Black Panthers community is similar to how Burawoy studied his fellow steel workers. It is also akin to what activist public historians built in many countries worldwide: a network of “sites of conscience” based on the history of specific communities with violent dictatorial and genocidal pasts.³ Knowing the truth about violent pasts and being able to inform the civil society of what happened can heal community memories and influence the present.

Methods that imply the sharing of an authority between social scientists and communities are thus commonly used in PS and PH practices when working with and for specific communities. Many PH practices focus on the enhancement of the public dimension of historical knowledge and the improvement of the public sense of the past through methods favoring bottom-up of accompanied forms of citizens’ history. The result of a mediation between community knowledge and public historians produces new forms of narratives, adds educational and cultural values within these communities, improving social integration. Above all, it brings a critical awareness of the present time, based on a better public and collective understanding of historical processes.

The above practices thus characterize the development of applied and activist projects in PH in the same way that they do in PS. Vincent Jeffries described “Burawoy’s holistic model of sociological practice,” capable of mobilizing four forms of sociology for a better society (Jeffries, 2009, pp. 1–2). Indeed, in his famous 2005 address to the *American Sociological Association*, Michael Burawoy described 11 proposals to foster PS as the public arm used by sociologists to engage with the civil society. He imagined forms of applied sociology within communities in which sociologists became “partisans” and professionally sympathetic to the needs of their publics (Burawoy, 2005, p. 24). Burawoy wanted to privilege what he called “the original passion for social justice, economic equality, human rights, sustainable environment, political freedom or simply a better world” (Burawoy, 2005, p. 5). Shaping society and serving the public good for a better world was his empirical vision of PS. Applying professional knowledge in dialogues with communities is also what activist historian Raphael

Samuel used in his History Workshops in 1984–85. He invited miners and their families to the Ruskin College in Oxford, during the strike against Margaret Thatcher’s neo-liberal policies, to properly capture the anthropological and historical profile of this social group.

Although this chapter focuses on PH, readers with a background in PS will realize how their PS methods are similar to the nature and epistemological tradition of activist public historians’ practices. Born in the United States of America (USA) 40 years ago, these practices focus on the need to first design the goals of a project strictly connected to a targeted public; a critical and collective approach to sources and contexts that are to be built and shared with the publics involved; and an ethical tension that is present when engaging in bottom-up activist projects serving communities and their history.

This chapter privileges “activism” as one of the most important PH practices, based on a direct and active interaction with different social communities. It starts by discussing the complex definition of PH throughout different countries and periods. It then moves on to a brief history of the internationalization of the discipline, starting from the two main countries that gave birth to PH in the 1960s and 1970s: the United Kingdom and the USA. It then studies how collective memories and identities often restricted to the local sphere, can become “glocal” issues and consolidate a better sense of the past in the public sphere. Additionally, this chapter tackles how forms of citizens’ history are built through user-generated content, the sharing of professional authority methods and the consolidation of a mutual trust. Lastly, it examines the more recent impact of digital technologies on PH methods, practices and projects.

HISTORY OF PUBLIC HISTORY: THE PUBLICNESS OF THE PAST

Institutionalizing PH in the USA

The National Council on Public History (NCPH) founded in 1978, is the North American association around which the most qualified initiatives in the discipline were and still are organized. The association promoted discussions about the field with all kind of PH practitioners: “museum professionals, government and business historians, historical consultants, archivists, teachers, cultural resource managers, curators, film and media producers, policy advisors, oral historians, professors and students with PH interests, and many others”⁴ (NCPH, 1979, pp. 41–58). The NCPH, during its first national congress in 1979, took stock of some defining problems of what PH had been up to then. Forty-five historians from different academic and non-academic backgrounds (public and private institutions) (NCPH, 1979, pp. 73–74) joined the conference and explored what future was in store for PH (NCPH, 1979, pp. 58–59). One of the main reasons for the foundation of a new field had been the deep crisis of history as a discipline, including the dramatic shortage of university positions (Hoff Wilson, 1980), and more generally, the fate of history in American society at the time.

According to Lydia Bronte, then Associated Director for the Humanities of the Rockefeller Foundation, organizer of the conference on behalf of the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), it was a question of making “applied” history (Conard, 2002),⁵ that is, no longer just a speculative and reflective history in academic settings. For Joel A. Tarr, Professor of Urban History at Carnegie-Mellon, public historians had to promote the knowledge of history and historical methods as an asset in the job market. Others thought that the birth of PH

was not only the result of a crisis in the university job market, but also responded to new social and popular needs for history expressed in the media and in local communities, and supported by the work of museum curators, historical parks civil servants, archivists, and librarians, all specialized in history. Indeed, at the end of the 1970s, the very term “public history” had already made its way into the discussions of the federal Association of American historians. The Organization of American Historians (OAH), the American Historical Association (AHA) and the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH)⁶ today support scientifically the specific vocational training, the role and activities of public historians in the country.⁷ Arnita Jones, on behalf of the AHA, pointed out for the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History that PH was “history that is done anywhere outside the classroom by anybody who’s not employed in a university” (Jones, 1979, p. 11). Jones was not legitimizing a “history made by everyone,” but instead, the use of historians’ professional skills outside universities with the ability to interact professionally in interdisciplinary ways with their publics.

PH academic programs in American universities introduced new skills and prepared their students for new jobs in public and private settings. We have no recent social and professional survey of who the public historians are in North America today. Nevertheless, in 2004, the AHA ended a four-year study by a Task Force on Public History (AHA, 2004a) created to understand how to better integrate public historians within the AHA, and to scientifically evaluate the necessary skills requirements for carrying out their professional tasks (AHA, 2021). The new discipline accounted for 17 percent of the total of the 14 048 members of the AHA, that is, those not working in the university, who were automatically classified as “public historians”; while nearly 85 percent of AHA members said they also occasionally practice PH, according to the same 2004 report. Finally, the areas of historical research of the public historians were substantially similar to those of academic historians (AHA, 2004b). In 2008, another survey by the AHA looked at where the public historians were employed, acknowledging that a quarter of them had been hired by museums (AHA, 2008). A 2015 survey, with added comments in 2017, was carried out on behalf of all US historical associations. It looked at what skills and knowledge were most valued by employers, to identify trends in public historians’ hiring practices (Scarpino and Vivian, 2017).

In various forms, therefore, PH in the USA has become a vital sector of historiography to bring history to American society at large, which has very poor knowledge of its national history. PH was also born because historians wanted to bring history to heritage institutions and public and private businesses, which have their own history, but which do not treasure history—and their own history—for understanding the present and helping to solve economic, political, social, urban, environmental, and ethnic problems thanks to an active and participated reflection on the past. In fact, Wesley Johnson and John Kelley, the fathers of the PH movement initiated at the University of Santa Barbara in California, thought that history had a public purpose and should serve the government of the United States, federal administrations, states and local administrations and businesses, and different types of cultural and heritage institutions such as museums, local history associations, historical parks, and historical societies (Wesley Johnson, 1978).

The United Kingdom: Raphael Samuel's History Workshops

In the United Kingdom (UK), PH projects and activities have sprung up, slightly before those in the USA, and even without using the term “public history” until the 1990s. PH initiatives in the post-1968 cultural climate, and burgeoning influence of social historians such as Eric Hobsbawm and Edward Palmer Thompson, attempted to make history from below, involving communities and marginalized categories of citizens and unionized workers, a form of people's history. In the 1970s, public debates, seminars, lectures, mutual training dialogues were used with the public, at the same time as the discipline was institutionalized in American universities. UK PH (Kean et al. 2000; Hook 2010) had developed, since the end of the 1960s, with groups of professional and non-professional historians, who gathered to talk about history serving forms of social and political activism. They cultivated oral history testimonies and built original sources collecting the memories of marginalized communities during their political confrontations with the government.

Founded in 1976, even before the journal *The Public Historian*, the *History Workshop Journal (HWJ)* promoted a “British style” of politically committed and activist forms of PH influenced by socialist historians. They gravitated around Ruskin College in Oxford where, since 1967, “workshops,” lectures open to a wider audience, were organized to engage history as a way to debate social and political problems (Selbourne, 1980; Samuel, 1980). Raphael Samuel dragged this “spontaneous” movement bringing history out of its academic “ghetto,” to perform grassroots history and build community archives. Samuel's workshops were used for bringing history closer to popular audiences with the “desire to lessen the authority of academic history and thereby further a democratization of the study and use of history.” Samuel intended to place the study of history and history itself in relation to the problems of the present, national politics, and contemporary ideologies. He intended to “draw lessons from the study of the past” (Jensen, 2009, p. 46) for the present, and to promote the making of history from below, history in public, by the public and for the public.

Since the first *HWJ* issue in 1976, the journal explored the themes that would have influenced the diffusion of PH worldwide: feminist studies rather than gender history; the relationship to sociology and the history of present times; oral history; history in museums and in the media; the creation of oral sources; social and family history through photography, cinema, literature, and theater. The *HWJ* brought history to academics and also to wider audiences, even relying on those who were not historians: the “Enthusiasm” column was entrusted to some even outside the profession (Mason, 1985). Returning to the program of the *HWJ*, it should be noted that although oriented towards a socialist political agenda, historians at Ruskin College anticipated some of the goals of American public historians and were close to the people's history of Howard Zinn in the USA (Duberman, 2012). The *HJW* experiment tended to make history available to other audiences, and often preferred to cultivate the memories of the past—closer to individual and collective experiences—in today's society, rather than being locked away without direct contact with the public, in an esoteric vision of history. For Samuel, historians were actors committed to analyzing social and political problems and capable of spreading their ideas “coming out” of the university, and sharing their analyses among ordinary people (Samuel and Thompson, 1990).

PH was recognized in the UK only in 1985 with a first international conference held at Ruskin College by Samuel. Ten years later, in 1996, the year of his death, Ruskin College launched the first Master's degree dedicated to PH in the UK. The activities carried out in the

two-year period of the Master's highlighted the highly spontaneous way of bringing the public closer to history, and sought to include everyone in reflections on British society that included analyzing the past. In fact, the course leveraged the traditional cornerstones of a British path to PH. When teaching or interacting with communities, Samuel adopted the Socratic method, to help his interlocutors articulate knowledge they were not aware they possessed. Students of Ruskin reflected on their personal relationship to history. This form of ego-history, consolidated with the use of specific techniques (Nora, 1987; Passerini and Geppert, 2002), was capable of focusing on and explaining the relationship between the self and history, the intersection between individual memory and history: Samuel's particular conception of the relationship between history and memory. In this, Samuel, and his academic legacy, clearly distinguished himself from Roy Rosenzweig's vision in the USA, which did not give collective memories an epistemological status such as that of history. Samuel tried to diversify ways of transmitting historical discourses on contemporary social issues. This venture was similar to the methods of a movie director such as Ken Loach, with his historic and committed cinema (Papadopoulos, 1999); or in the field of popular music, with his lyrics about the injustices of history, the storytelling of a musician such as Robert Wyatt (1985).

International Public History: Local Practices with Global Methods

It was in the UK that the movement was born, with its own methods for sharing knowledge and authority between the actors of the bottom-up process to making history with lower social classes, before blossoming so consistently through a great diversity of practices, not only dedicated to social activism, in the United States at the end of the 1970s. Outside these two countries, different conceptions of public/applied history through different paths made their way worldwide within Anglophone countries such as Canada and Australia, but also in South Africa (Ashton and Kean, 2009; Ashton and Trapeznik, 2019).

From the start of the PH movement in the USA, the question of an internationalization of PH has been raised. In 1980, the founder of PH in California, John Wesley Johnson, was invited to the first PH conference held in continental Europe, in Rotterdam. This was an Anglo-Dutch seminar of "applied historical studies" organized by the Economic and Social History Committee, Social Science Research Council (SSRC) of the UK, together with the new University of Rotterdam (Wesley Johnson, 1982; Sutcliffe, 1984, p. 7). The organizers were the urban historian Anthony Sutcliffe from the University of Sheffield, and historian and journalist Henk Van Dijk of the University of Rotterdam. They invited some historians from other countries to the seminar, including François Bedarida, Director of the newly born Institut d'Histoire du Temps Present in Paris (Torres, 2020).

We had to wait after 2010 for PH to really become a global phenomenon, spreading to all continents with greater or lesser success, and in various forms. In this, the birth in 2011 of the International Federation for Public History (IFPH) has been an asset (Adamek, 2010). After the birth of the IFPH, the IFPH Steering Committee worked to foster PH presence worldwide, in organizing international conferences. PH developed outside of English-speaking countries in the last ten years in continental Europe, South America and Asia. It has been supported by the birth of national associations: in Brazil in 2012,⁸ in Italy in 2016,⁹ and more recently in Japan (2019),¹⁰ Spain (2020),¹¹ and Australia (2021).¹²

International PH influenced the way in which history developed as a profession globally and in specific countries (Cauvin and Noiret, 2017; Gardner and Hamilton, 2017; Cauvin, 2018;

Dean and Etges, 2018; Ashton and Trapeznik, 2019). Also, specific journals took an essential role in developing the field worldwide. *The Public Historian* founded in 1979 at the UCSB, was the only PH academic journal until the foundation in 2007 of an open access journal with an international scope, the *Public History Review*, at the University of Technology in Sidney. In 2013, *Public History Weekly*, the first international PH BlogJournal, also open access, was founded in Switzerland. Finally, in 2018 appeared *International Public History*, the official organ of the IFPH.

What has to be stressed is that the name of the field varies worldwide. When the usage of history has a policy-oriented and political purpose, the term “applied history” is often used in the UK and elsewhere (Green, 2016). “Applied history” is translated in German as *Angewandte Geschichte* (Niesser and Tomann, 2014), with the idea that history serves policy-oriented activities. Based at the University of Jena, there is also an Applied European Contemporary History association which promotes the field. In 2002, a group of historians, belonging to the universities of London and Cambridge, founded an association called History and Policy with the purpose of “connecting historians, policymakers and the media.”¹³ They, in a way, took over the policy-oriented part of Raphael Samuel’s mission in a less radical and actively committed social and political framework, and also without the participation of interested communities. They pointed at the value of past experiences—the usability of different pasts—for solving contemporary questions.

In addition, in some countries such as Germany, the politics of history education, how history is used and transmitted in schools and their manuals, has become a relevant part of the PH field of activities and is called “public history of education” (Demantowsky, 2018; Carretero et al., 2017; Bandini and Oliviero, 2019). Sometimes the English terms are retained in other languages, such as in Italy, the Netherlands,¹⁴ and partially in Germany, because of the intellectual affiliation with the North American model of institutionalization. In Italy, the two words in English differentiate the study of the instrumental use of the past in the present to sustain political purposes, from the discipline of PH as a fieldwork of practices and methods. The English name was maintained with the intention of connecting with the field taught in American universities and to indicate a clear difference with the “public use of history” (*uso pubblico della storia*) for political-ideological purposes, a term introduced in Italy in 1993 (Gallerano, 1995).

More often the words are not translated into English. This happens in Hispanic countries and in Brazil (*história pública*) or in francophone countries (*histoire publique*). In Brazil in 2012 and in Japan in 2019, the intention is to avoid using English, sometimes seen as a “colonial language,” and to translate the canonical words to indicate the specific path of the discipline in these countries. Michihiro Okamoto, at the University of Tokyo, describes a specific path for the birth of the discipline in Japan, based on several conferences and projects organized in the country which opened the making of history to other actors, not only professional historians, influenced by the linguistic and visual turns that proposed not only written historical narratives (Okamoto, 2018).

TASK OR MISSION? IS IT POSSIBLE TO DEFINE PUBLIC HISTORY?

The need to define PH is constantly reiterated (Conard, 2018) and regularly debated (Cauvin, 2016, pp. 10–11; Nießer and Tomann, 2018). Jim Gardner and Paula Hamilton speak of the politics of defining PH. They focus on “doing” history. Working with the past is the principal task of PH that informs its definition: “The concept of practice is its central *raison d’être*. The verbs relating to history are what matter: the activity of doing, presenting, or making history in a range of forms for many different purposes and communicating it to multiple audiences or “publics” is the main characteristic” (Gardner and Hamilton, 2017, p. 1). The path to a definition of the field varied over time and in different continents depending on specific national contexts and journeys (Frisch, 2009, pp. 720–721). In Australia, in 2005, Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton wrote that “public history ... is an elastic term that can mean different things to different people, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.”¹⁵

Making PH means history in direct contact with the evolution of the mentality and sense of collective belonging of the different communities that coexist within the national space, and enhances the study of their identities and collective memories. PH is history made in the field, among people who produce testimonies of their own past. History is a way to reconstruct and make sense of something that is gone, and which is called “past,” using evidences that are still accessible or that can be reconstructed in our present. The difference between history and PH lies in the context of the kind of representation of the past chosen. Historians reconstruct the past in essays and books written mainly for their peers; public historians do so with the intention to interact and engage with their audience about it. To behave as a public historian means adding a public purpose to the reconstruction of the past. This process contributes to offering usable meanings and interpretations of past events in the present for doing history with different media within communities, which enhance their tangible and intangible heritages, and question their collective identities between history and memory.

PH consists of multidisciplinary collaborations and integrations between different professional languages. The product of a PH project—in other words, what emerges at the end of the working process—is very rarely to be traced back to a single historian. It covers many different forms of communication of the past: in a public park, a historical reconstruction (re-enactment), an urban restoration, a material or virtual exhibition, an archaeological site, even the creation of a website, a television product, a theatrical representation, or a documentary film. Processing the past in all these different contexts presupposes that historians engage and share their professional authority in collective behaviors with other disciplines and other professionals, and in interdisciplinary settings. Indeed, a PH project should credit all participants, as happens with the closing credits of a movie, when the public are already leaving the still dark theater. All this information would often be useful precisely to offer recognition to the various professionals who contributed to a PH project.

Nevertheless, defining PH is a very difficult task. PH has often been identified as transdisciplinary, as a “big tent” discipline. Knowing the past better is not enough: history must be delivered publicly, and with direct participation of the public. The adjective “public” attracts all the questioning. Therefore, this sub-field of history could be compared to the digital humanities field, often called by its practitioners an “umbrella field” which includes different sub-fields such as, for instance, digital history or digital PH. The international dimension of PH is about applying universal methods locally. Today PH is a glocal practice and discipline

(Cauvin and Noiret, 2017, pp. 26–27). As a result, local case studies have become comparable in their methods and practices globally.

A global definition of PH and of the social role of public historians could be the following: the discipline of PH aims at sharing a “public sense” of history for a better society, publicly aware of its past. PH implies that analyzing the past with and for different publics is an asset for the understanding of the present. Public historians aim at becoming important experts in interpreting the role of the past and of collective memories in our societies.

IDENTITY AND MEMORY AT THE CORE OF PUBLIC HISTORY

The influential American PH movement asserted that history should be alive and publicly useful within different communities that reflect on themselves and seek their own cultural and anthropological identity. In this sense, PH becomes a civic value and a public good in a plural society.

Building forms of history-telling within migrant communities, capturing their memories based on the social experience of migration, serve as instruments to negotiate individual and collective meanings and shape plural identities belonging to countries of origin and arrival. Such life story research and narrative is based on a transdisciplinary analytical perspective, with an overall focus on the mutable cultural role of past experiences in molding new identities and social categorizations (Lucchesi, 2019; Passerini, 2018; on South Africa, Escobedo and Kurzweily, 2021). Oral history interviews played a central role in contributing to the ethnographic methods used by public historians in fieldwork activities with migrants. As a consequence, it is not a euphemism to say that oral history practices well described by Brazilian public historians (Almeida and Rovai, 2011; Mauad et al., 2016; Rodrigues and Trindade Borges, 2021), influenced PH methods from its origin (Woods, 1989; Hamilton and Shopes, 2008).

The reconstruction within concerned communities of their individual and collective memories is a core PH practice. It is often part of a cosmopolitan approach to marginalized communities and ethnic/gender groups with whom history and memory is dealt with on a local scale. Access to all peoples’ history, be they migrants, first nations, religious or linguistic minorities and local ethnicities in all continents is a basic human right worldwide. The role of PH is to help rediscover and cultivate collective memories enlightened by the knowledge of history. It implies the capacity to rewrite controversial periods in history in more consensual ways and to process mourning, consolidating memories through historical research and in some cases, creating truth commissions, because active collective memories are not compatible with a mythization of the past (Bevernage and Wouters, 2018; Hettiarachchi and Santhiago, 2021). Memory has to be studied and interpreted by historians, and is not a form of blindness when only history brings us the truth about the past (Noiret, 2011).

A key issue of today’s difficult process of European integration is the capacity to welcome, by consensus, the divided European memories of the post-World War II history in Eastern European countries that suffered communist totalitarianism until 1989, compared to Western countries liberated from Nazi fascism in 1945. The European Parliament narrative of the House of European History in Brussels (2017) has been challenged by the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, founded by Eastern European countries because the permanent exhibition did not show enough of the crimes of the Soviet occupation (Hrynko et

al., 2017). The perceptions of the post-war period in collective memories are highly divergent between Eastern and Western Europe (Kesteloot, 2018).

Together with other social scientists, the task of public historians is also to analyse the memories of events in the present and actively focus on their changing perception in different historical contexts over centuries, keeping their memory alive (Duby and Nora, 2005). Their persistence nurtures intangible heritage and shapes the definition of the concept of identity investigated by Levy-Strauss (1995). Between 1986 and 1996, the Urban Identity in Tuscany multidisciplinary proto-PH project, at the European University Institute in Florence, enquired about the persistence today of collective memories of the medieval past (Carle, 1998). Based on ethnographic methods that engaged with the local population, this study of centennial civic and popular traditions investigated the permanence of collective memories inside and outside the walls of six small medieval towns from the 15th to the 20th centuries.

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs wrote, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* in 1925; and Marc Bloch, in the *Revue de Synthèse historique*, and as a historian, wrote a long review of the book, also to draw a dividing line between the two professions in looking at collective and individual memories (Bloch, 1925, p. 77). Bloch was very interested in learning about a theory of collective memory based, as Halbwachs did, on collective psychology. According to Halbwachs, a sociology of memory was made up of two aspects: how the social entered individual memories, and the study of the “*mémoire collective au sens propre du mot, c’est-à-dire la conservation des souvenirs communs à tout un groupe humain et leur influence sur la vie des sociétés*” (Halbwachs, 1925, p. 199). Bloch agreed with Halbwachs that individual memories were only one aspect of a group’s memory (Bloch, 1925, p. 76). Halbwachs identified three different types of collective memory: the “family memory,” that of religious groups, and finally, that of social classes. As a medievalist, Bloch argued that “custom,” a complex construction of rules and practices over time, was missing in Halbwachs’s categories. Therefore, it was worth studying how historical processes impacted changes in collective memories. Historians had to contextualize Halbwachs’s sociological memory categories over time (Halbwachs, 1925, p. 77). Bloch proposed to study the presence of collective mentalities in social classes, build on the representations of traditions daily updated. This was the missing piece of reflection in the “*cadres sociaux de la mémoire*.”

Bloch anticipated what is a core practice of PH: the study of traditions within local communities, and the struggle against communities’ myths when aiming at a memorial reconstruction. According to Bloch, older community members have to actively transfer their knowledge of the past to the younger generations. To help in achieving this process, the mediation of “memory professionals” is needed. Today, public historians may achieve such a task sharing their authority within communities.

HISTORY WITH A SHARED AUTHORITY: PH AS CITIZEN’S SCIENCE OF THE PAST¹⁶

Michael Frisch’s concept of a “shared authority” approach to the past with communities, considers that communities would not be directly empowered, historians having shared their own expertise with them (Frisch, 1990, 2017). “Sharing authority” applies when public historians agree to split and divide their professional expertise, because they practice forms of engagement, trustworthy dialogues, and participation for and with their non-expert audiences, but

keep in mind the guidelines of the project and their public goals. It is easier to accept a shared authority between experts, especially in transdisciplinary contexts with other technology professionals and social scientists and their multiple forms of expertise about the past and memory which actively participate in the making of narratives.

PH implies that they are different forms of knowledge coexisting within communities: what people know (or think to know) about their past and what experts studied about their history. The role of the public historian is then twofold. They have to take account, critically and in their context, of available public knowledge and myth. They also have to share and communicate their own knowledge, and how to apply professional skills and methods to the public knowledge. Doing PH is always about a tension existing between the role played by communities of knowledge (ethnic, gendered, sexual, linguistic, and so on) and the public historian's active role in contributing to their interpretation. Such an interactive process of history-making, sharing an authority with others, is needed to build a community narrative (Noiret, 2022a, 2022b).

To do so, public historians can share part of their authority as experts of the analysis of the past, what is also called in citizen's social sciences a form of "mutual education" between experts and their communities, in defining the kind of relationship that can be built in a social knowledge-making process. A qualified expert such as Jim Gardner in the USA does not suggest that public historians should accept giving up or losing their authority and "radically trust" the role of the public: "historians should not abdicate their responsibilities privileging the public's voice" (Gardner, 2020, p. 61; see also Gardner, 2010). It is preferred that, when historians are working with an audience (which is not always the case in PH endeavours), they should share their authority without losing control of the role of experts.

Such popular access to the creation of historical knowledge, especially in the digital realm, has been defined as a form of citizen science, a "democratization" of the making of history part of the global emergence of a digital open science promoted by and for the citizens.¹⁷ Newly born digital sources do not belong to traditional archives, but to the potential participation of all citizens in the making of history in the present and on the web, with their own memories and documents. The shift towards the digital has ultimately contributed to the development of digital PH as a form of "history." In this context, sharing authority fostered the possibility of co-creating history contents and storytelling. This process of doing history became particularly useful in multimedia PH projects launched with and for communities. Collaboration between the public and history professionals indeed encouraged, even in the digital world, the use of shared authority practices for the creation, management, dissemination, and public use of content generated directly by the communities interested in their history. Public historians and curators active in memory institutions, galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM), understood that the knowledge which came from below, directly from the citizens with their collective and individual memories, had to be collected and channeled, sharing their authority, into the construction of applied digital PH projects.

DIGITAL PUBLIC HISTORY

The developments of Web 2.0 interactive practices fostered a rapid and global transformation of the role of the public (Noiret, 2013). Furthermore, the semantic web (Web 3.0) and interoperable data coding languages through international description standards fostered new

communication processes for the digital content. The web has become “social”: web users as passive readers of someone else’s content have become direct actors and producers of their own history through now easily built websites and social media. In 2001, with the creation of Wikipedia, and between 2004 and 2006 with the birth of the first social networks (MySpace, Flickr, Facebook, YouTube), the discipline of PH was deeply transformed. Applied collaborative practices that had characterized its birth in the 1970s were moved into the global virtual world and open to everyone, promoting their own “social self” (Floridi, 2014) made up of individual memories, documents, and narratives. Such a citizens’ quest to become direct protagonists of the past in the present had become socially ubiquitous and global.

At the turn of the millennium, first Jan van Dijk in 1994 (Dijk, 2020) and then Manuel Castells in 1996 (Castells, 1996) described a new networked society in which mass digital media had empowered different social actors and publics, remodeling social organizations and communication through the digital. In just a few years as Director of the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University (George Mason University, 2007; Goodman, 2007), Roy Rosenzweig, a social historian with a passion for digital media since the invention of the CDROM in the 1980s (Rosenzweig, 1995), was able to orient the CHNM to produce numerous seminal digital PH projects. Digital PH projects integrated PH traditional methods engaging with publics, with the request for direct participation of the users in the creation of digital archives based on individual and collective memories.

On September 11, 2001 a global event took place that allowed the testing of these new forms of collaboration between experts and the public in the digital realm. The terrorist attacks on American soil were documented by their witnesses. The 9/11DigitalArchive¹⁸ collected over 150 000 digital documents on this epochal event, “allowing ordinary Americans to literally make their own history” (Sparrow, 2006). Started in January 2002, this first-born digital archive, based on crowdsourcing methods and collective participation, became the first large “invented” digital archive deposited at the Library of Congress in 2003. Since then, and in all countries, PH has been irremediably and radically transformed. The past and the present, as time categories, have come closer together, and sometimes mixed (Olivier and Tamm, 2019).

Today, numerous catastrophic events that hit communities (wars, civil wars, terrorist attacks, earthquakes, hurricanes, pandemics, and so on) are now documented worldwide through crowdsourcing practices aiming at collecting everyone’s testimonies. The 2011 earthquake at Fukushima in Japan and the consequent nuclear catastrophe have been documented directly by the affected communities.¹⁹ More recently, the many worldwide Covid-19 memory projects document worldwide on local dimensions how targeted communities lived during the pandemic.²⁰

The new digital sources and digital PH projects with the participation of citizens in the making of history in the present, and on the web, have ultimately contributed to the development of a public science of history, a digital PH or, in other words, a new citizen’s history. “Digital PH allows the combination of academic knowledge of history with modern digital communication practices and to engage with the past facilitating user-generated content and authority sharing with involved communities and publics” (Noiret et al., 2022).

The two main and recurring methodological methods in PH practices—shared authority and user-generated content (or crowdsourcing)—have been further shaped by the digital turn affecting the historical sciences. The possibility of crowdsourcing documents, creating new forms of storytelling, has developed greatly within digital multimedia PH projects (Leon, 2017). What has revolutionized the public practice of history online is the fact that profes-

sionals (archivists and historians) are no longer the only ones to act in the virtual world and to produce, or use, digital documentation to carry out research, write history, communicate reflections about the past, and engage with online communities, even if it is not done without many criticisms and the undermining of expert knowledge and truthful narratives.

One of the consequences of the so-called democratization of communication processes, and the capacity to foster a “social self” through widespread public diffusion of digital social media, is the promotion of alternative narratives about the past. Social media fostered direct attacks on what had been, up to then, a social legitimate and scientific recognition of the value of science and of professional research and scientific output. New digital media 2.0 had given everyone with a computer and an Internet connection a voice bypassing expert knowledge which was no longer able to control and validate the message (Nichols, 2017). New social media, especially the web that integrates all other media, deeply changed the way individuals and communities add documents, memories, comments, and narratives, allowing everyone to become a historian, without the need of professional historians (Jensen, 2009, p. 44).²¹ These digital transformations affected social behaviors in the digital infosphere and raised important critical issues about the truthfulness of easily spread information. With easy mass access to communication media, it became easier, for instance, to promote negationist views of the Jewish Holocaust (Criscione et al., 2004). Alternative, unscientific narratives of the past in the digital world rapidly spread uncontrolled in the infosphere.

Notwithstanding these critical issues, the process of history-telling through different media reordered the epistemological priorities of public historians in the digital age. The transformation of traditional history-making in the new digital age put at the center of a new attention the concept of “audience” that has always been essential for the practice of PH: “the public has a major role to play in shaping the work of public historians” (Dean, 2018, p. 3).

CONCLUSIONS

A public historian does not renounce any of the scientific methods and the wealth of practices that made up his profession. They get involved in the public arena by proposing ideas, plans, summaries, exhibitions, stories, paths, analysis, reports that push them to the forefront of the media to respond personally to the social “needs for history.” More prosaically, public historians follow the understanding of what the public and private institutions that employ them think these needs are, in function of their respective audiences. Public historians’ practices are aimed at helping to design, correct, and direct public and private policies, to produce market studies based on the knowledge of history, support legal initiatives, foster urban and cultural heritage preservation, work for private companies, enquire into historical ecosystems for supporting environmental and conservation policies, curate exhibitions and museums, manage material culture evidence, orchestrate forms of re-enactments of the past and “living history,” interpret civic and public commemorations; all activities capable of fostering the awareness of the past among the public (Benson et al., 1986).

The social role of history, its descent into the public arena, the use of history with a public purpose in mind, and its diffusion in the media, these different ways used to interact publicly between public historians and consumers of history influenced new ways for bringing history into present discussions about the past (De Groot, 2016). Asking ourselves, as Rosenzweig and Thelen did in 1998, what kind of past is being represented in our societies when entire com-

munities are in need of history, and being able to raise the level of public awareness of history, goes hand-in-hand with the need to identify the type of audience that is being addressed. Both issues are perhaps at the core of public historians' professional orientations.

An important challenge today, and for the future, is not institutional or pedagogical: it is about the need to engage in civic campaigns for a better public knowledge of history, against the proliferation of the fake narratives about the past that foster public clashes between divisive or invented collective memories, outside of a historical and critical analysis. In many countries, memory battlefields are part of the history of the present times. What is needed is to include conflicting collective memories in an open, public debate. This would foster a better understanding of how nations and civil societies developed against the backdrop of their complex and often violent pasts.

NOTES

1. All web resources were active on July 17, 2021.
2. "The primary difference between public and academic history is in the area of communication. In the audiences that we attempt to reach and in the products that we use to convey our scholarship to those audiences," wrote Philip Scarpino, Co-Director of the Graduate Program in Public History at Purdue, Indiana University (Scarpino, 1993).
3. *International Coalition of Sites of Conscience*. Available at: <https://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/home/>.
4. Now see also NCPH, What is Public History? Available at: <https://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/>.
5. The terms "applied history" and "proto-public history" had been used to refer to periods even before World War I.
6. History Associations with a Special Interest in Public History. Available at: <https://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/additional-resources/>.
7. Resources for Public Historians. Available at: <https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/professional-life/resources-for-public-historians>.
8. Rede Brasileira de História Pública. Available at: <https://historiapublica.com.br/a-rede>.
9. Associazione Italiana di Public History. Available at: <http://www.aiph.it>.
10. Japanese Association of Public History. Available at: <https://public-history9.webnode.jp/>.
11. Asociación Española de Historia Pública. Available at: <https://www.historiapublica.es>.
12. Australian and Aotearoa NZ Public History Network. Available at: <https://phn.edu.au/>.
13. History and Policy. Available at: <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/whatwedo.html>.
14. University of Amsterdam. Master in Public History. Available at: <https://www.uva.nl/en/discipline/history/specialisations/public-history.html>.
15. Australian Centre for Public History, 8 October 2005. *Internet Archive*. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20050208103632/http://www.publichistory.uts.edu.au:80/>.
16. University of Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH). PH as Citizen's Science of the Past (PHAS). Available at: <https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/projects/public-history-new-citizen-science-past-phas>.
17. EU Commission (2013, 2017). Green Paper on Citizen Science. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/citizen-science>.
18. CHNM (2002–). The September 11 Digital Archive. Available at: <http://911digitalarchive.org/>.
19. Japan Disasters Digital Archive (JDA) (2015–). Available at: <https://jdarchive.org/>. Regroups more than 600 collections of multimedia data dealing with the impact of the March 2011 Tsunami and the nuclear catastrophe in Japan.
20. International Federation for Public History and Made by Us. You are the primary source: COVID-19 Story-Collecting Initiatives. Available at: <https://ifph.hypotheses.org/3276>.

21. “Everyone a historian,” the expression revisited by Roy Rosenzweig, came from the title of the 1931 famous lecture by Carl L. Becker, President of the AHA, entitled “Everyman his Own Historian.”

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