

## Call for Papers: Museums and Their Publics at Sites of Conflicted History

International conference

13-15 March 2017

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw, Poland

Museums of history face a particular challenge in societies that have experienced conflict and violence in recent memory, radical geopolitical and ideological change, and socio-economic and technological challenges. Multiple and rival historical perspectives characterize the dynamics of public memory in these societies. Differing narratives of the past are told either in parallel, or appear in open conflict with each other, while memories still hidden and silent await their midwives for their public articulation at the right juncture.

Divided memories are characteristic of post-communist Europe and in other regions that have experienced totalitarian regimes, wars, mass violence (ethnic cleansing, population transfers), radical border changes, and other disruptions. The present day brings additional tensions: liberal democratic societies in the West are called on to respond to global crises, the massive population shifts that ensue, and creation of new national and ethnic minorities within multinational and ethnonational states. In some societies, attempts at expanding democracy and human rights, through such mechanisms as truth and reconciliation commissions, bring new waves of difficult knowledge into public circulation, challenging long-held national narratives enshrined both on the walls of major museums and in the minds of many visitors.

The purpose of this conference is to explore these issues in relation to the changing character and role of museums today. POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw is a prime site for such a conference, given the complex history it presents. While seeking to offer an authoritative historical account, without it being authoritarian, museums such as POLIN offer an open narrative in multiple voices and invite the public to play an active part in interpreting historical processes and events. The exhibition itself, using a variety of media, offers an experience that is at once thought provoking, sensory, emotional, and memorable. Projects and events such as performances, workshops, debates, and lectures invite the public to add their experiences and voices. Curating historical narratives is thus a collaborative, inclusive, and dynamic process.

Museums have a responsibility to those whose story they tell, as well as to their publics and stakeholders. As institutions of public history, they aim to build lasting relationships with their audiences, both local and international. This is especially important in post-communist and post-conflict societies, where museums can play important roles in building a robust civil society and in bringing history – and historical debate – into the public domain.

The conference will explore the role of museums in negotiating new public histories in societies in transition, as old narratives and historical policies are questioned and stories once silenced are given voice. Of special interest is how the historical narratives constructed in museums help to shape new social relations in a dynamically changing present.

Scholars in various disciplines (anthropology, sociology, history, memory studies, museology, art history, and political science, among others) and museum professionals, including curators and museum educators, are invited to discuss the role of museums in negotiating contested histories in relation to their publics.

Send abstracts, maximum 300 words, and short bio to: [GEOP@polin.pl](mailto:GEOP@polin.pl)

**Deadline: 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2016.**

**Academic Committee:**

Professor Bruce Altshuler (New York University)

Professor Dorota Folga-Januszewska (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw)

Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (POLIN Museum, Chair)

Dr. Gabriel Koureas (Birkbeck University of London)

Dr. hab. Iwona Kurz (University of Warsaw)

Professor Erica Lehrer (Concordia University)

Dr. Małgorzata Pakier (POLIN Museum, Conference Convener)

**Organizers:**



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