

Workshop “Experiencing local history”

Kwidzyn (Pomerania, Poland)

September 2016

General information

Project deals with two main issues. First is the multicultural past of a region of Powiśle (located in Pomerania, northern Poland), a post-migrative community. Second is family transmission of the past, combining a variety of narratives. Students will have a chance not only to read or learn about the cross-section of different narratives, but also to personally experience it and discover it in their family and neighborhood.

Workshop is designed for 10-12 people, aging 18-19 (2nd - 3rd class in high school), living in the city of Kwidzyn and attending a school there. Preferably, the group participants should be divided equally in terms of gender.

The project is based upon a methodology of “entangled history” delivered by Stiftung Kreisau and Fundacja Krzyżowa. The methodology embraces the non-formal history education among young people and is dedicated to a great extent to topics related with crossing historical narrative, often conflicting or even contradictory.

The main goal is to learn the dialogue despite differences and an ability to see different perspectives when talking about the past and historical events. All acquired methods base upon personal involvement, fieldwork and direct contact with witnesses.

Project involves researching local oral history. Oral history becomes more and more recognizable way to gather information regarding XXth century history and also to a great extent - local histories. Especially in postcommunist countries, oral history is perceived as 'civic history', as opposed to state version of the past. Moreover, it enables to discover history from the view of minorities, often excluded from the dominant narrative.

Moreover, an important inspiration to develop the project was the idea of an inhabitant becoming a tourist in her/his own place of living. This means

exploring once or more own city from the perspective of a tourist, doing sightseeing and visiting less known places. It enables to more in-depth understanding of everyday space and see it's deeper social context and historical development.

Methods

1. Borders change, memory stays

Proposed method has been developed especially for post-migrative communities (Polish Recovered Territories), which experienced a massive social change after WWII due to migrations to an extraordinary scale.

The main goal is to gain an ability to notice and deconstruct the main (dominant) historical narrative and marginal ones. Moreover, fieldwork aims to create a deeper understanding of surroundings, historical sites and their relations with historical narratives. Another aspect discussed during the workshop is propaganda and it's associations, and ability to 'read' the propagandist narrative using visual materials, such as old posters and postcards.

During the workshop, young people had an ability to discover the space of their place of living from different perspectives, representing both pre- and postwar inhabitants of the city of Kwidzyn. Fieldwork will be preceded by short, theoretical introduction, delivering crucial knowledge to the participants. Materials used during this short presentations include both historical knowledge, but also propaganda materials and some demography.

Subsequently, participants will be asked to depict and describe selected places from previously chosen perspective and try to develop a coherent story basing on their findings. The fieldwork is also to familiarize young people with less known historical sites in their own city.

The last element of this method are presentations and discussion, how the same place can be 'read' using different perspectives.

2. Oral history for beginners

This method aims to bring participants closer to histories of their own families – especially with those people, who personally experienced post-war migrations – using oral history background. By using this method every young person will have an ability to explore micro-histories in their local community in Kwidzyn through the perspective of family storytelling. Consequently, the method is designed to show the variety and multicultural dimension of Kwidzyn local community. This is due to the confrontation of different perspectives and historical experiences.

The task is to conduct a talk with member of own family – a witness of history – and recording it, using either video or audio recorder. The fieldwork will be preceded by a short introduction to familiarize participants with the method, its ethical aspect, to learn what is oral history and how it can be applied. Moreover, the instructor will emphasize the role of additional materials, such as photographs, documents etc. and encourage the participants to gather them and later present.

This method will also end up with presentations session, where every participant will have an opportunity to relate to the biography of member of his/her family and to confront it with other historical experiences.

3. Same event, different stories

The final method, comprising both previously described, is a critical outlook on the same event - post-war migrations - and to discover the heterogeneity of the process.

Participants - already familiarides with different memorial sites, family stories and propaganda - will work in groups aiming to deliver a coherent story regarding the past. Finally, every group will present mail obstacles towards creating a common history and similarities between narratives.