

City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts

Setting Methodological Frameworks

ECHOES International Workshop

Warsaw 14-15 September 2018

The *City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts: Setting Methodological Frameworks* workshop jointly organized by the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw and the Museum of Warsaw came to a successful conclusion on September 15 after two days of intensive work.

During this workshop, members of the ECHOES project met with museum practitioners and external experts to discuss the premises behind the research to be carried out at the Amsterdam Museum, the Shanghai History Museum, and the Museum of Warsaw in the next two years.

The workshop commenced with opening remarks, made by Jan Ifversen (Aarhus University, Project vice-PI) and Project PI, John Oldfield (University of Hull), about the aims and scope of the ECHOES project. After these preliminary comments, Elizabeth Buettner (University of Amsterdam) and Joanna Wawrzyniak (University of Warsaw, WP3 leader) went on to introduce the *City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts* Work Package.



Elizabeth Buettner and Joanna Wawrzyniak introduce the *City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts* Work Package.

Those who participated in the first session discussed the concepts of multiple colonialism, postcolonialism and decolonization. In his presentation, Prof. Oldfield presented colonialism as a global phenomenon rooted in Europe's economic expansion and driven by a paternalistic, racist and oppressive philosophy. The history of such colonialism can, however, be told in many different ways, one of these being to concentrate on cities and communities that were occupied by more than one European power, and that therefore experienced multiple colonizations. Furthermore, Prof. Oldfield suggested that studying former sites of multiple colonizations will allow us to better understand what heritage means in different settings and for marginalized subjects. While Prof. Oldfield's paper mostly focused on colonization outside Europe, Dr. Wawrzyniak and Małgorzata Grajper (University of Warsaw) analysed Central and Eastern Europe as an example of "internal colonialism". After identifying various postcolonial approaches being applied to Central and Eastern Europe, the speakers considered the possible applications of the "decolonial option" (Walter D. Mignolo) to the specific nature of the Polish case.

The panel was followed by comments from Elizabeth Buettner, Jan Ifversen and Tomasz Zarycki. Prof. Buettner commenced by reflecting on the multiple uses of the word "colonialism", which is nowadays also used metaphorically to describe unequal power relations not only between countries, but also social groups. Prof. Buettner suggested that studying how the "other" is constructed can also be useful for understanding political and social dynamics within the European Union, where Central and Eastern European countries are often categorized as "others" and not "fully European". In his comments, Prof. Ifversen pointed out that the two preceding papers had also successfully showed that Europe, rather than being a geographical entity, is composed of discourses. Recent migrations have made it even clearer how difficult it is to draw borders around Europe in a literal geographic and discursive manner. Finally, Prof. Zarycki (University of Warsaw) reminded the audience of the central role played by economic dependencies and modern-day forms of neo-colonialism in the creation of compensatory myths and understanding of historical heritage in Central and Eastern Europe.



Saxon Square in Warsaw, one of the examples of difficult heritage analysed by Łukasz Bukowiecki and Magdalena Wróblewska during the workshop.

Those who participated in the second session, which was titled *Cities and Multiple (De)colonizations: New Trends in Cultural Heritage*, analysed how the three cities at the centre of ECHOES Work Package 3 – Shanghai, Amsterdam and Warsaw – manage and practise their colonial heritage today. Professor Du Xiaofan (Fudan University) talked about the conservation of the historic district of Tilanqiao, which the Shanghai Municipal Government has designated as a historical protected area preserving the memory of the Jewish refugees who lived there during the Second World War. Csilla Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke (University of Amsterdam) analysed contemporary de-colonial heritage practices in Amsterdam. Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke argued that while Amsterdam is considered one of the most tolerant cities in Europe, it still needs to deal with the complexities of its colonial past. Finally, Łukasz Bukowiecki (University of Warsaw) and Magdalena Wróblewska (Museum of Warsaw/University of Warsaw) discussed two case studies of sites of dissonant heritage in Warsaw – Saxon Square and the Palace of Culture and Science – using the ECHOES key analytical concepts of removal, repression, reframing and reemergence. When commenting on this panel, Britta Timm Knudsen (Aarhus University, Leader of WP1, Theory and Methodology) posed several direct questions relating to the content of the papers, thereby drawing connections

between these three case studies and comparing these examples with other cases in different countries.

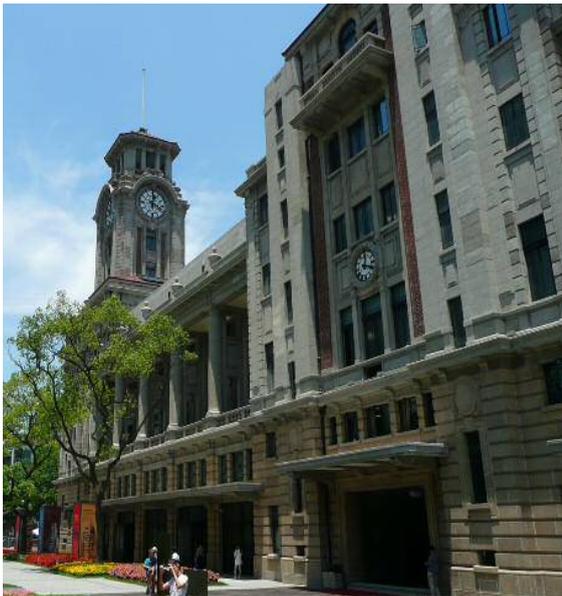


The Cities and Multiple (De)colonizations: New Trends in Cultural Heritage Session

The second day of the workshop opened with a discussion about the most recent trends in the development of city museums in present-day Europe and East Asia. Joana Sousa Monteiro, Director of the Museum of Lisbon and Chair of ICOM-CAMOC, spoke about how city museums, like the one in Lisbon, need to deal with the double challenge of reflecting on the ongoing migration waves that are creating new multicultural societies while also integrating post-colonial narratives into both permanent and temporary exhibitions. Zheng Yi (Fudan University) reflected on the case of China, showing how city museums have become agents of “soft power” and created new economic and educational opportunities for citizens. Ewa Klekot, one of the curators of Museum of Warsaw’s new permanent exhibition, drew attention in her comments to differences between “economic” and “soft” powers and invited to more reflection on inclusive role of museums.

The discussion on city museums continued into the following session, during which representatives of the city museums of Shanghai, Amsterdam and Warsaw discussed how their institutions have been tackling the issue of colonial heritage and de-colonization in their new permanent exhibitions.

Professor Lu Jiansong (Fudan University) showed how the *Modern Shanghai* exhibition illustrates European colonial influence on Shanghai's culture, economy and institutional life. Imara Limon (Amsterdam Museum) explained how curators are trying to address more diverse audiences and challenge well-established historical narratives in temporary exhibitions and through guided tours. In her presentation of the Museum of Warsaw, Dr Magdalena Wróblewska concentrated on the role of the objects of heritage in the new permanent exhibition, which challenges the historical narratives that are guiding the exhibitions in other Warsaw museums.



Two of the museums discussed during the workshop: The Shanghai History Museum and The Museum of Warsaw.

The last session addressed the methodology of the ECHOES project. The key categories of the project – re-emergence, repression, removal and reframing – were discussed by two scholars from the *Theory and Methodology* Work Package (WP1), Christoffer Kølvråa (Aarhus University) and Britta Timm Knudsen. All the participants were invited to share their comments and input. There was a general consensus that the categories are a very useful intervention in the field of heritage studies. The participants shared their comments on how to broaden these categories' scope and increase their utility as heuristic tools, not only for researchers but also for practitioners. In addition, experts from two other H2020 heritage projects: deputy co-ordinator of the CoHERE project, Susannah Eckersley (Newcastle University) and Zofia Wóycicka (Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin) from the UNREST project

provided the ECHOES team with insightful feedback on potential directions for future research. Susannah Eckersley reminded session participants that “The dialogue between the theoretical and the empirical is crucial to analysis of museums, where the process of collecting, exhibiting, displaying and transmitting is in itself always also a process of theorization”. She also urged the participants to reflect upon how to make their research useful for museum staff and audiences.

The workshop closed with a visit to the Museum of Warsaw guided by curator and project member Magdalena Wróblewska. The tour presented an opportunity for the ECHOES team to familiarize themselves with the collection of one of the city museums involved in WP3 while also discussing the challenges curators have encountered while attempting to break through conventional perspectives of urban and national history. Similar issues were discussed during the curatorial tour of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN given the following day by Joanna Fikus (Head of the Exhibition Department).



The curatorial tour of the History of Polish Jews POLIN given by Joanna Fikus (Head of the Exhibition Department).

In conclusion, this workshop allowed the members of the ECHOES team to get to know each other, debate methodological issues related to WP3 and set an agenda for future initiatives.