

The Italian Public History Manifesto

What is Public History?

Public History (in Italian, “*storia pubblica*”) is a field of the historical sciences. Historians who adhere to Public History conduct activities related to research and communication outside academic circles, in the public sector as well as in the private sector, with and for different audiences.

It is also a new university research and teaching area which aims at the formation of Public Historians.

Who are Italian Public Historians?

Public Historians work in cultural institutions, museums, archives, libraries, media, in the cultural and the tourism industry, in schools, and are engaged in cultural volunteering and social promotion and in all fields where the knowledge of the past is required to work with and for different audiences.

Likewise, also academic historians who have chosen Public History as a research and teaching subject are Public Historians, as those who make history interacting with audiences outside the academic community (history applied outside the university is sometimes called "third mission", after teaching and research).

How was AIPH born?

The Italian Association of Public History (*Associazione Italiana di Public History, AIPH*) was founded in 2016 with the support of the *International Federation for Public History (IFPH)* and of the Central Council for Historical Studies (*Giunta Centrale per gli Studi Storici*).

It has held its first national congress in June 2017 in Ravenna, where the steering committee of the Association was elected.

Purpose

Amongst others, purposes of the AIPH are:

- the promotion of historical knowledge and of the methodologies of historical research with different audiences, encouraging multidisciplinary dialogue;
- the valorisation of practices and experiences that focus on the active involvement of groups and communities, even in the digital world;

AIPH - Associazione Italiana di Public History

- the promotion and valorisation of innovative and high-quality researches, whose results are obtained through participative practices and methodologies that may consent the emergence of new documents.
- to define and share professional and academic best practices, including standards for evaluating Public History scholarship;
- to provide to the professional growth and training of Public Historians who work outside academic circles, with professional expertise regarding the methodologies of historical research and of the teaching and the communication of history;
- the development of Public History as a new academic discipline;
- the contrast to the “abuses of history”, meant as the practices of mystification of the past in order to manipulate public opinion;
- the promotion of the Italian historical, material and immaterial cultural heritage, in all its forms
- the provision of professional skills, where history as critical knowledge and the methodologies of historical research are necessary for the resolution of today’s issues

Why is Public History a resource?

The development of a full and conscious citizenship passes through a widespread awareness of the past, that allows to overcome the fears and prejudices that are multiplying in the contemporary world.

Public History practices offer occasions and tools for the critical comprehension of historical contexts and of present processes, helping to confront their complexity avoiding resentment-ridden solutions, or resolutions induced by alleged “identitarian clashes”. Public History is a precious resource for social cohesion, promoting comprehension and the encounter between people of different provenience, of different generations and with sometimes conflicting memories.

Furthermore, Public History supports the economic development of key sectors of our country, in particular in the fields of cultural industry and cultural tourism, preserving and valorising our extraordinary cultural heritage.

Public Historians, as professional historians, can also give a considerable contribution in the administrative and legislative sphere, providing professional consulting activities in the public and private spheres - such as, for example, those related to the government of the territory or in legal disputes that concern the territorial communities.

The International discipline and the Italian tradition

The choice of the English term “Public History” is motivated by the explicit intention to refer to a vast international movement and to a discipline that has its origins in the late seventies in the Anglo-Saxon world. It also underlines the novelty of this professional proposal in our country, without the ambiguities that a literal translation in Italian in "storia pubblica" could have created, as it is close to the often instrumental concept of public use of history ("uso pubblico della storia").

The acknowledgement and the ties with important Italian traditions are explicit. In our country there are many cultural institutions that can proudly claim a long activity of civil commitment and of history practices in the public and with local communities, and that have contributed to innovating with originality the forms of communication of historical knowledge.

In Italy, moreover, both the lesson of oral historians - with their reflections on the concept of "shared authority", on the value of individual and collective memories and on the processes of their construction - and the lesson of microhistory, that has profoundly innovated historiography starting from the study of circumscribed territorial realities, are essential for Public History. Finally, we cannot forget Italy's unique experience in managing and enhancing its historical, archival and artistic heritage, unique in the world in terms of architecture, landscape and archaeology.

In conclusion

Public Historians strive to ensure that the results and the methodologies of historiographical research are known by a wider public and experiment with practices of communication and research that can also lead to new and original developments in historical knowledge through interaction with the public.

It is essential for Public Historians to consider the public, whether specialized or not, both as privileged interlocutors and as potential protagonists of original research practices, contributing to the restitution of a central role to historians and history in the interpretation of contemporary society.

(English translation by Stella Molina)