

## Public History as Collective Action

In this paper, I argue that public history is best understood in terms of collective intentionality, which in turn explains a certain type of collective action. I define public history as a complex of shared representations of the past, within a society, that are sustained by institutions such as memorials, toponymic commissions and public schools curricula. This definition of public history rests on a certain conception of the interaction between institutions and individual representations and has, on my account, two distinct collective intentionality dimensions. First, public history can be understood as a set of collective beliefs and second, as a set of collective intentions.

In the first part of the paper, I argue that beliefs and intentions concerning public history cannot be accounted for in individual summative terms. It is best conceptualized as collective beliefs and as collective intentions. I flesh out my argument in this section by pointing to three features of public history as collective intentionality. Those features are 1. the idea that public history acts as a coordinating factor in certain circumstances of political action, 2. the normativity of public history, 3. The idea that public history produces a collective subject. I argue that these are collective intentionality features and that they provide helpful theoretical insights on the ontology and the epistemology of public history and of historical representations.

In the second part of the paper, I develop schematically the thesis that this conception of public history as collective intentionality helps us to understand a species of political action which involves both the *production* and the *use* of historical representations by certain groups to achieve certain goals. It is in this section that I connect collective intentionality, change in historical representations and social change. Dwelling on the three points of the first section, I develop three main arguments related to the philosophy of collective action. First, that public history as collective intentionality acts as a coordinating factor, for different groups in different situations. I draw examples from two types of domestic political situations: first, from normal conditions of democratic deliberation and second, from extreme conditions of regime instability and post civil conflict transitions. The second argument is that public history as collective intentionality is normative in the sense that it restraints (in an arbitrary or non-arbitrary way) the possible courses of political action and institutional change. The third argument is that public history is an epistemologically essential element both for the self-understanding of a group's members and for the recognition of the group by other groups.

Finally, I sketch a few consequences of the idea of public history as collective action for political theory. I focus on two sets of implications. The first set concerns the conception of groups and of the political subject that is implied by this conception. This position, I argue, is consistent with a socio-political conception of groups and does not necessarily imply an ethnic or essentialist conception of groups. The second set of implications connects to the way contemporary political theory conceives historical and cultural justice. I argue that there are good reasons, grounded on this conception of public history and on principles of justice, to foster participation in the production of public history without thereby adopting a relativist or a socio-constructivist stance in epistemology of history.