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COMMUNITY MUSEUMS
A PROPOSITION FOR HISTORY EDUCATION
/
ΜΟΥΣΕΙΑ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΤΩΝ
ΜΙΑ ΠΡΟΤΑΣΗ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ
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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το παρόν άρθρο παρουσιάζει τα πρώτα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας που πραγματοποιήθηκε ως μέρος του ερευνητικού προγράμματος «Αφηγούμενοι ιστορίες των ανθρώπων μας: Μουσεία Κοινοτήτων και Ιστορική Εκπαίδευση», του οποίου κύριος στόχος ήταν να συμβάλει στην οργάνωση και την εκπαιδευτική φυσιογνωμία του Κοινοτικού Μουσείου (MUPE) της πόλης Curitiba, πρωτεύουσας της πολιτείας Paraná της Βραζιλίας. Σκοπός του μουσείου είναι η πραγματοποίηση πολιτιστικών δράσεων και η παροχή εκπαίδευσης για τα ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα στον φτωχό πληθυσμό του Sítio Cercado στα περίχωρα της Curitiba. Το άρθρο αντιμετωπίζει το μουσείο κοινότητας ως έκφραση της σχέσης που διαμορφώνουν οι κάτοικοι μίας περιοχής με την ιστορία του τόπου όπου ζουν. Όσον αφορά τη μουσειακή εκπαίδευση, η έρευνα βασίστηκε στο έργο της Μαρίας Cecilia Teixeira de Moura Santos και επικεντρώθηκε στα ακόλουθα ερωτήματα: Μπορεί το μουσείο μιας κοινότητας, χώρος μουσειακής και ιστορικής εκπαίδευσης, να συμβάλει στη διαμόρφωση της ιστορικής συνείδησης των μελών της;

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MuseumEdu 6 / Autumn 2018, pp. 239-252.

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Μπορεί ένα μουσείο να δομήσει τη γνώση γύρω από μια ταυτότητα, ατομική και συλλογική, όσον αφορά τις αξίες της πολιτειότητας και να ενθαρρύνει την εμπρόθετη δράση που συνδυάζει την οικουμενικότητα της ανθρώπινης ιστορίας και τις ιδιαιτερότητες της ζωής ενός τοπικού πληθυσμού; Η ανάλυσή μας βασίζεται στο έργο του Jörn Rüsen, σύμφωνα με τον οποίο η έννοια της ιστορικής συνείδησης δεν ταυτίζεται με τη γνώση του παρελθόντος, αλλά προκύπτει από την υιοθέτηση μιας συγκεκριμένης σχέσης ανάμεσα στο παρελθόν και το παρόν. Πρόκειται για σχέση που μας βοηθά να κατανοούμε το παρόν και να κατευθύνουμε τις ενέργειές μας προς το μέλλον. Επομένως, η ιστορική εκπαίδευση που παρέχεται από τα μουσεία κοινοτήτων δύναται να συμβάλλει στην οικοδόμηση της ατομικής και συλλογικής αυτογνωσίας. Κοινωνικά υποκείμενα που εξοικειώνονται με ποικίλες ιστορικές πηγές σχετικά με κοινοτικούς αγώνες για τα ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα μπορούν να εντοπίσουν την καθολικότητα της ανθρώπινης ιστορίας στην ιδιαιτερότητα της δικής τους καθημερινής ζωής, αναπτύσσοντας έτσι ατομική και συλλογική εμπρόθετη δράση.

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the first contributions of the research done as an extent of the project “Telling Stories of our People: Community Museum and History Education”, main objective of which is to contribute to the organization and educational proposition of the Community Museum (MUPE) at the city of Curitiba, capital of the State of Paraná, Brazil. The purpose of this museum is to carry out cultural activities and offer human rights education to the low-income population of the Sítio Cercado region, a community located in suburban Curitiba. The article treats the community museum as an expression of the relationship that local residents establish with the history of the place where they live. In relation to museum education, we draw on the work of Maria Cecilia Texeira de Moura Santos and focus on the following questions: Can the community museum, understood as an organization offering museum and history education, reveal and, at the same time, contribute to the formation of the historical consciousness of the community’s members? Can a museum construct individual and collective self-knowledge related to citizenship values and encourage intentional action that links the universality of human history to the particularities of local people’s lives? Our analysis draws on the work of Jörn Rüsen, for whom the concept of historical consciousness does not summarize the knowledge of the past, but comes from the establishment of a

specific relationship between the present and the past. It is this relationship that offers elements that help us understand the present and guide actions toward the future. Therefore, history education provided by community museums could encourage the construction of individual and collective self-knowledge. Social subjects who become familiar with diverse historical sources about the history of struggles for human rights within their community can find the universality of human history in the particularity of their own practical life, and, thus, can develop individual and collective intentional action.

Introduction

In Brazil, one of the problems that affects the lives of the needy population is the difficulty in preserving the historical memory of groups, families and individuals. In general, history taught in schools values aspects related to national and world history much more than local history, making it difficult to have some space designated to the history of localities and the struggles and experiences of local populations. Thus, it can be affirmed that a non-inclusive historical perspective still remains in the teaching of history in Brazil. One of the recent objectives of the Brazilian government has been to strengthen the diversity of memories, as this can be exemplified by the *Memory Places* Program of the Brazilian Institute of Museums, Ministry of Culture. The *Memory Places* Program was the result of a partnership between the *Brazilian Institute of Museums* (Ibram / MinC), the *More Culture Program* and *Live Culture* of the Ministry of Culture and the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) (Brazil Ministério da Cultura 2008). The aim was to support actions of recognition and valorization of social memory, based on a participatory methodology, seeking to work with memory as a result of social interactions and communication processes that select aspects of the past according to the identities and interests of the group members involved.

One of the conditions for the creation of *Memory Places* Program was the valorization of the role of community and the conception of the museum as an instrument for social change and sustainable development. The objective was to promote the improvement of the population's quality of life and to strengthen local traditions and the sense of belonging to a place, in order to contribute to development and the reduction of poverty. Therefore, this program initiated the *Memory Place of the Sítio Cercado locality* in Curitiba, capital of the state of Paraná. As an active proposition, the Community Museum "Museu de Periferia – MUPE" was created in the same Sítio Cercado community, which is far from downtown Curitiba.

Between 2011 and 2016, the Research Laboratory of History Education (LAPEDUH) of the Universidad Federal do Paraná (Brazil) started to develop the research project "Telling Stories of Our People: Community Museum and History Education" (LAPEDUH-UFRPR 2011), in collaboration with the community of Sítio Cercado. The purpose was to investigate and contribute to the formation of the historical consciousness of the residents in that community through the MUPE cultural action.

The community of Sítio Cercado was built through a process of occupation of lands that belonged to an old unproductive and unoccupied farm owned by one family. Thanks to the residents' struggle, this occupation was and has been legalized by the successive governments of the city of Curitiba since the 1980s. The Residents' Association, the churches and other organized movements, such as schools and public hospitals, have also claimed and won rights, as well as the improvement of transportation and treatment of social and cultural issues in the community. Based on the importance of investigating the present ideas and the historical awareness of the subjects, the LAPEDUH project sought to understand the community museum as an expression of the

relationship that the residents have established with the history of their place and considers it as an important agent in the formation of local historical consciousness.

Theoretical reference

The theoretical perspective that underlies this research project was based on a double dimension: a. historical consciousness, and b. the concept of museum education.

The concept of “historical consciousness” is drawn from Rüsen, for whom

historical consciousness is the way in which the dynamic relation between the experiences of time is realized in the process of human life (Rüsen 2001: 58).

For Rüsen, history has a didactic function: it forms historical consciousness providing elements for orientation and interpretation (inwards: building identities, and outwards: providing meanings for action in practical life). Historical understanding needs to be constructed with reference to the insertion of the subject in the present, based on historical inquiries that make the meaning of that present through the past possible. This understanding also presupposes that the subject learns to structure the idea of time cognitively, not only from an individual point of view, but also collectively, related to the idea of humanity, since learning history is to learn to “temporize humanity” (Rüsen 2015: 17).

In Rüsen’s perspective, historical learning happens only when we are able to process the experience of temporal change in the human world, thus producing historical meaning. A first step is the self-reflexive interpretation, that is, what one learns has to make sense for the learner. The second is orientation; the process of temporal change must be articulated to the perspectives of otherness: “in my time, in the time of the other and in the time of the other that includes me”. Finally, the learner needs to learn to situate and insert his/her goals and actions of practical life, both individual and collective, into the flow of time (Rüsen 2012: 91).

Evidently, this is a learning process in which the subject, based on his/her experiences in the present, articulates the relation with certain past experiences. Such process contributes to his/her present action and prospects for the future. It is a two-way process that demands a situation of ethical commitment to the present, from which the relationship with the past is articulated in a meaningful way. Therefore, the present can be considered a “social place” through which the experiences of orientation, interpretation and motivation are built. This “social place” also provides a current context from which the past is sought, questioned, problematized, while it offers the conditions and possibilities of a sense of belonging (Martins 2008: 16).

One of the issues mentioned by Rüsen (2001) concerns narratives as an expression of historical consciousness, and the fact that narratives as constitutive of historical consciousness call upon memories to interpret the experiences of time. But it is not only by remembering that the past is recovered. Whatever way historical consciousness

penetrates the past, the stimulation for this intellectual itinerary is provided by the experiences of the present. That is, historical consciousness is the place where the past is brought to speak and it only does so when questioned; and the matter that makes the past speak comes from the lack of people's orientation in the current practical life, in face of its experiences in time. This is an interpretative memory that makes the past present, here and now.

According to Rüsen, a historical narrative –such as a community museum– has the function of

guiding the practical life in time, mobilizing the memory of temporal experience through the development of a concept of continuity and the stabilization of identity. This general function can be performed in four different ways according to the four necessary conditions that must be fulfilled so that human life can continue in its course in time (Rüsen 2010: 98).

Rüsen proposes four types of historical narratives: in the *traditional narrative*, memory is the memory of its origins, continuity relates to permanence, identity goes through affirmation of obligations and the sense of time is related to consensus and permanence. In the *exemplary narrative*, memory goes through cases, continuity is related to the validity of rules, identity to the generalization of experiences, and the sense of time is a spatial extension. In *critical narrative*, memory relates to problematization, continuity to change, identity to negation and the sense of time to judgment. And, in the *genetic narrative*, memory dialogues with change, continuity with development, identity with the mediation of permanence and change and the sense of time with the temporalization of humanity. All these four types of historical narratives, corresponding to different types of historical consciousness, may be expressed and pursued by a community museum.

To summarize, historical consciousness is constituted by means of practical life operation, within which people guide their actions and sufferings. This methodological purpose of history can be associated with museum education, as we shall see in the research project presented here.

Museum education: Dimensions and possibilities offered by a community museum

The concept of museum education, as employed in our research, is based on the work of Maria Célia Teixeira de Moura Santos, presented in her book *Museological Meetings, Reflections on Museology, Education and the Museum* (2008). According to Santos, the concept of community museums can be approached as follows: every museum can be a centre of community education and/or a space of contribution to formal education. Following the path designated by the author, some of the characteristics of a community museum were adopted in Curitiba, such as: valorizing the active role of social subjects who recognize and transform reality in the fight for their rights; considering the educational process as responsible for the formation of the citizens who

must recognize a reference to the formation of citizenship in their cultural heritage; and understanding that museums, schools and communities should focus on local cultural heritage in its dimensions of time and space, in the dynamics of the social process and its relation to the rest of the country and the world.

The perspective of “sources stored in a family archive” developed by Artières (1998) is the theoretical reference that guided the residents of the community to identify sources that they keep in their houses and to discuss the importance of their preservation for their individual and collective histories. Understanding the sources as evidence (Ashby 2006), the participants in the project sought to elicit events from their past and to elaborate on them in the form of narratives. These narratives are what organized the collection and the exhibitions of the MUPE panels. Therefore, documents such as objects that were used in the encampment during the occupation of local lands, photos and other forms of registration were identified, catalogued and organized for exhibitions and panels in MUPE, after being discussed and analysed in collective meetings. Also, the interviews and testimonies of the former residents became part of the study collection.

Research Methodology

The residents’ participation in the construction and organization of MUPE was understood from the perspective of collaborative research (Ibiapina: 2008). This research perspective proposes that subjects cannot be considered only as consumers of knowledge, but also as its producers. Thus, the employed methodology advocates the involvement of local residents in all activities, from the collection of sources to the organization of the museum, thus contributing to the construction of knowledge from their life histories. The presentation of the museum space as well as the narratives represented by the selection of objects and their organization were understood as part of the community’s temporal orientation and as forms of expression of people’s historical consciousness.

Strategies such as “cafés de memoria” (memory coffee breaks) and “rodas da memória” (memory circles, i.e., gatherings regarding the locals’ experiences in the place) were held monthly in the MUPE space for five years for the residents to communicate their memories. Likewise, in the eleven public schools in the region, teachers and children retrieved documents stored in family archives, thus interacting dialogically with the MUPE space. The documents identified by students and teachers and their use as didactic material generated new historical narratives. From the point of view of history teaching methodology, this approach meant new possibilities for problematizing historical knowledge in the way in which participants orientate themselves in time. Hence, the educational act of getting children to identify ways in which their parents’ and grandparents’ fights are recorded in the present, as well as getting them in contact with the MUPE space, has helped to expand the possibilities of interpretation of the past, causing silenced voices to be brought out and valued by students.

The research activities concerning the project coordinated by LAPEDUH intended to analyse some of the records produced in the museum. Therefore, some testimonies and materials became the object of an analysis led by the coordinators of the museum during relevant activities.

As the project is still in progress, the results and their analysis are in a way, influenced by the available documents and records.

Results

The source of this article was the material of a museum exhibition and the residents' testimonies recorded in the meetings called "café de memória" mentioned above. Among the actions organized under the MUPE coordination was an exhibition held in the museum in the end of 2011. The exhibition was the starting point of the work and its main objective was to show the memory of fights and achievements of the population that had first lived in Sítio Cercado.

The central theme of the exhibition, chosen by the residents of the community, was "The Fight for Housing". The fights of the 1980s and early 1990s as well as the accounts of everyday difficulties in the suburbs ended up being the central elements in the construction of this narrative about the relationship between present and past. This fact was evident in Daniel's testimony at the first "café de memória" (MUPE, 2011) and allows an understanding of the difficulties faced by local families:

The house was not even finished. I had to take it; the energy was "hotwired" – it was illegally connected like that. We didn't have the water system because Sanepar [the water department] would take another month, or a little more than a month, to install it. I borrowed water for me to live (Daniel, First "café de memória" 2011 / MUPE archive).

This testimony reveals the precarious conditions experienced by the residents, who even had to adopt the "hotwire" practice, that is, a strategy of illegally obtaining electric power by pulling clandestine wires from existing electrical grids. In another testimony, a local resident gets emotional when she recognizes herself in a photo at the camp: "at that time it was all very difficult. I am happy to see all the victories we have today in Sítio Cercado".

And another testimony:

My name is Vera. I began on August 23rd. I started being part of the movement from the day I got consciousness that if I did not start fighting, I would not get a decent home. To live in a risk area, hut, favela is to live without dignity. We wanted a project of division of lands, to have homes and conditions to pay for them. We did not want to occupy the lands, or fight with anyone. [...] It is not only the land that is important. We fight for health, for education, for the environment. Our fight is all that (Vera, local resident, 2012, MUPE website).

These narratives reveal a position that recognizes struggle through the difficulties of the social movement itself, in the direction of a memory identified with Rösen's *exemplary narrative*. Such narratives make the meaning of rules and principles evident, whereas history is seen as a lesson in the present. Exemplary historical consciousness reveals the meaning of a value, or a system of values, through the demonstration of its generality.

The narratives of land occupations in 1988 and 1991 were also expressed in the form of panels exhibited in MUPE. In one of them, there were images of the family collection of Dona Deuzita, a local resident, with photos of her wedding to Santinor, her parents (Isaac and Magdalena Claudino) and her paternal grandparents (Laurindo and Maria Pereira); of her and of her siblings' (Isaides and Eurides) childhood; of the daily life in the lands where the first occupation was carried out. Also in this panel, there is a map of Fazenda Cercado, dated 1932, with the division of the farm and the corresponding parts of the heirs Isaac, Cesinando and Julia. This panel is important in revealing where the name "Sítio Cercado" comes from, which was the name of the land and tells the story of the first "settlers", whose names later became the names of some important streets in the community.

Reports and photos of former residents were gathered as a result of "cafés de memória" meetings. With this action, besides the research, the participants were able to transmit their life history and, at the same time, contribute to historical research. As one of our informants said:

You see, if your father has a house today, ask him what he has suffered to get to that point. I always do that with the children of Sunday school and the children of the schools. For them to take a moment, step on the ground and see that everything that one gets is through difficult experiences (local resident, 2012, MUPE website).

Through the photo exhibition of the first residents and through the memory of the fight for housing, it was possible to notice that the coordinators of the museum bear a concern in 'saving' the history of the settlers of the region, in other words, of the first residents. The sources of the exhibition indicate the necessity of recording this history and imply a traditional narrative (according to Rösen's typology), which is the memory identified with the origins and with the continuity type of history. Traditional narratives are those that link traditions recalling origins that constitute life in the present. In this case, historical consciousness works in part to keep these traditions alive and the past becomes a basic reference in the present.

The occupation and the fight for housing are narrated in panels. Photos and objects depict people in the encampment, in their tents built with plastic tarp and pieces of wood.



Picture 1. Resident shows panel with her family's history.



Picture 2. Panel with photos of the first 'settlers' of the Sítio Cercado locality.



Picture 3. Objects used during the occupation of local lands, as exhibited in MUPE.



Picture 4. Tents built during the occupation of the land.

In the same way, spaces such as the “rodas da memória” (memory circles), thematically organized the memory of the local residents or served to sensitize and help other individuals to understand and relate to their past struggles. In this sense, it seems important to cite a “café de memória” carried out only with women, in order to construct a narrative about the history of the locality from a woman’s perspective. It is also important to mention the “roda de memória” (memory circle) held in the Nova Primavera occupation in 2013 that generated a debate about the daily fights for housing in the 1980s and the current fights for housing in Curitiba.



Picture 5. Street protest of inhabitants fighting for their rights (1980).

Final Considerations

Based on Rüsen’s typology, two basic types of historical consciousness can be observed among the people who participated in the project: traditional historical consciousness – manifested by the allusion to the origins related to the settlers’ action, and exemplary consciousness – as in the testimonies that refer to the example of the fights of the inhabitants in the past. Also, elements of the critical consciousness of the residents are expressed in the form of questions about and claims of their rights.

Some of the narratives expressed in the MUPE organization can also be considered as *genetic narratives* that connect the history of the city with other themes such as immigration, political re-democratization of the country and social movements. In other words, all different dimensions of historical consciousness (traditional, exemplary, critical and genetic) are present in MUPE and its activities.

One of the important considerations to be made is that the dialogical and collaborative perspective adopted in the project pointed to possibilities of museum and history education, in which the elements of historical culture, understood as the effort of a society to secure through collective memories an acceptable self-comprehension and preserve its historical identity (Rüsen 2012: 155), particularly its aesthetic, cognitive and political aspects, are strongly identified and expressed in the form of narratives articulated by community residents. The organization of the panels in the museum as well as the drawings made by the children participating in the project during the activities carried out in the schools of the community can be considered as evidence of this perspective.



Picture 6. Panel with children's drawings exhibited at MUPE.

More importantly, the museum activities and the sensitive experiences of the residents of the community were not seen simply as a mere fulfillment of a certain interpretation of the past, but as a form of self-knowledge and resistance (cf. Freire 1987) – i.e. the instrumentalization of one's own past and social memory.

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