

Book Review

Review of **Serge Noiret, Mark Tebeau, and Gerben Zaagsma** (eds.), *Handbook of Digital Public History* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2022).

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In the last three decades, a significant number of works (books, chapters, papers), projects, conferences, graduate programs, and research centers in digital history and public history have appeared, especially, in North America and Europe. Even though those two fields of historical scholarship are in constant epistemological and technical discussion, there is a scarcity of works on the intersection of digital and public history. The recently published *Handbook of Digital Public History*, edited by Serge Noiret, Mark Tebeau, and Gerben Zaagsma sheds light on this historiographical gap and creates a bridge between digital and public history. The editors call this interplay Digital Public History (DPH) and, as they explain in the introduction, DPH “entails the combination of academic knowledge of history with modern digital communication practices to engage the past while incorporating user-generated content and sharing authority with communities and publics.” (p. 3).

The handbook offers a systematic overview of Digital Public History and consists of multiple short chapters written by scholars and practitioners of digital and public history. Most authors work at universities and institutions in different countries of the western world, the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Italy, Luxembourg, Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, and Switzerland. As public history has been significantly internationalized in the last decade, it would have been useful to see more reflections on digital public history from scholars and practitioners from Australia, Asia, Latin America, and South Africa.

The chapters are organized around four different categories: historiography, context, best practices, and technology. The first category includes a set of essays on historiographical practices and traditions that characterize public history and digital humanities. Anaclet Pons explores the historiographical foundations of DPH. He traces the roots of digital history to three pioneers: Paul Otlet, Vannevar Bush, and Roberto Busa, and the roots of public history back to the original North American model, local history, popular history, and oral history. Serge

Noiret examines the concept of “crowdsourcing,” investigates the literature related to the concept, and presents different DPH projects of crowdsourcing and user-generated content. Noiret also explores the concept of shared authority and how public historians have used it in DPH projects. Mary Larson suggests we should think about digital technologies beyond triumphs and simplistic opportunities. She examines multiple issues related to power imbalances that characterize both public and oral history and discusses how we can make both fields more inclusive. Chiara Bonacchi introduces us to Digital Public Archaeology and presents its relation to neighboring fields and disciplines. Sophie Gebeil focuses on the Internet and analyzes how the past is used to construct identities. Joshua MacFadyen studies how public and digital humanities have transformed human encounters with the natural environment. Emily Esten examines museum initiatives that use digital technologies to engage collections and audiences by focusing on three dimensions, community building, collections enhancement, and experiential engagement. In addition, Pierre Mounier explores the growing open access to monographs and journals about history combined with new forms of communication, such as open data journals and academic blogs. Marcello Ravveduto investigates the relationship between the past and present to analyze the perception of time in the digital era. Lastly, Andreas Fickers proposes the concept of “digital hermeneutics” to explore the “trading zone” of digital public history where new digital methods meet epistemological traditions of history.¹

The second group of essays explores multiple dimensions of the practice of DPH. Trevor Owens and Jesse A. Johnston investigate the overlap of needs and practices between public historians and archivists. William S. Walker discusses how public history projects in museums can become successful in terms of education, interpretation, and outreach. Michelangela Di Giacomo and Livio Karrer examine how museums have changed their focus from collecting to storytelling. Also, Marii Väljataga explores the digital public history practices that libraries use to engage the public, such as crowdsourcing transcriptions, content, and image data. Rabea Ritterrodt investigates the meaning of publishing in our digital age and more specifically, the publishing of public history. Mills Kelly studies the current state of teaching digital

¹ For the concept of “trading zones,” see Max Kemman, *Trading Zones of Digital History* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2021).

public history at universities in the U.S. and calls for more emphasis on the engagement of students with digital technologies. Kimberly Coulter, Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, and Finn Arne Jørgensen examine how control of iconography, access, and ownership is at stake in digital public histories. Thomas Cauvin explores the birth, development, and institutionalization of digital public history in the United States. Priya Chhaya and Reina Murray show how digital technologies, such as GIS, LiDAR, photogrammetry, drones, mobile applications, and social media transform data into a usable and accessible format for historic preservation. Finally, Florentina Armaselu provides an overview of how social media can communicate history to the public.

The third part of the book investigates how public history has changed in the last few years with the advent of digital history and focuses on the new digital practices that have appeared and aim at a historical engagement with the public. Specifically, Mark Tebeau presents how public and digital historians have changed their fields with a new curatorial turn that encourages technical innovation and public engagement. Martin Grandjean investigates a series of questions about the use of data visualization for history. Fred Gibbs explores how digital maps constitute important opportunities to engage a broader audience in critical cartography. Also, Nico Nolden and Eugen Pfister analyze the role of digital games in digital public history and make a series of suggestions on how we can study digital games. Tammy S. Gordon reflects on her personal experience as a creator of *NC HB2: A Citizen's History*, a digital project that collects materials related to North Carolina House Bill 2, legislation that promoted discrimination against transgender people and presents the conflicts between public historians' professional roles and their roles as private citizens. Rebecca S. Wingo and William G. Thomas III study how historians engage with communities in digital spaces. In addition, Sandra Camarda explores the characteristics of "cyber-memorials" and their relation to more traditional memorial sites. David Dean examines different living history projects ranging from the earliest digital projects to contemporary uses of virtual and augmented reality. Lara Kelland studies how digital public historians can shape public understandings of the past through digital means. Jerome de Groot sheds light on the use of digital technologies in family history. Valérie Schafer discusses the public interest in archiving the self and memories, their heritagization, and the role that user-generated content plays in digital public history projects and research. Pierluigi Feliciati reviews the different methods that can be used to evaluate the impact of projects. Lastly, Brett

Oppegaard presents how history-seeking audiences follow technological developments in communication and how mobile technologies offer important opportunities for the communication of historical information.

The last category focuses on the main core of DPH, which is the intellectual and technical application of digital technologies. Matteo Di Legge, Francesco Mantovani, and Iara Meloni explore the challenges and opportunities for historical narrations on digital platforms by focusing on memes. Paolo Mogorovich and Enrica Salvatori analyze how a historian should effectively use GIS to communicate their results to the public. Gerben Zaagsma discusses the opportunities that content management systems offer and how they can support public history activities. Carlo Meghini focuses on linked open data and metadata. Frédéric Clavert and Lars Wieneke examine how public historians can use big data and what opportunities and challenges big data have. Gioele Barabucci, Francesca Tomasi, and Fabio Vitali propose the useful concept of "contexts" to support different points of view inside the same collection of data. In addition, Yannick Rochat explores some of the constraints of video games related to history and explains why historical inaccuracies are often part of video games. Also, Dominique Santana goes over the multiple forms of digital storytelling including the opportunities and risks for the field of digital public history and cultural heritage institutions. Enrica Salvatori discusses how public historians can integrate audiovisual elements into their digital public history projects through digital technologies. Raffaella Biscioni investigates the contributions of photography to digital public history projects focusing on the change of perspective between photography and memory in the online world. Seth van Hooland and Mathias Coeckelbergs examine the possibilities and limits of machine learning to extract semantics from large collections of digitized textual archives. Finally, Federica Signoriello explores the role of infographics in public history.

Besides the diversity of topics and themes that the *Handbook of Digital Public History* covers, it signifies an important contribution to the historiography of digital and public history for two main reasons. First, almost all the essays of the volume perceive and discuss the public(s) as an active producer of history and not as a passive consumer. Most authors see the public as a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic historical subject with different social, economic, and cultural characteristics, which does not passively consume history online but actively uses digital technologies, engages with the past, and produces historical knowledge. Most authors do not approach the public as a neglected historical subject, to which they will give a voice – a repeating pattern in the historiography of

public history. Instead, they explore multiple digital tools to hear what the public says and writes in order to share authority with it and co-design interesting epistemologically and technically projects. The contributions of Serge Noiret, Mary Larson, Emily Esten, Andreas Fickers, Thomas Cauvin, Mark Tebeau, Tammy Gordon, and Pierluigi Feliciati offer important insights into this aspect.

Second, all the chapters of the handbook seek to make public history more inclusive in terms of historical subjects (different publics), historical objects (memes, digital maps, videos, sounds, photographs, performances, cybermemorials, user-generated content, big data, video games, family histories, etc.), and methods (cartography, data visualizations, infographics, shared authority, mobile technologies, crowdsourcing tools, family history, digital

public archaeology, digital environmental humanities, etc.). I discern the works of Chiara Bonacchi, Joshua MacFadyen, Sandra Camarda, David Dean, Lara Kelland, Jerome de Groot, Valérie Schafer, Matteo Di Legge, Francesco Mantovani, Iara Meloni, and Enrica Salvatori, who bring new historical subjects, objects, and methods to the DPH table. In that way, the handbook expands and redefines the boundaries of public history by taking advantage of all available digital tools and technologies. At the same time, the handbook offers a critical reflection on the risks and challenges that digital technologies create. The strongest point of the handbook is that the authors do not see digital public history as a promise for the future but as an ongoing phenomenon with successes and failures, opportunities and risks, potentials, and limitations.