

Call for Papers

Infrastructural Turn. How Materiality Shapes Exhibitions about Difficult Pasts

29-31 May 2025

In recent decades, memory and museum studies have vastly researched the social, political, and aesthetic concepts of exhibition narratives about difficult pasts. However, many other factors in the display of difficult pasts in museums, art galleries, or sites of memory have gone largely unnoticed. These include the materiality of exhibition spaces, technological developments, and administrative frameworks. While they are part of the everyday work of exhibition practitioners, they receive little attention from scholars.

In order to better understand these seemingly “banal” and yet very powerful aspects of exhibition (and memory) making, the conference organizers are drawing inspiration from infrastructure studies. According to this perspective, infrastructure is more than just an enabling subsystem beneath any visible structure that becomes palpable only when it breaks down. It can be seen as an active factor or an actant, a verb rather than a noun, a conjunction and intra-activity between elements and actions that ultimately lead to the creation of a cultural production.

Following these theoretical developments, **we propose to examine various infrastructural factors that actively condition and shape historical and/or artistic exhibitions about difficult pasts, and to consider the exhibitions themselves as being, in turn, infrastructures of collective memory.** These factors include, but are not limited to, artefact materiality and conservation requirements, exhibition space design, curatorial strategies, installation formats and display technologies, legal frameworks, management strategies and funding sources for cultural institutions, collaborative networks, cultural education strategies, audience development, public relations, disability law and policy, security protocols and safety standards.

As the conference takes place at the German Historical Institute Warsaw and is funded by the Polish-German Research Foundation, we are particularly interested in papers dealing with the difficult Polish-German past, namely the Second World War and the Holocaust. However, proposals related to exhibitions on other forms and histories of persecution, war and violence from East-Central Europe and beyond are also welcome. We refer to the concept of exhibition in its broad historical, artistic, and ethnographic sense and therefore welcome contributions on various forms of exhibiting history. We are also open to interdisciplinary and comparative approaches that combine discussions of exhibitions considered as infrastructures with other media of memory.

We encourage submissions on the following topics:

- material and institutional histories of exhibitions
- technological and environmental factors of exhibiting history
- financial and legal frameworks of exhibiting history
- curatorial practices in exhibition making
- exhibiting history in times of digitalization, VR and AI
- transnational and global challenges in exhibiting local histories

The conference language is English. We are open to submissions from any discipline as well as to transdisciplinary contributions.

Practical Information:

The conference will take place at the German Historical Institute Warsaw on **29 – 31 May 2025**. Conference participants are asked to submit an abstract and biography. Presentations should last no more than 20 minutes. The travel and accommodation expenses of the invited guests will be covered by the organizers. Selected papers will be considered for publication in an academic journal or collective monograph of international relevance.

Organizers: Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska and Izabela Paszko (GHI Warsaw)

To Apply: Please submit the title, abstract (ca. 250 words) and short biography (ca. 150 words) by e-mail to Izabela Paszko (**paszko@dhi.waw.pl**) by 31 October 2024. You will be notified about your participation by 30 November 2024.

Timeline:

Submission deadline: 31 October 2024

Notification of Acceptance: 30 November 2024

Conference: 29-31 May 2025

Contact: paszko@dhi.waw.pl