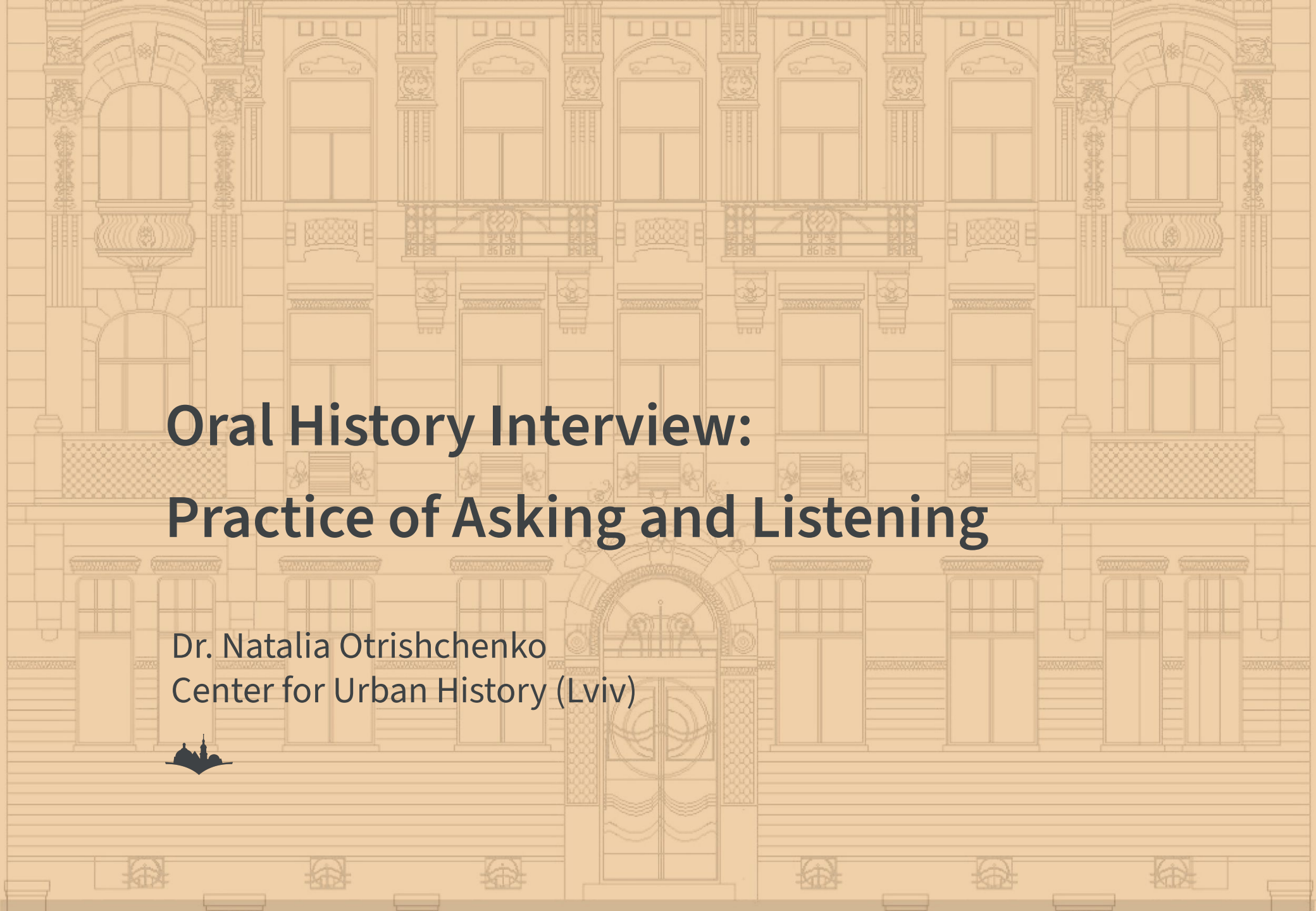




Oral History Interview: Practice of Asking and Listening

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...the most powerful meanings of the past come out of the **dialogue between the past and the present**, out of the ways the past can be used to answer pressing current-day questions about relationships, identity, immortality, and agency.

Roy Rosenzweig (1998), *Everyone a Historian*



Oral history collects **memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews**. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are **transcribed, summarized, or indexed** and then placed in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization, or other **form of public presentation**.

Donald Ritchie (2003), *Doing Oral History*



I. Ethics of care (Joan Tronto)

Attentiveness > being sensitive to another person's vulnerability and needs (developed through active listening)

Responsibility > willingness to act (and acting) according to these needs

Competence > providing quality care, effectiveness, and not harming

Responsiveness > ability to listen to the reactions of the person being cared for and adjust one's behavior

Solidarity > care should be organized fairly in society, without shifting it exclusively to women or vulnerable groups



III. Interviewing: Timeline

Before > recruitment, first contact (building trust)

During > interactions related to the interview situation
(creating safe space for sharing)

After > post-interview communications (gesture of respect)



III. Interviewing: Structure of conversation

Main narrative question > as open as possible

Additional narrative questions > related to the narrative

Focused questions > specific to each project

Ending remarks > a situation of closure

Prompting techniques > visual methods (using photos, maps, drawings), life calendar, memory walks, etc.



III. Interviewing: Practice

“**The miner**” > digging into one specific topic, getting as much details as possible

“**The traveler**” > creating a map of various topics, general and broad overview



III. Interviewing: Practice

Language choices > adjusting to narrators, possibility to switch between various languages, familiarity with context (last names, toponyms, specific terms)

Navigating emotional curve > empathic listening and ability to react timely when interviewee needs it

Work with silence > power of pauses

“By listening, being open to the unexpected, with a willingness to take into account not only what we want to know but also what our interlocutor considers important, we always find more than we seek”, Alessandro Portelli



Case: “24/02, Life After” Project



24.02: Життя після. Історія Яни | Eng Sub

Natalia Otrishchenko | 2025

III. Interviewing: Self-care

Psychological supervision > providing with a toolbox to balance one's emotional state and the emotional state of the others, collective reflections on specific cases

Team meetings > helping to cope with difficult emotions and creating a sense of professional community

Basic Ph > Belief Affect Social Imagination Cognition Physiology



IV. Disclosing

Back to informed consent > the limits of using interview defined by interviewee (i.e., with or without name, in various settings)

Back to project aims > interconnecting envisioned plans with accomplished results and findings

Forward to new discoveries > a good project always gives you more than expected



IV. Disclosing

Audience > different age, professional, regional, etc. groups that the project aims to address

Format > various ways how the story can be transformed (e.g., podcasts, visual novels, exhibitions, educational programs, academic articles)

Archiving > possibilities to return to recorded stories with new questions and tasks (lives of interviews after the project is over – respect to narrators and colleagues in the future)



Oral history is not necessarily an instrument for change; it depends upon **the spirit in which it is used**. Nevertheless, oral history certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history. It can be used to **change the focus of history itself**, and open up new areas of inquiry; **it can break down barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside**; and in the writing of history – whether in books, or museums, or radio and film – **it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.**

Paul Thomson (1978), The Voice of the Past



V. Further readings

Svend Brinkmann, Steinar Kvale. *Doing interviews* (Sage, 2018)

Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Nancy MacKay, *Curating Oral Histories: From Interview to Archive*. (Left Coast Press, 2006)

Andrea Pető, *Oral History Class*, URL:
<https://podcasts.ceu.edu/series/oral-history-class>

Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2014)

Oral History Association, *Best Practices, Guidelines, and Toolkits*
<https://oralhistory.org/best-practices-guidelines-and-toolkits/>

