



REFLECTING REMEMBRANCE



Introduction Almost 80 representatives of organisations that received support from the 'Europe for Citizens' programme for their activities in the field of remembrance met again this year in the charming city of Erfurt to debate and discuss the state of play of a European approach to the issue of remembrance and memory. Participants represented 25 European countries and came from various backgrounds; they included almost 170 teachers from all over Europe. This year's meeting was held in cooperation with the European Association of History Educators (EUROCLIO), which is celebrating its 20th anniversary. Teaching of and learning about remembrance issues, and the development of a European perspective on remembrance and memory, were the main themes of this year's conference.

The conference followed up on the networking meetings in Copenhagen in 2012 and in Brussels and Mechelen in 2011.



Europe: Moving towards a common memory?



The opening day of the networking meeting centred on the theme of establishing a European memory, what this could entail, what challenges it faces, what a transnational approach to memory and remembrance requires and what role history teaching can play.

Sylvia Semmet, President of the Board of EUROCLIO, started her welcome speech by saying how pleasantly surprised EUROCLIO had been by the participants' positive responses. She explained that Erfurt was a symbol of a region in which east and west met. She added that, while this conference focused on teaching and learning about remembrance issues, it was also a unique opportunity to meet and connect with people from all over Europe. She said she hoped that the gathering would provide food for thought and maybe even broaden people's horizons.

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Sophie Beernaerts, in charge of the Europe for Citizens programme at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication, emphasised the European Commission and EUROCLIO joining forces to bring together organisations at the forefront of history education. She said that this third networking meeting of the Europe for Citizens programme again showed the striking variety of remembrance projects participating in the programme. She stated that the European Commission would continue its support for remembrance projects from 2014 to 2020, and would even increase its support, strengthen the networking aspect and encourage new stakeholders and projects to join. According to her, the programme's most important aim was to develop a perspective that goes beyond national viewpoints and was truly European, thus bringing out the European dimension in national discourse whilst feeding local knowledge and sensitivities into a broader European context. She said that defending common values and sharing knowledge on and understanding of the causes of regimes that led to genocides were two other key issues to explore together in more detail.

Furthermore, Sophie Beernaerts pointed out that 'together we will see how we can go forward'. To conclude, she drew on Jorge Semprún and expressed her wishes that this meeting would be an 'intellectual laboratory for a better future.'

Dr H.C. Christoph Werth from the Thuringia Ministry for Education, Science and Culture in Germany stressed the importance of remembrance from a European perspective. He said that it was necessary to bear in mind that 'history is more than just what was', while the recording of history would always remain incomplete. He stated that holding the meeting in Erfurt enabled participants to 'walk on historical ground', as Weimar had been Germany's cultural and political capital and its symbolic capital and continued to represent the essence of Germany.

Dr Andreas Jantowski, Director of the Thuringian Institute for In-Service Teacher Training in Germany, outlined how the institute supported roughly 26 000 Thuringian educators each year. He brought the current inhumane acts of the so-called 'National Socialist Underground' to the attention of the attendees and accentuated how important and relevant a joint culture of remembrance was, including for society and educators, 'in order to prevent attempts to devalue others'.

Rafal Rogulski from the European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity in Poland talked about how the EU Network on Remembrance and Solidarity and EUROCLIO had similar values in that both were aware of the importance of responsible history education and the role transnational dialogue could play in this. He concluded that we should consider how much transnational cooperation innovative history education requires.



Keynote speech by Keith Lowe 'Challenges of Memory: The Many Faces of World War II'

Keith Lowe started his speech with the words: 'I have come with an open heart and an open mind'. This, he explained, was seen as an 'act of extreme bravery' in Britain, the country he comes from, since the EU is 'an entity kept at arm 's length' there. With the slightly ironic note which characterised his whole speech, Lowe pointed out how the Second World War was relived in Britain almost every day, usually described as 'our finest hour' in that it constituted a 'defining moment of our nation'; its 'last time as superpower'. While World War II was Britain 's 'golden age', looked back on with nostalgia, this myth and that of a superpower overshadowed how war poses 'simple choices between good and evil'. In that context, Lowe continued, this myth simply ignored, for example, the treatment of political prisoners or the bombing of German civilians and French towns, making it increasingly problematic.

War was 'like a big stone dropped into a pond, in which the waves continue to rock boats'

Lowe said that war was 'like a big stone dropped into a pond, in which the waves continue to rock boats'. He added that, while the war was a humanitarian, economic and moral disaster, the main villain was identified to be Nazi Germany, which was a consensus that suited everyone.

Lowe continued to say that, while the military perspective on the war dominated the post-war debate for decades, the story of the war and its aftermath was now being told differently in different European countries. Who was seen as a perpetrator and who as a victim had started to change. Nowadays, local conflicts between the left and the right in countries like Greece and Italy produced internal rifts and questioned national myths and therefore ideas of national unity that were often based on specific myths. In some places, new myths had replaced old myths and led to divisions instead of unity. Lowe said that this showed how history was a deeply personal matter and not something objective. The question was how both sides could take a step back and then take a European perspective. He added that 'violence and atrocity lurk in the back of all of our closets', and every country distorted its own figures and increased the numbers of its victims. 'The war might be over but we still fight over the numbers', and according to Lowe use them as a 'stick with which to beat the villains'.





Consequently, Lowe called for an approach based on open hearts and minds, where people were mindful of their own failings and took a European or even global view before narrowing in on their national perspectives. Lowe emphasised that progress had been made in that EU countries 'bore each other to death rather than shoot each other'. He said that the EU was a force of good, providing its citizens with a common identity, but that it was also easy to make the EU into a scapegoat. He noted that the rise of dangerous and hard nationalism, in which outsiders were blamed for what was going wrong, should be observed with caution. Lowe concluded by saying that the EU was created as a response to World War II and that one should never forget the terrible things that happened. He added that in standing stronger together, the value and fragility of 'our hearts and minds' should become a key defining aspect.

DEBATE

Follow-up comments and questions focused on the role of the Soviet Union and on what happened behind the Iron Curtain. Keith Lowe pointed out that myths functioned similarly across Europe. Another question concerned the distinction between the perpetrators and the victims. Lowe suggested that there was no easy answer to this and refrained from making some countries out to be better than others. He explained that he preferred coming up with questions to providing definite answers.

Panel Discussion: Germany and its neighbours at the crossroads of European memory and remembrance

The chair of the panel discussion, Ulrich Bongertmann, President of the German History Teacher Association (VGD), pointed out that Germany had a lot of neighbours and therefore also a lot of conflicting memories. Prof. Eckhardt Fuchs from the Georg-Eckert Institute in Germany talked about the processes and challenges of developing bilateral textbooks and said that, for him, it was still too early to say if such textbooks could contribute to a European narrative. He asked whether an EU textbook was actually possible, let alone something people would want. If people do not want to establish a master narrative, how can multiple narratives be presented without being too fragmented? If history is still about narration, 'how do we narrate it'? If memory and history are contested constructions, how can a textbook summarise the different forms of remembering and forgetting? Bongertmann said that, while building identity and memory go hand in hand, the EU process had facilitated the notion of reconciliation. However, he added that the current crisis, which brought the national to the fore, demonstrated that there is currently no EU memory.

Dieter Hackmann, Chairman of the Weimarer Dreieck e.V. in Germany, informed participants that the triangle was a forum for equal partners (France, Germany and Poland), for consultation and dialogue, and described some of the the experience so far. Dr Odila Triebel, Head of the 'Research Programme Culture and Foreign Policy' and 'Dialogforums' sections of the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations in Germany, outlined the role of the politics of remembrance in German foreign cultural and education policy. She posed three questions to the panel: How can European integration be supported? How can history be taught to the young generation? How can the transnationalisation of history and national histories be balanced? She suggested a post-sovereign approach to histories and narratives at the crossroads of European memory.

Hanna Huhtasaari, from the Federal Agency for Civic Education for 'Remembrance Culture and Memorial Sites' in Germany, talked about citizenship, remembrance and the process of remembering, of 'aufarbeiten und durcharbeiten' (working on and working through) an issue. She pointed out that Europe was in the middle of a 'historisation' process in which the survivors were dying, and the question was now about how history was placed in the politics of today. She asked how several images of history could nevertheless tease out connecting factors and contact points for remembrance, and what could this entail for new ways of teaching.

Dr Laurence van Ypersele from the Catholic University Louvain in Belgium talked about German-Belgian relations during World War I. In her presentation, she pointed out how the formerly unanimous Belgian memory of World War I moved to one of diversity, and how Belgian identities were becoming increasingly divergent during this process.

Dr Robert Rozett, Director of Libraries at Yad Vashem in Israel, explained how Israel and Germany had moved from hesitation to cooperation in Holocaust research. He described an early dispute between Martin Broszat of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte and the Holocaust survivor and historian Joseph Wulf. Broszat and his colleagues at the IFZ had focused on the perpetrators using classic documentation and perpetrators' testimonies but had remained sceptical about Holocaust survivors' testimonies and their ability to be objective. He said that historians in Israel were shifting away from focusing only on perpetrators, and tried to understand Jewish responses during the Holocaust. They considered Jews to be not only passive victims, but also actors. With time, exchanges between German and Israeli scholars had increased and cross-pollination helped place events in a broader context. Broszat said that there is now a great deal of exchange between the German and Israeli scholarly communities, and many personal ties too. In other words, networking had emerged as a very important aspect of scholarship. He pointed out, however, that many challenges remain for the future and perhaps the most important is to keep politics out of research as much as possible.

DEBATE

The discussion, to which the audience was invited, centred on questions about the role of eye witnesses in communicating history, about how the research done in Latvia could be made available to a wider public, about whether memorials are sometimes used to falsify history and about the importance of continuing with EU cooperation meetings in the EU countries affected by the Holocaust.

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Martin Broszat



Nine parallel international workshops

The afternoon classroom sessions, which aimed to come up with best practices, all focused on the notion of international cooperation on sensitive historical issues. There were nine workshops:

1. Can transnational history textbooks contribute to a common culture of remembrance in Europe?
Dr Rolf Wittenbrock (Germany) and Hans-Joachim Cornelissen (France)
2. I make mistakes: others are allowed to too — Models of teaching towards a common understanding of negative aspects of the past
Dr Areti Demosthenous (Cyprus)
3. Comics in your classroom — the possibilities of teaching diversity through 'Friendship', a graphic novel
Piet van Ledden (the Netherlands)
4. e-twinning- A community for schools in Europe
Ellen Kammertoens (Germany)
5. «... First I am human...»
Beate Klammt (Germany)
6. Distomo, Greece / 10 June 1944 — Nazi genocidal violence and memory politics in the local community
Katerina Brentanou and Zeta Papandreou, PhD (Greece)
7. Historiana in the Classroom — The assassination of Reinhard Heydrich: Morally justified or not?
Chris Rowe (United Kingdom)
8. Modelling a Toolkit on Holocaust and Human Rights Education
Dr Eva Sobotka (Czech Republic) and Richelle Budd Caplan (Israel)
9. Multi-perspective approach to the study of controversial and sensitive history; Balkan Wars case
Mire Mladenovski (Republic of Macedonia)



Projects, research presentations and discussion

Prof. Alois Ecker from the University of Vienna in Austria presented the results of his comparative study on civic and history teachers' education in Europe. He stressed that Europe was facing a demographic change and that this presented a 'good moment to reflect upon and to invest in teacher education'. The study's conclusions were as follows: there are concepts, forms, organisations, and forms of professional and practical training; there are more and more historical narratives and a growing emphasis on political literacy and civic education; there is greater emphasis on methodological and professional training; there is still little coherence on the aims of history teaching and civic or citizenship education; emphasis is rarely placed on media literacy or on working with new technologies, and there is a diminishing emphasis on developing key competences for active citizenship, interdisciplinary cooperation, teamwork and social responsibility.



Steven Stegers from the European Association of History Educators (EUROCLIO) introduced *Historiana- Your Portal to the Past*. The portal's defining themes are its mirror of pride and pain, its recognition of the need for a balanced approach, its variety of perspectives and its multilateral initiatives. It should therefore be seen as a digital alternative to a European textbook, as it collects new material and presents it in new modules and sections. Its target groups are students aged 14+ and teachers.

Sirkka Ahonen from the University of Helsinki, Finland demonstrated in her comparative study how Coming to terms with a dark past took place in Finland, South Africa and Bosnia-Herzegovina. She pointed out that memories could also hinder reconciliation and that representations of the past were produced in all spheres of history. But what is history? In her analysis, history encompassed public memory as well as social memory. Ahonen emphasised how myths in post-conflict history varied but could continue to contribute to guilt and victimhood. Reconciliation could therefore take place in the history classroom but also in public memory, e.g. in the form of monuments. Ahonen said that it was therefore very important that encounters take place in shared spaces (e.g. non-segregated classrooms), that multiculturalism is recognised, myths are deconstructed and deliberation prevails as a method.

Panel discussion: European Memory — Limitations and Challenges?

The chair of the afternoon panel discussion, Joke van der Leeuw-Roord, Executive Director of EUROCLIO, shared the results of an EU-wide survey on days of commemoration, ranging from independence days (70 %) to the Holocaust Remembrance day (50 %), and on commemoration being linked to human rights. She then went on to pose three guiding questions to the panellists, asking them to share what is happening, to outline the challenges, limitations and opportunities, and to identify the next steps.

Dr Tatiana Milko, Head of History Education Programmes at the Council of Europe, spoke about teaching and learning history in the 21st century. She said that one of Europe's key aspects is the sharing of historical space while living with a diversity of memories. However, she also pointed out that, with the opening of borders within Europe, violence, nationalism and xenophobia had increased and she asked what could be done about this. Could it be overcome through teaching history? She went on to highlight that 2014 marked the anniversary of the start of World War I, but also the 60th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention. Can dividing lines possibly be overcome through shared histories? Do we need a new paradigm for teaching and learning history? Milko suggested applying a complementary instead of a competitive approach, one that moves away from a mechanical approach towards attributing equal value.

Erika Aronowitsch, from the House of European History at the European Parliament, focused on the challenges and problems in trying to exhibit European history and memory. She said that the new museum is taking a broad approach to European history, with European memory being the link between the exhibits. Challenges lie in presenting this memory in a space of 4 000 m² and in defining criteria for what will be presented. In conclusion, Aronowitsch said, the topics and subtopics had been decided, but that they remained open to suggestion as to what exactly to exhibit in the space.

Pavel Tychtl, from the European Commission's Europe for Citizens programme, explained what supporting the establishment of a European memory and remembrance entailed. He explained that the Commission's Europe for Citizens programme was a funding programme for organisations active in the field of EU remembrance and memory. Its current focus is on projects dealing with Stalinism and Nazism. With the start of the new programme in 2014, an additional new angle will be introduced, framed as 'Defining moments of contemporary European history.' Tychtl told the story of the discovery of a mass grave in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2001 and the disputes about and investigations into the identity of the remains, ranging from the idea that the dead were victims of Stalinism, to them being Polish soldiers from the beginning of World War II, and finally establishing that they were the bodies of Napoleon's soldiers originating from more than 20 European nations. This story showed how preconceptions give rise to pre-narratives before the truth about what really happened is clear.



“I realise that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone.” Edith Cavell

Tychtl pointed out that memories can conflict, and not only between the east and the west. He said that the EU was a construct based on a diversity of cultures and memories, an attempt to create a political project based on tolerance and diversity. While values are the cornerstone of the political construct in the EU, they do not belong to one specific culture. Memory can therefore be national and institutional, also at grassroots level. ‘We need a good compromise between the two,’ he said. Tychtl concluded with two quotes that highlighted how necessary it is to see history through the eyes of the other and closed with the words of Edith Cavell: ‘I realise that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone.’

Steven Stegers, from EUROCLIO, explained the methods and challenges for the Historiana portal in trying to establish a common history in the classroom.

DEBATE

The debate centred on a variety of questions. Given that democracy is seen as a central EU value and is being threatened by current developments, is the Europe for Citizens programme therefore also threatened? If narratives still constitute a challenge, how can the participation of grassroots groups be increased?

European Remembrance in the Europe for Citizens programme

Pavel Tychtl started the morning by taking stock of the European Remembrance action under the 2007-2012 Europe for Citizens programme, which will finish at the end of 2013. The programme has supported more than 300 projects active in the field of remembrance and memory. The projects presented after the introduction were selected for the following reasons: their work extends beyond national relevance, they highlight forgotten moments of local history, and they are innovative and interesting in their approaches and methodologies.



Of the total programme budget of € 215 million, about € 12 million were allocated over the past seven years to the 'Active European Remembrance' action.

The Europe for Citizens programme has four parts, one of which is 'Active European Remembrance' (Action 4). The objective of this action is to preserve the memories of victims of Nazism and Stalinism through commemoration, reflection and networking. Of the total programme budget of € 215 million, about € 12 million were allocated over the past seven years to the 'Active European Remembrance' action. This amounts to 4-8 % of the total Europe for Citizens programme budget. The programme's latest developments include the launch of the networking process, cooperation with the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) on Holocaust and human rights education, and support for conservation work at the state museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

To introduce specific project examples, Tychtl drew attention to the 'Crocus Project' in Ireland, through which schools were provided with yellow crocus bulbs. These are planted in early spring to commemorate the one and a half million Jewish children and thousands of other children who died in the Holocaust. The yellow flowers bring to mind the yellow Stars of David all Jews were forced to wear under Nazi rule. Similarly, the 'Neighbours who disappeared' project, run in cooperation with the Jewish Museum in Prague, focuses on the disappearance and killing of the Jewish population from 1939 until 1945, and points out how the 1945-1989 period saw the gradual destruction of monuments and of religious life.



Young people can discover specific connections by exploring traces of local Jewish settlements.

'The Train of Commemoration' project consists of several train compartments in which the history of European deportations of children is narrated through exemplary biographies. The Reichsbahn deported more than one million children and young people. The train has travelled through Germany, the border regions of France and the Netherlands and to Auschwitz for the symbolic presentation of the photos and life stories of the disappeared victims. Another project example presented was the Terezin Initiative's Mosaic Memory'.



Sophie Beernaerts outlined the future Europe for Citizens programme (2014-2020), focusing specifically on the remembrance strand. First of all, she emphasised how everything still needed to be taken with a pinch of salt, since the final decisions had not yet been made. She explained the political context of the new programme, in which projects needed to be linked to key EU policies. She also said that the budget allocated to remembrance would increase to 20 % of the total programme budget, but that the current political context was difficult. The objectives of the new programme will centre on two main strands instead of four actions; these are remembrance and civic participation. The overarching objective of the future programme is

to 'strengthen remembrance and enhance capacity for civic participation at the Union level'. To this end, the programme will help develop citizen organisations' capacity to engage citizens in the EU's democratic life.

The EU remembrance strand will also expand from its focus on Nazism, Stalinism and totalitarian communist regimes to include other defining moments and reference points in EU history.

Strong emphasis will be placed on the valorisation and transferability of results to make the programme more effective.

Presentations

In her presentation on the follow up of the "Holocaust and Human Rights education" project, Eva Sobotka, Fundamental Rights Agency, outlined that EU Member States have a responsibility to promote respect for human rights through education. Museums and memorial sites that are linked to the Nazi period play an important role in this respect, testifying on the historical consequences of racism, intolerance and prejudice, and offering an insight into the intrinsic value of human rights, by providing an on-site learning opportunity about the Holocaust and about gradual taking away of human rights of victims of National socialism.



There is a need to promote better understanding of how the Holocaust became possible, focusing on the political and administrative structures, that enabled the process of gradual taking away of human rights of different groups of victims, as well as on the behaviour of perpetrators and bystanders. Human rights education and training has a crucial role to play in ensuring that citizens and, in particular, public officials are sufficiently informed and sensitised about the Holocaust and the lessons that could be learned from this historical period. There is a time for policy and decision makers to consider how to move effectively beyond project initiatives and integrate them within existing policy frameworks, such as Key Competences Framework. Richelle Budd Caplan from Yad Vashem introduced a toolkit focusing on Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education (<http://194.30.15.238/fraWebsite/toolkit-holocaust-education/index.htm>). The toolkit includes a methodology for educators who are interested in connecting teaching about the Holocaust and addressing issues of human rights in their classrooms. Caplan also highlighted examples of teachers' projects and other educational resources. She strongly stressed the importance of teaching about the historical context of the Holocaust, as well as of being careful not to confuse an escalation in stripping human rights with carrying out a plan to commit mass murder. For example, in 1930s Nazi Germany, Jewish people were gradually denied their human rights due to Nazi anti-Jewish policies. However, Nazi extermination centres, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, are Holocaust-related sites to which victims were deported in the 1940s to be murdered.



Presentations of model projects

In 'Developing education at memorial sites', Yariv Lapid and Wolfgang Schmutz from the Mauthausen Memorial in Austria invited participants to watch a two-minute film excerpt from Rex Bloomstein's 'KZ', about a wedding in the concentration camp. This provided a glimpse into discussion of memories of Mauthausen. The question that came up concerned how to deal with such dissonances. Lapid emphasised the importance of acknowledging one's helplessness and being transparent about one's inability to understand one's own subject matter.



In order to deal with this, the pedagogical team in Mauthausen developed an interactive methodology to enhance or enable participation, and through participants finding their voice, pave the way for them to assume responsibility. The team is in the process of developing new models with an international think tank and guides for educational work at memorial sites.

In his presentation of the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Project, Helmuth Frauendorfer emphasised the importance for the project of the role of eyewitnesses and their experiences as political prisoners in the former GDR. The Berlin-Hohenschönhausen memorial is the site of the main remand prison for people detained by the former East German Ministry of State Security (MfS), or 'Stasi'. Tours of the prison are usually led by former inmates, who provide first-hand details of prison conditions and the interrogation methods used by the GDR's Ministry of State Security (MfS).

'The Imprints of Gisi Fleischmann' project, presented by Anna Grusková from The Holocaust Documentation Centre in Slovakia and Dana Tomečková from Atrakt Art, illustrates how an artistic project (theatre play, radio series, documentary film and exhibition) can communicate the European dimension of life and work of a little-known Jewish activist, Gisi Fleischmann (1892-1944), from Bratislava, and make her story more accessible to an uninformed audience. The project questions national myths about who was active in the resistance movement and thereby redefines national and gender-negative or neutral concepts of heroism. Furthermore, it offers a new perspective on the First Slovak Republic (1939-45) and also examines connections between its ideology and current neo-Nazi activities. It shows that Gisi Fleischmann's message is still highly relevant today.

In her summary of the 'International youth conference on combating anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination', Karen Polak from the Anne Frank House in the Netherlands outlined how important networking was in all endeavours. Questions she posed centred on how websites can be made internationally accessible, how young people can be involved from the beginning of a project, how moving stories can be told, and how a web tool for young people and educators could be developed.



'... how young people can be involved from the beginning of a project, how moving stories can be told...'

Closing

Sophie Beernaerts closed the third networking meeting. She drew on Keith Lowe's notion of working with 'open hearts and open minds', which should be the cornerstone for all networking endeavours, and emphasised how this would enable people to look at history through the eyes of others and to initiate new collaborative projects. She quoted Jorge Semprún to say that, for her, an active memory does two things: 'It does not only turn its look towards the past but also pretends to look towards the future'.

She addressed the recent criticism from a professor of contemporary history who said that money was no longer being given to academic research, only to memorials, stating that this conference showed that work done at memorial sites and research projects could work together. For her, 'it is important to confront perspectives and to benefit from each others' experience.'

To better reach the public, we need to expand from using only brochures, videos and DVDs to using new multilingual IT tools such as social media, various internet platforms and 'tools we don't even know yet'. Sophie Beernaerts stressed that she was looking forward to receiving proposals in this area. She thanked everyone for participating in the meeting and for providing 'food for further thought'.

Visit to Buchenwald Memorial

A visit to the Buchenwald memorial took place in the afternoon. Buchenwald Concentration Camp was built in 1937, close to Weimar, the city of German classicism and the so-called centre of democracy. The Head of Buchenwald Memorial's Pedagogical Section, Daniel Gaede, deconstructed several of these myths in his introductory speech. He explained that Weimar was not the often-praised centre of democracy. It is true that the Weimarer Constitution was signed there in August 1919, but the city had been chosen because it was far away from those who could have protested against this new constitution. In the 1930s, the perceived juxtaposition of 'culture downtown' in Weimar and 'terror on the hill' in Buchenwald was in actual fact complementary rather than contradictory. Culture and terror were part of the same programme under the Nazi regime.

More than 250 000 people from more than 50 different nations were imprisoned in Buchenwald between 1937 and 1945. Around 56 000 people were killed in Buchenwald and its sub-camps. Approximately 21 000 inmates were liberated.



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Gaede went on to deconstruct the idea that prisoners had liberated themselves. He said that, according to recent research, the U.S. Army had reached Buchenwald on 11 April 1945; it was then that the SS fled and the prisoners who had been part of the secret resistance organisation opened up the camp.

The only clock the prisoners had, the one on top of the gate building, now stands still at the hour of liberation: 3:15. The Nazis used various proverbs at concentration camps and chose 'Jedem das Seine' (to each what he deserves) for the wrought-iron camp gate of Buchenwald. It was meant to be read from the inside, by the prisoners. But it also reads as an act of resistance: the prisoners managed to use Bauhaus as the font, the style that the Nazis had branded as 'illegal art'.

After the withdrawal of US troops, the Soviet secret police created Special Camp No 2. From 1945 to 1950, around 28 500 people were interned in Buchenwald. Most of them had belonged to the NSDAP, held special posts in the party or served somewhere in the Nazi state apparatus. More than 7 100 people died there.

Gaede said that one could approach the history of Buchenwald from different sides. The tours around the memorial site are not arranged chronologically. Two different tours and different exhibitions exist in order to address the complexity of the place. In the words of Gaede 'One cannot equalise everything. You always have to ask for causes and consequences.'

Buchenwald Memorial — Voices of visitors

‘Being able to connect history with objects and places, approaching history through an archaeological, almost forensic view of Nazi crimes at memorials is a unique and important possibility. This tour provided us with lasting impressions and knowledge about the Nazi-fascist ideology on site, connecting it to the level of society (i.e. through highlighting the economic role of the Buchenwald camp and its transformations in the 1940s), but also with profound insight into the living conditions and the plurality of inmates’ perspectives. Additionally, the visit was a great possibility to reflect, analyse and discuss processes of turning history into memory at such sites, including the ‘blank spaces’ of memory.’

‘The guided tour was very interesting but did not contain so much information on the Soviet aspect unfortunately. And we did not see so much, only the solitary confinement cells, which reminded me strongly of Pawiak (the Gestapo prison in Nazi-occupied Warsaw), then we saw the model room and the crematorium. Overall, I was surprised that so little of the camp has been preserved. Very clear and interesting is the fact of the different stories, which have been told at this place, the version of the GDR and the story of Buchenwald as a symbol of resistance and victory (through the alleged self-liberation) in contrast to the current, much more fact-based interpretation of history.’

