

What is the purpose of these memorials? And who are they for?

Berlin's evolving relationship between commemoration and tourism

Riddled with important historical events and countless memorial sites to commemorate them, Berlin now faces a challenging double role of being a place of remembrance and a successful urban destination. These challenges change over time, because as Beech (2009: 223) explains: “*atrocities sites are evolutionary rather than static*”. That is to say, the goals of their designers, and the visitors who view and experience them, change over time. Thus, the answers to the questions in the title change, too. This article will analyse the newly created problems, and with them, newly created potentials for this commemoration-tourism co-existence.

Memorials, as Jeager (2017) suggests are used by the Germans to clearly define their political and moral failures, as oppose to common monuments widely purposed in the world – and previously in Germany – to celebrate war heroes and heritage the nation is proud of (Ladd, 1997). But memorials and large memorial sites in our day and age are argued to have a wide array of potentials beyond the ones the authorities who commissioned them or their designers considered; and those, may not always go hand in hand.

Certainly, these sites commemorating tragedy and atrocity hold great potential for positive social and political change. Considering specific aims, remembering is the first to come to mind, whether it is for descendants of victims (of wars, the Holocaust and the Berlin Wall), or for all other visitors without personal connection, both domestic and international; referred to by Beech (2009) as ‘third party’, with interests and often competing needs.

Beech continues to state mourning, reconciliation, and forgiveness as the benefits arising from visitation to such sites for people with personal connection. For example, families of victims of the Berlin Wall visiting memorial sites along the Berlin Wall Trail. However, it can be argued that these memorials can offer further aid in dealing with personal and/or national trauma and were in fact built by a generation that needed to deal with their own trauma, possibly done by and/or to them (Jeager, 2017; Winter, 2009). This begs the question, however, whether on individual level memorials hold the capacity to function as a form of psychological self-help exercise?

Arguably, the erection of some of the larger memorial sites, (E.g. Peter Eisenman's Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe) is a unique attempt of the German post-unification governments to acknowledge the national crimes committed by 20th Century German totalitarian regimes. But is such public acknowledgement meant for the Germans to deal with

collective guilt, to learn lessons from history, or as the cynics would argue to ‘give face’ for those foreign visitors? In other words, can mourning, reconciliation and forgiveness exist in the same physical space of a memorial site and even more ambitiously perform informative tasks for millions of visitors?

In that context, Morsch suggests that “*modern memorials now see themselves as historical museums with special humanitarian and educational tasks*” (Morsch and Ley, 2007: 9). Indeed, not everyone shares the ambitions that Morsch refers to. Wight (2009) points out to the lack of clear communication of the social responsibility of such heritage sites, particularly the ones with contested heritage. Whereas Thunbridge and Ashworth (1996) argue that heritage, by its nature, is someone’s and not others’. A conflict of interest may occur when the narrative is contested. Not only that history is written by the victors, it has evolved to be perceived very differently in every one of Germany five different regimes of the 20th Century.

Sharing the urban space of memorial sites may also be the cause of Germans feeling the loss of ownership of memory. Berlin is not just host to millions of international visitors, it is also home to Germans from all of its 16 federal states, the aptly named new Berliners. In the post-Reunification era, many Germans from both former Germanys moved into the city and to its surrounding Brandenburg close proximity neighbours, such as Potsdam, Falkensee, Oranienburg, Bernau and others. Although many are young and may not feel spatial or temporal ownership, others, perhaps of an older generation with more personal connection to the commemorated historical events do feel deprived of what is essentially their heritage, for better or for worse. And, it is important to note, in the context of the Cold War the story of the DDR is not necessarily presented in its fullest. Understandably, with an abundance of memorial sites for the Wall and its victims, remembrance attention to other aspects of the lives of people in both the DDR and the BRD during the Cold War is almost non-existing. To some this can almost be viewed as gentrification of collective memory.

There are also political and social agendas, which may or may not coincide with the presence of international tourists. It is claimed that with the birth of a new nation state a new historical narrative is written (Lowenthal, 1985; Thunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). That is not to say that every new country deletes its history books completely, whilst removing all of its previous monuments. However, significant changes are made to the way history is taught and, as in the case of Berlin, monuments have been removed largely to be replaced by memorial statues and sites (Jaeger, 2017; Ladd, 1997). These are now often used as a reminder and a catalyst for the political and social values of the current government and society in power. As Merbach

suggests: “A capital like Berlin has to identify itself with its monuments. The public space must represent a valid political attitude, in particular towards foreign visitors.” (In Merrill & Schmidt, 2006: 123). The presence of five memorial sites at the eastern side of Berlin’s largest public park, the Tiergarten, is a testimony to the vastly shared views by most Germans that walls and concentration camps are no longer wanted here. At times, these values are clearly conveyed on memorial plaques such the Deportation Memorial at the Grunewald station or the one at the former Jewish old people’s home on Grosse Hamburger Straße.

Unsurprisingly, memorials also share a defining and potentially volatile characteristic with real-estate and that is their location. On the one hand, the location of the five major memorials between Potsdamer Platz and the Reichstag makes them visible and easily visited, whilst sending a strong message of remembering the victims of the Nazi euthanasia killings, the Homosexual victims, the Jewish victims, the Sinti and Roma, and the Reichstag representatives. On the other hand, their location provides a political and promotional stage to all, from young authors to provocative politicians. A recent such incident was the provocation done by far-right AfD party candidate Björn Höckes who on the 14th of September 2017, ten days before the federal elections, used the Holocaust Memorial to attract media exposure by referring to it as “ein Denkmal der Schande” – a memorial of disgrace; a disgrace that in his opinion the Germans should no longer feel. Rather than places of mourning or places of acknowledgement of national guilt, memorials may need to readdress their aims or at least add and emphasise their function as societal warning signs. And the danger of national forgetfulness is certainly already there. Deutschlandfunk Kultur quotes the Körber Foundation claiming that only half of the Germans in the age group of 14 to 16 know what Auschwitz-Birkenau was (Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 2017).

The potentially abused location of the Holocaust memorial and other central memorials, such as the official Memorial Site for the Berlin Wall, is also their educational advantage. It is important, therefore, to break down the groups to whom the memorial sites are supposed to provide the function of education. Most sites, as early the earlier quote of professor Morsch shows, will prioritise education as their primary goal. Effectively, this means that youth groups receive preference when entering an exhibition. This manifest itself in small museums, the likes of the Otto Weidt Workshop for the Blind, rather than the larger open ones like the Memorial Memorial Site of the Former Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen. It may not make a great difference in memorials such as the Block of the Women at Rosen Straße. Groups of high school

students from abroad are categorised as tourists, and their priority to be educated on these topics is not disputed.

Being educated about historical events in Berlin is also one of the motivations for adults to visit memorial sites. These are generally divided into locals, either visiting on their own or with friends/family from out of town, second/third generation of descendants of victims, and the 'third party' – their learning of the topic could lead to a multiplier effect of social change in their place of origin. For both Berliners and foreign visitors, the positive of this 'holiday education' is explained by David Lowenthal who claims that "*we need other people's memories both to confirm our own and to give them endurance.*" (Lowenthal, 1985: 196). Endurance that by sharing urban spaces of remembrance functions as an instrument in our social attempt to live up to promises of "never again".

Thus, although education for the next generation is invaluable, the importance of education by commemoration of domestic and international adult visitors must not be neglected. However, the inevitable result of limited space is that adult tourists, individuals or groups, may not always be able to enter different exhibitions (for example, exhibitions in the Villa Wannsee have limited capacity); a significantly less of a challenge when it comes to outdoor memorials.

Crucially, it can be argued that memorials act as educators even when the person or groups were motivated to view them just because 'it's the thing to do when visiting Berlin'. However, the level of pre-existing knowledge of adults, individual or in groups, German or international vary beyond measure. Moreover, time works its magic and as new generations are born, becoming more and more emotionally distant from the events commemorated.

The obvious risk is that the fourth and fifth generation away from an event (namely, the Second World War) will no longer see this event as something which has something to do with them, whether they are a school in Stuttgart or from a college in Florida. Therefore, not only that the aim of the memorials changes, the visitors ('the audience') to whom the memorial was initially targeted change as well.

Memorials in Berlin can no longer be seen with the eyes of those who know exactly to which event it commemorates. We have to assume a rise in ignorance of historical chapters, and not to view this lack of knowledge as a negative trait. Rather, the inevitable ignorance can be seen by tourism authorities, urban planners and other locals as a unique opportunity to show the consequences of the past. A sarcastic 2016 Facebook meme referring to recent political developments: "George Orwell wrote a warning, not an instruction manual...". But whereas

dystopian novels with future social warnings is not everyone's fun time activity, memorials in popular destination are more equipped to achieve the goal of being a social and political warning sign. Lowenthal explains that "*We interpret the ongoing present while living through it, whereas we stand outside the past and view its finished operation, including its now known consequences for whatever was then the future*". (Lowenthal, 1985: 191). And this, if we want is potentially the best use of Berlin's memorials: it not only shows us the consequences of what was the future of these events, its presence is a testimony to the tragic nature of the events.

The sheer numbers of visitors and the physical capacity of memorials to contain them is one more important point for consideration in the context of urban space of memorials. Memorials to difficult heritage can be used as a mirror for the Germans to examine their attitudes towards their collective past (Macdonald, 2016; Merbach in Merrill and Schmidt, 2006). Merbach (in Merrill & Schmidt, 2006) rightfully argues that with development of new interpretive concepts, old monuments and memorials can add a useful new layer to aid in dealing with controversial heritage. when memorial sites receive a large number of international tourists, the above said process might be hindered due to lack of physical space, or even commodification of the event it commemorates.

The purpose of memorials has also a lot to do with their size. Clearly, large memorial sites with multiple exhibitions and more or less abstract memorial sites and statues serve other aims. The latter, it is argued, are not meant as places of learning. Not only that all information can be read online, as several scholars have argued (see for example Cohen, 2011 and Feldman, 2002) for the specific goal of learning (rather than remembering) one might better do by going to a museum on the topic. In Berlin alone there are more than 30 museums dealing with history, and on the topic of the Holocaust and the Second World War one can also go to a museum in Jerusalem, Budapest, Washington DC, London, and many others. Moreover, visitors who may not have direct personal connection to the event commemorated, and thus little knowledge on the topic, are likely to get their curiosity aroused by visiting a site of remembrance. A short exposure to a certain chapter in Berlin's history may result in later learning.

Finally, a monument can be a roadblock thrown at face of society to prevent it from swiftly treating the problem by simply moving on. Even, or especially, if the problem is national guilt slowly dissipating into the oblivion of the fourth and fifth generation. Thus, the presence of millions of domestic and international visitors may actually maintain a conversational catalyst, rather than impede an internal social debate. If done right, with interpretation and clarity,

residents of Berlin, the city's visitors and its authorities can all benefit from the duo-function of Berlin's memorials as sites of commemoration and tourist attractions.

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