



Shaping Memory: The Evolving Remembrance Culture at the Memorial Sites Mauthausen and Dachau - from Zero Hour to the 21st Century

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Abstract: Memorials are seen as places of remembrance but also as institutions of historical and political education. They bear responsibility in two respects, namely in relation to the victims and their descendants. Due to the passing of many contemporary witnesses, concentration camp memorials are generally in a transitional phase, in which the educational work on site is confronted with the challenge of securing, documenting and pedagogically processing the legacies of the survivors who are still available. In this context, the educational conceptions of two memorial sites – Dachau and Mauthausen– are compared and analysed. For methodological processing, memorial site pedagogical or deconstructive approaches are offered here, such as the questions: How is history shaped? How is memory shaped?

Keywords: Remembrance Culture, Memorial sites, Holocaust Education, Bavaria and Austria, historical-political-pedagogical development, Contemporary History

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the question of whether and to what extent similarities and differences have emerged in the contemporary historical-political-pedagogical development of remembrance culture and memorial education in Bavaria and Austria. First of all, attention will be paid to the concept of memorial sites and their functions and tasks. In a further step, two concentration camp memorials – Dachau and Mauthausen– will be subjected to a historical-political-pedagogical comparison. In addition to the developments of the memorials since 1945, the political discourses in dealing with the former concentration camps are in the foreground. Furthermore, the pedagogical conceptions of the two memorials will be compared and analysed. A further aspect relates to the curricular and textbook relevance of memorial site visits.

2. MEMORIALS AS CENTRAL PLACES OF HISTORICAL-POLITICAL EDUCATION

Memorials are seen as places of remembrance but also as institutions of historical and political education. They bear responsibility in two respects, namely in relation to the victims and their descendants. Consequently, the greatest challenge of historical-political education is not to regard the National Socialist past between 1933 and 1945 as a closed historical epoch but rather to cultivate a critical-reflective approach to this part of the recent past. As a consequence, memorial sites, usually in cooperation with schools, take on the task of structuring historical knowledge about National Socialism in a moral value framework and passing it on to the younger generation (Haug, 2010, p.33). Seventy-five years after the liberation of the largest concentration camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, the symbol of the industrial mass murder of European Jews, it is remarkable that the Hollywood film, *Schindler's List*, and the four-part US television series, *Holocaust – The Story of the Weiss Family*, have had a far greater impact on the general public in terms of dealing with the Nazi past than traditional political education has been able to do (Rathenow & Weber, 1995, p. 12).

While in Germany and Bavaria, the broadcast of the TV series, *Holocaust*, led to a massive rethinking of the pedagogical teaching of Nazi crimes in history lessons, in Austria, it was above all the film, *Schindler's List*, conceived by Steven Spielberg in 1994, that had a direct influence on history lessons. The president of the Vienna City School Board, Dr Kurt Scholz, initiated a film campaign that

enabled Vienna's 8th grade students to see *Schindler's List* free of charge during class time. This campaign was also very well received in the other eight federal provinces so that around 150,000 pupils nationwide took advantage of this film campaign. For about 20 percent of Austrian pupils, *Schindler's List* represented their first contact with the Holocaust (Amesberger & Halbmayr, 1995, p. 43).

Regarding the influence of the media through films and series, since the mid-1980s, the concentration camp memorials in the Federal Republic of Germany and, to some extent, in Austria have gradually developed into places of learning that stood or still stand for a critical and reflective approach to the Nazi past. Favoured by this development, the concept of memorial pedagogy emerged in the same way. The following commemorative days in the 1980s and their media resonance were of central importance for their anchoring as an independent pedagogical sub-discipline: 50 years of the Nazi takeover in 1983, 40 years of liberation and the end of the war in 1985 with the ground-breaking speech by the German Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker and 50 years of the November pogrom in 1988 (Knoch, 2010, p. 125).

3. IN THE FIELD OF TENSION BETWEEN POLITICAL REPRESSION AND MEDIA RESISTANCE

With the final definition of the four occupation zones, the former concentration camp Mauthausen came under the influence of the Soviets. The US troops used the former camp and the SS housing estates as barracks for their soldiers until the spring of 1946. After the withdrawal of the American troops in March 1946, there was initially uncertainty about the further future of the former concentration camp; the establishment of a memorial was one of many possibilities considered (Perz, 2006, p. 48).

In the eyes of the liberated prisoners, Mauthausen represented a place of suffering and death to which remembrance by means of a monument had to be maintained as an obligation to the murdered (Perz, 2011, p. 88). As a former prisoner of Dachau and Buchenwald, the establishment of a memorial was a special concern of Heinrich Gleißner, the governor of Upper Austria in office in 1946. Already in May 1946, the first liberation ceremonies took place in the quarry of the former camp, and mostly concentration camp survivors were among the participants. Public interest in these liberation celebrations remained very limited until the 1970s (Angerer, 2014, p. 48).

On 20 June 1947, the Soviets handed over the former Mauthausen concentration camp to the Republic of Austria, which, at the same time, was obliged to preserve this memorial site as a reminder of the victims of National Socialism. On 15 March 1949, the Council of Ministers decided to declare the site of the former Mauthausen concentration camp a public memorial in accordance with the Federal Law on the Care and Protection of War Graves and War Memorials from the Second World War, passed by the Austrian National Council on 7 July 1948 (Marsalek, 1974, p. 272).

The passing of this law turned out to be more complicated than initially assumed, especially since the Austrian victims of National Socialism remained excluded. Hilde Krones, a member of the SPÖ, acted as rapporteur for this piece of legislation in the session of the National Council scheduled for 7 July 1948. Krones criticized the title of the bill to be passed, which, in her opinion, did not correspond to its content, especially since the Austrian victims of National Socialism were not affected by this bill:

Krones expressed the wish of the Constitutional Committee, which, in the same session, provided for the adoption of a separate law, through which the care of the war graves from the First and Second World Wars would also be transferred to the federation. Convinced that these two laws would fulfil a duty of gratitude to the active fighters for Austrian freedom, Krones solicited the approval of the deputies. In separate votes, the National Council passed the version of the two laws requested by Krones. (Austrian National Council, 1948, p. 2470)

On the basis of the line of argumentation of the deputies Krones, the indispensable adherence to the Austrian victim myth becomes obvious – as was typical for the time; there were no admissions whatsoever with regard to the participation of Austrians in Nazi crimes; thus, when passing these two laws, any form of commemoration of the Jewish victims was renounced.

A few months after the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp, representatives of the survivors and the American military government organized several commemorations. The first commemoration

on November 9, 1945, was marked by the beginning of the Dachau trials. The significance of this first commemoration was evident from the fact that it was broadcasted by German as well as European and US radio stations. In addition, US officers, representatives of the International Committee of Prisoners and members of Bavarian and Munich political celebrities took part in this commemoration. The town of Dachau also played a special role in these ceremonies. On November 9, 1946, the mayor of Dachau, Schwalber, announced the renaming of streets after the names of Dachau resistance fighters. This renaming was intended to express the solidarity of the Dachau population with the prisoners and to keep alive the memory of the Dachau uprising. Already in the first years after the liberation of Dachau concentration camp, three occasions crystallized, on which commemorative events are held to this day: April 29 as Liberation Day, the second Sunday in September as Victims of National Socialism Day and November 9 as the Day of the November Pogrom (Marcuse, 1990, p. 187).

With the handover of the former concentration camp to the Bavarian authorities after the end of the Dachau trial in 1948,¹ a phase of impious “efforts” began on the part of the Bavarian state, aimed at making the former concentration camp and the crimes committed there fade into oblivion. Against this background, on January 16, 1948, the Bavarian parliament discussed the motion of CSU member Hans Hagen, which included the demand, hardly to be surpassed in impiety, to convert the former concentration camp Dachau into a labour camp for “asocial” elements:

The Bavarian State Parliament shall resolve: That the State Government be instructed to enter into immediate negotiations with the Military Government in order to obtain the fastest possible release of camp properties (Dachau) for the establishment of labor camps for antisocial elements. (Bavarian State Parliament, 1948, p.587).

Based on the wording of this motion, the symbolic value of the former concentration camp Dachau in Bavarian public opinion becomes clear: while in the eyes of the world public, the camp was perceived as a place of mass murder, Bavarian politics regarded the former camp complex as a place whose shameful history could be concealed by a new kind of use (Marcuse, 1990, p. 188).

The motion was justified by Deputy Hagen with the allegedly severely endangered security in the major Bavarian cities, especially in the area of the Munich Central Station. A closer look at this motion by the CSU deputy also reveals the Nazi dictions still in use, such as “work-shy or asocial elements”.

[...] In order to stop the flooding of the state of Bavaria to some extent, the creation of appropriate laws is the order of the day. It has been proved that the immigrant elements find in time connections with gangs of racketeers and criminals, and then do not seek support from the public authorities, but all the more harm the general public. [...] The second no less urgent need is the creation of labour camps, away from large cities and in places where really productive work can be done and without considerable supervisory forces. [...] So you can see from these statements by the Munich Police Department that the motion to create labor camps is very justified. (Bavarian State Parliament, 1948, p.587.).

The motion introduced by Hans Hagen to create labour camps was passed unanimously by the Bavarian state parliament on the same day. Against the background of the escalating East-West conflict and the resulting migration flows, the Bavarian State Parliament amended its resolution in April 1948 to establish a settlement for German expellees and refugees in Dachau. The renaming of the former camp site as “Wohnsiedlung Ost”² was another attempt by the Free State of Bavaria to make the former concentration camp fade into oblivion (Eberle, 2008, p. 117). Not only the renaming but also the structural changes made in the following years, such as the construction of cinemas, restaurants,³ schools, kindergartens, the renovation and re-functioning of the prisoners’ barracks or the construction of a connecting road to the city of Dachau, contributed little to an adequate historical reappraisal in the sense of a critically reflective culture of remembrance. Only the area of the crematorium remained unchanged due to the exhibition there; it was accessible to visitors (Schwenke, 2012, p. 32).

¹ The former SS camp remained under American administration until 1972.

² Wohnsiedlung Ost = East housing estate

³ Completely devoid of any historical awareness, the former disinfection barracks of the Dachau concentration camp were converted into a restaurant with the name “Zum Krematorium” (Richardt, 2006, p. 50).

After media interest in the former Dachau concentration camp gradually waned in the early 1950s, the Bavarian state continued its policy of denying remembrance: the plans of the Dachau Working Group for a commemorative event on April 15, 1951, were disavowed by being publicly defamed as communist. Furthermore, the Bavarian state government refrained from holding an official commemoration on April 29, 1951; instead, it had a “week of remembrance for German prisoners of war” held from April 28 to May 5, 1951 (Marcuse, 2008, p. 170).

Under the pretext of protecting the public reputation of Dachau from the propaganda of gassings, the Bavarian state ordered the closure of the exhibition in the Dachau crematorium building in May 1953. The actual reason for the closure of the exhibition, however, could be traced back to the increasing interest in the former concentration camp Dachau on the part of visitors so that – much to the displeasure of the Dachau district administrator and Bavarian CSU member of parliament Heinrich Junker – the annual number of visitors increased, especially those of foreign guests (Marcuse, 2008, p. 170). Against this background, the District Administrator of Dachau and CSU member of the Bavarian State Parliament requested the closure of the crematorium in the former concentration camp Dachau. Junker justified his motion by saying that an end should be put to further “propaganda” that victims of National Socialism had been gassed or burned alive in this crematorium (Distel, 2005, p. 215).

Heinrich Junker, thus, caused a storm of indignation among survivors of the concentration camp, in the media and also among members of the Bavarian state government. The Bavarian Minister of Finance, Panholzer, said in this context that it was completely wrong not to make the former concentration camp Dachau, where so many people died or were murdered, accessible to visitors (Marcuse, 2001, p. 184). Minister-President Hoegner acted in a similar manner, firmly rejecting Junker’s application in a press conference on 22 July 1955. In view of these protests, but above all because of the supplementary agreement of the Paris Treaties, which stipulated the inviolability of gravesites of victims of the Nazi regime, Heinrich Junker had to withdraw his application a few weeks later on September 20, 1955 (Bavarian State Parliament, 1955, Amendment 640).

The additional provisions of the Paris Treaties of 1955, in which the German government committed itself to the inviolability of Nazi victims’ memorials, thus provided the basis for the establishment of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial (Marcuse, 2008, p.171).

In Austria, the first steps towards the creation of a memorial on the site of the former Mauthausen concentration camp were overshadowed by local conflicts in a similar way as in Dachau. When the Austrian federal government, with the support of the Soviets, decided to have a memorial established on the site of the former Mauthausen concentration camp, this triggered a broad conflict, conducted on a wide variety of levels, over the future of the former concentration camp. Various Austrian print media, especially local media, launched campaigns against the establishment of the memorial. In most of the newspaper commentaries, the memorial was dubbed as un-Austrian, alien to the country and not in keeping with its own culture, in the spirit of the victim thesis. Some newspaper commentators apparently acted as “advocates of the survivors”, by arguing that the victims and their relatives would not like to be reminded of the crimes committed in the Mauthausen concentration camp. In the local newspaper “Der Mühlviertler”, following the development in Dachau, the proposal was made to use the area of the former camp as refugee accommodation for 2,000 people (Perz, 2006, p. 112). The most vehement criticism of the memorial was to be read in the Upper Austrian weekly newspaper “Echo der Heimat”, which described the renovation of the former concentration camp as embarrassing as well as damaging to foreign traffic.

Somewhat more complex conflicts developed at the Mauthausen Memorial in the course of the establishment of the memorial district. With the construction of the French memorial in May 1949, the individual nations were given the opportunity to erect national monuments for their citizens murdered in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. In the following decades, the “memorial district” was created along the access road to the former prisoners’ camp. The national orientation of the individual monuments very soon led to a conflict with those victim groups who did not feel represented by this type of memorial. An even deeper conflict developed over the question of adequate representation for the Jewish victims. For decades, the State of Israel was not recognized as

a representative of the Jewish victims, arguing that it did not exist during World War II and therefore could not represent a prisoner nation. With the unveiling of the Jewish memorial on 20 June 1976, the long-disputed chapter of the representation of Jewish victims was closed (Perz, 2006, p. 190).

Through the erection of the Jewish memorial, the construction of the monuments for Roma and Sinti as well as for children and youths or female prisoners, the nation-state character of the memorial district experienced a significant weakening, especially since now the focus of commemoration was no longer exclusively on nation-state victim groups but gradually on ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged groups, who had long been denied socio-political acceptance.

With the renewed founding of the Comité International de Dachau (CID), an association of survivors, in 1955, the first efforts were made to transform the former Dachau concentration camp into a memorial site. After lengthy negotiations with the Bavarian authorities, the CID had the first memorial stone erected on the former camp site on September 9, 1958 (Zifonun, 2004, p. 24). This laying of the foundation stone in September 1958 can be seen as an important developmental step on the way to the establishment of a concentration camp memorial in Dachau, especially since the resistance on the part of the Bavarian state clearly weakened, and additional religiously influenced monuments were built in the following years. One of these is the Catholic Deathly Prayer Chapel, erected in 1960 on the initiative of the Munich auxiliary bishop and concentration camp survivor Johannes Neuhäusler. When fifty thousand people from all over the world came to Dachau for the dedication of the church on the occasion of the World Eucharistic Congress taking place in Munich, it became obvious that the neglected condition of this place of German and European history had become intolerable (Distel, 2005, p. 27). As a first measure, a small documentary exhibition was set up by survivors in the rooms of the former crematorium in the same year. Two years later in 1962, the Bavarian State Government and the Comité International de Dachau signed an agreement which paved the way for the creation of a memorial with a historical documentary exhibition on the grounds of the former Dachau concentration camp (Eberle, 2008, p.117). After the dissolution of the Dachau East housing estate promised by Prime Minister Hoegner was not immediately implemented, there were delays in the construction of the memorial. The CID had already decided on 10 June 1956 to submit an application for the dissolution of the housing estate to the Bavarian State Government. The final closure, however, took until 1964, and after sixteen years, the history of the Dachau East housing estate came to an end (Richardi, 2006, p. 69). After the last residents had left the housing estate only towards the end of 1964, the final phase for the completion of the memorial began in spring 1965. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the liberation, the Dachau Memorial and the accompanying documentary exhibition were opened on May 9, 1965. On this day, six hundred and forty former prisoners from fourteen countries and several thousand people gathered on the former roll call square for the opening of the exhibition. Prominent guests at the opening ceremony included Bavarian Deputy Prime Minister AloisHundhammer, former prisoner Doctor Frantisek Blaha, and CID President Albert Guerisse (Marcuse, 2008, p. 177).

Ruth Jakusch, who played a leading role in the conception of the documentary exhibition on behalf of the CID, was entrusted with the management of the memorial. In the following years, further structural changes were made with the construction of the Protestant Church of Reconciliation and the Jewish memorial. The construction of the Church of Reconciliation was preceded by intense internal church disputes. The idea of the Munich auxiliary bishop Neuhäusler to erect a Protestant memorial next to the “Catholic Todesangst-Christi-Kapelle” was not necessarily met with undivided approval within the Protestant Church of Germany, especially since the latter only planned to erect a cross of atonement and clearly rejected the construction of a chapel in Dachau. In this context, the Protestant Church pointed out that it would make more sense to build a church in a former concentration camp in a predominantly Protestant country, such as Bergen-Belsen in Lower Saxony. Only at the insistence of the Dutch Minister of the Interior, who informed the Protestant Church Council that Jewish groups had asked for the building to be abandoned because of the Jewish concept of the resting place of the dead, was the plan to build a chapel in Bergen-Belsen dropped. In view of the developments in Bergen-Belsen, the construction of the Protestant Church of Reconciliation in Dachau was realized and completed by 1967 (Kappel, 2010, p.48).

The initiative for the erection of a Jewish memorial came from Heinz Meier, the then President of the Jewish community of Bavaria, as well as from Auxiliary Bishop Neuhäusler. The dedication of the Jewish memorial took place a few days after that of the Protestant Church of Reconciliation on May 7, 1967. In contrast to the Mauthausen Memorial, where a Jewish memorial was prevented because of the alleged lack of national representation, the erection of the Jewish memorial at the Dachau Memorial was not preceded by any attempts to prevent it. The position of the Jewish memorial is to the east of the To desangst-Christi-Kapelle and thus beyond the large streams of visitors moving along the former camp road to the crematorium grounds. That the Jewish memorial, in contrast to the Christian monuments, is clearly a memorial, clear from the psalm above the entrance.

“Set forth, O Eternal One, a warning to them! Let the nations learn that they are mortals” (Baars, 1995, p. 101). With the unveiling of the international memorial on 8 September 1968 by Nandor Glid on the former roll call square, as well as the covering of the open area with pebbles and the already mentioned structural changes, the former concentration camp Dachau had now finally taken on the form of a memorial site. With few exceptions, the general character of the memorial has remained unchanged to this day (Zifonun, 2004, p. 26).

4. THE DEVELOPMENT INTO PLACES OF LEARNING FOR HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

The conflicts fought out on different levels, especially those between the Austrian federal government and the survivors' organizations close to the Communist Party; they had blocked the demand for a contemporary history exhibition raised by former prisoners for a long time. It was not until the media response to the Eichmann and Auschwitz trials that the realization arose that younger generations should be informed about the crimes committed by the National Socialists in a comprehensive and critical form. With the opening of the permanent exhibition of contemporary history designed by Hans Marsalek, the Mauthausen Memorial began to change from a monument and cemetery to a central place of remembrance in Austria. In this way, the public authorities had created a prerequisite for a state-organized policy of remembrance, by means of which the importance of contemporary history and political education in Austrian schools increased. This development was also supported by the fundamental decree “Political Education in Schools” issued by the Ministry of Education in 1978. The primary goals of this decree were the acquisition of critical judgement and insight into the factors of socio-political decision-making as a basis for responsible participation in social and political life (Perz, 2006, p. 238). The school year 1978/79, which was declared the Year of Contemporary History, brought additional input in the thematic examination of the Holocaust, especially since schools now had the opportunity to invite contemporary witnesses and historians to the school as part of history lessons. This meant that Austrian pupils were confronted with former concentration camp prisoners from Mauthausen and their personal experiences for the first time during their school years (Perz, 2006, p.238).

Furthermore, official efforts to establish the Mauthausen Memorial more firmly in the historical consciousness of Austrians were intensified. For example, the Ministry of Education issued decrees recommending that schoolchildren visit the memorial. The first such recommendation by a school authority to visit the memorial was issued in 1960 by the Vienna City School Board on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the liberation of Mauthausen. Visits by school classes to the Mauthausen Memorial began as early as 1949 – after the official opening – albeit on a very small scale (Perz, 2006, p. 214). In 1970, about six thousand Austrian schoolchildren visited the memorial site; by the memorial year 1988, this number had risen to almost seventy thousand; in total, two hundred and fifty thousand people visited the Mauthausen concentration camp memorial site in that year (Schätz, 2009, p. 52). Looking at the development of visitor numbers in the first phase of the Dachau Memorial, it can be seen that in the 1960s, a constant number of around 300,000 people visited the memorial every year. The majority of these visitors came from abroad. The proportion of survivors and their relatives was very high at this time, while the German population showed little interest (Distel, 2005, p. 28). The period between 1975 and 1985 was characterized by a massive increase in the number of visitors. The number of those who visited the Dachau Memorial rose to 900,000 per year.

The curricular importance of visits to memorials in the history curriculum of Bavarian schools can be traced back to the 1960s. External factors once again played a decisive role in this developmental step, especially since, following the desecration of the Cologne synagogue and the swastika smearings on

the Dachau crematorium, the accusation was voiced, especially from abroad, that too little was being taught about the Nazi era in German schools. The Cultural Policy Committee of the Bavarian State Parliament reacted to this criticism and endorsed the motion of Wilhelm Hoegner and the Social Democratic Party, which provided financial support for Bavarian school classes visiting a concentration camp memorial (Bauer, 2004, p. 42).

Although this motion laid the foundation for a critical and reflective awareness of history, pedagogical concepts and educational policy considerations still played a subordinate role at the time. The small number of German school classes that visited the Dachau Memorial in the early 1960s can be attributed, among other things, to the lack of age-appropriate and educational concepts (Distel, 2005, p. 28). Another example of the curricular importance of visits to memorial sites is the Bavarian curriculum of 1985, which recommends a visit to the Dachau memorial site or a former concentration camp under the heading “Notes on Teaching”. Against this background, the Bavarian Parliament unanimously decided on February 19, 1986, at the request of the Social Democrats, to ensure that all Bavarian students would be able to visit a concentration camp memorial at least once during their school years. (Bavarian State Parliament, 1986). As far as the discussion of visits to memorials in Bavarian history textbooks is concerned, there is only one textbook in which a visit to a former concentration camp is explicitly mentioned. In order to encourage the development of right-wing extremist ideas, the textbook “Menschen Zeiten Räume” (People, Times, Spaces), published in 1998, explicitly recommends a visit to the Dachau Memorial:

Plan a class trip to the nearest concentration camp memorial. Memorials serve as reminders and are intended to bring the past to life through encounters with original objects. Such memorials are also the concentration camps, which illustrate the atrocities of the National Socialists and the suffering of the prisoners in a particularly impressive way. The first concentration camp that Hitler had built - Dachau - is located near Munich. A visit to the camp should be well planned [...].⁴(Schierl, 1998, p. 186).

In view of the increasing number of visitors, the memorial began offering regular guided tours of the grounds of the former Dachau concentration camp in the early 1980s. The activities of “Aktion Sühnezeichen/Friedensdienste”, the members of the “Dachauer Forum”, the “Förderverein Internationale Jugendbegegnungsstätte” and the association “Dachau – Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Erforschung der Dachauer Zeitgeschichte”, which contributed significantly to the further development of the educational work at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial, should be mentioned here (Marcuse, 1990, p.183). In the course of this development, Dachau was transformed into a place where generations could meet and learn first-hand about the fate of concentration camp inmates. Four decades after the liberation, Jewish survivors who had emigrated to Israel agreed for the first time to return to the site of the former concentration camp in order to engage in an interactive dialogue with young Germans (Distel, 2005, p. 29).

In contrast to Bavaria, measures to raise awareness of contemporary history were taken much earlier in Austria, with public figures increasingly taking part in the liberation ceremonies at Mauthausen. In this context, the Austrian camp community Mauthausen is to be mentioned as a leader, which succeeded in winning top representatives of the Austrian state as speakers for the annual liberation ceremonies. On the initiative of the camp communities, Rudolf Kirchschläger, on the 30th anniversary of the liberation of Mauthausen on 5 May 1975, was the first Austrian Federal President to take part in the liberation ceremony. In his speech, Kirchschläger spoke – albeit in very general terms – of the Austrians’ complicity in Nazi crimes. In addition, on the initiative of the Austrian camp community Mauthausen, from 1983 onwards, the Austrian Armed Forces held regular ceremonies to mark the commencement of military service on the roll call square of the former camp, thus anchoring the concentration camp memorial even more firmly in the historical consciousness of young people in particular (Angerer, 2014, p.52).

⁴ . [This very unfortunate formulation equates the concept of a memorial site with that of a concentration camp. In order to adequately prepare a visit to a memorial site with pupils, a clear conceptual separation is needed in this regard.]

5. PEDAGOGICAL REDESIGNS

The political upheavals in Europe since 1989 led to a broad international discourse on the role of historical scholarship in the conceptualization of memorial sites, against the backdrop of the increasing death of many contemporary witnesses. This discourse also had a direct impact on the Dachau and Mauthausen memorials, especially as it initiated a historical-political debate on the future design of concentration camp memorials in the 1990s, which was shaped by organizational, pedagogical, museological and scientific issues, with new exhibition content and a general reconceptualization of the memorials playing an essential role in this discussion process (Perz, 2011, p.108).

A decisive developmental step towards the final realization of Dachau's redesign was the federal government's memorial site concept, which came into force in 2000. This concept formed the basis for the financial support of memorial sites. This mainly affected the educational departments, most of which were established in their form in the years after 2000. The memorial sites that had their own educational departments after 2000 were only considered eligible for federal funding if they had a scientific, museological and memorial site educational concept (German Bundestag, 1569).

The inclusion of the Dachau memorial site in the federal government's memorial site concept meant that the next phase of the transformation of the former concentration camp began in 2000. The renovation of the bunker, the former camp prison, marked the beginning of the redesign in order to set up a new exhibition there, which was opened on 27 January 2000. The installation of new information and display boards on the grounds of the memorial began in January 2000. The design and the pedagogical offer were revised in order to be able to reflect, in an adequate way, on the crimes of the National Socialists critically also in the future, in view of the passing away of many contemporary witnesses. In order to meet the scientific demands in the same way, a professional archive was created and the main exhibition was redesigned according to the latest historical findings.

Since May 2005, visitors have been able to take the same route through the memorial site that the prisoners had to take during their internment in the concentration camp. The stations of the internment in the shearing room and in the prisoners' baths are documented in the entrance building. For the visitors, the path of the prisoners means that the historical places and their function and its effects on the inmates have been chosen as a central element of critical reflection. The focus is now primarily on those sites that still have original buildings such as the Jourhaus, the watchtowers, the utility building, the bunker and the crematoria. In addition, the focus is also on those sites that were crucial to the fate of the prisoners, such as the roll call square, the bunker yard and the area of the crematorium. With the opening of the visitor centre in April 2009, the transformation of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial came to a temporary end (KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau, 2010, p. 21).

In light of the general discussion process on pedagogical reconceptualizations of memorial sites, a reform initiative to redesign the Mauthausen concentration camp memorial site emerged in 2000 under the leadership of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior (Perz, 2011, p. 108).

As a first perceptible sign of this redesign, the new visitors' centre was built in 2002 opposite the entrance in the former SS garage courtyard. The construction of the new visitors' centre was not entirely free of conflict, especially since the representatives of the camp community and the initiative "Mauthausenaktiv" favoured the construction of a youth meeting place in analogy to the Dachau Memorial. Initially, the visitors' centre was given too many tasks, which it was not able to fulfil. In the future, it would concentrate more on the follow-up of memorial site visits and on in-depth studies in the sense of temporary exhibitions and events. In the area of research, a large-scale oral history research project was carried out in which 850 survivors of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp and its subcamps were interviewed worldwide.

In retrospect, the 2001 reform initiative can be seen as the beginning of the memorial reorganization, as the envisaged changes were gradually implemented in the following years, including investments in infrastructure, the establishment of academic staff in the archives and the establishment of a library in the Ministry of the Interior and in the memorial itself.

The redesign of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial was accompanied by a structural shift in responsibility, from joint sponsorship by the Bavarian State and the Comité International de Dachau to a foundation largely funded by the Free State of Bavaria, which officially took over sponsorship under the name “Foundation of Bavarian Memorials” on 1 January 2003. Its primary goal was to establish an educational department as an institutional part of the memorial. The education department saw its main task in the new conception of the memorial as emphasizing content-related areas to describe the profile of the memorial. Among these content areas is the consideration of the memorial as a place of survivors (KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau, 2010, p. 23). Without the commitment and the political concerns of the survivors, the Dachau Memorial would not have its specific design and content, so the perspective of the survivors plays an essential role in the educational offerings of the memorial.

With a time lag – compared to the German memorial sites – a pedagogical team has been working at the Mauthausen Memorial since 2007, which undertook a new pedagogical adaptation of the tours for visitor groups, which required, above all, a professional training of the guides. As a consequence, since 2009, there has been a pool of professionally trained guides who accompany the visitor groups through the memorial site instead of the previous civilian servants. As far as guiding through memorial sites in general is concerned, a move away from traditional guided tours of visitors can be observed – also against the background of the increasing importance of open forms of learning in teaching. In the case of the guided tours at Mauthausen, the focus is increasingly on communicative pedagogy through interaction. Through different forms of narration that do not present a closed story, through questions, observations, discussions and activities, the visitors of a memorial should be more intensively involved (Lapid et al., 2013, p.6). Materials handed out at special points can be the basis for dialogues between guides and visitors. Texts, photos and maps can be examined by the visitors for their information content, their effect and with regard to the contemporary historical context (Angerer, 2014, p.57).

The tours for visitors on the grounds of the Dachau Memorial are basically conducted by two different providers. The first option is to have a tour with schoolchildren conducted by a non-commercial provider in the area of the memorial (education department, contemporary history associations and initiatives, churches). There are cooperation agreements between the memorial and the non-commercial providers, which regulate the joint work on site, the training and further education of those persons who organize tours and other educational offers in the memorial on behalf of the providers.

At the Dachau Memorial, in contrast to the Mauthausen Memorial, it is also possible to have such a tour organized by a commercial provider such as the Munich Tour Guide or similar tourism providers. There are also training courses for guides from commercial providers, although these are shorter than the courses offered by non-commercial providers. In addition, all providers are required to have their guides evaluated by the memorial’s education department with regard to their methodological-didactic skills and historical knowledge (KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau, 2010, p. 10.) As a result, the guides are given precise methodological and didactic guidelines that they must take into account when conducting tours. The education department explicitly states that the content of the tours must be based on current historical knowledge and not on narratives and anecdotes. If experiences or impressions are reproduced, the guides must refer to exact sources. At this point, however, it is also pointed out that the guides must not be afraid to admit gaps in their knowledge, especially since the history of the concentration camp and that of the memorial site is very complex and there are still unexplored areas (KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau, 2010, p.10). All questions that cannot be answered by the guides due to their complexity are immediately forwarded to the science department of the memorial and answered in writing at a later time, if desired.⁵

In view of the fact that the first concentration camp was built in Dachau, its significance as a model camp is essential. In this context, the focus is on the concentration camp system and the role of Dachau and its satellite camps. During the tours, attention should be drawn to the buildings and structural reconstructions that have been preserved in order to be able to draw a distinction between

⁵ Interview with the head of the pedagogical department, Waltraud Burger, on 14.7.2016.

concentration camp and concentration camp memorial. During the interaction between guides and visitors, special attention should be paid to avoiding the language of the perpetrators and to clarifying the conceptual distinction between concentration camp and memorial site. In this regard, the guides are asked to avoid “shock pedagogy” aimed at superficial consternation and to refrain from technical descriptions of the SS power system (KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau, 2010, p.25). In addition, all guides are required to exclude visitors from the tour of the memorial if they are wearing Thor Steinar clothing or clothing that can be associated with other right-wing extremist groups (Interview with the head of the educational department, 2016).

6. CONCLUSION

Due to the passing of many contemporary witnesses, memorial sites are generally in a transitional phase in which the educational work on site is confronted with the challenge of securing, documenting and pedagogically processing the legacies of the survivors who are still available. On the one hand, dealing with the descendants of survivors plays a decisive role here, especially since the confrontation with the imprisonment suffered does not end with the death of the former prisoner, particularly in these families. Thus, memorial sites also see their task in giving the descendants of survivors an important orientation aid in coming to terms with their own family history. For educational work, on the other hand, this also means creating various opportunities for commemoration on the grounds of the former concentration camps. From the field of research, a large-scale oral history project “Mauthausen Survivors Documentation Project” should be mentioned here, in which 850 survivors of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp and its subcamps were interviewed worldwide, some of which are available audio-visually for schoolchildren in an online interview archive.⁶

A further challenge for memorial sites is to make it possible for visitors to experience this historically sensitive place for themselves. For methodological processing, memorial site pedagogical or deconstructive approaches are offered here, such as the questions: How is history shaped? How is memory shaped? (Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial, 2010, p.23). The aspect of Holocaust education should also be seen in this context, which views concentration camp memorials as places of learning where political education work in the debate about right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism and racism is geared towards anchoring the guiding principle “Never again” in the historical consciousness of visitors. However, this opportunity of the historical site of a memorial consists, above all, in placing the aforementioned debate in the overall historical context of the concentration camp. These indeed very complex tasks of the memorial sites require pedagogical offers, which, on the one hand, should cover the very different information needs of the visitors, and, on the other hand, the pedagogical-didactical considerations have to take into account the age appropriateness as well as the social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the visitor groups.

Against the backdrop of the current COVID-related situation and the demise of a large number of contemporary witnesses, online tools are becoming increasingly important; in view of these challenging times, the Dachau and Mauthausen memorials have also designed their own virtual tours for school classes and developed corresponding apps. In the medium and long term,⁷ such tools can at best complement a visit to a memorial site by being used appropriately in the phase of preparation and followup, but they are by no means suitable to completely replace a visit to a memorial site.

⁵ 183 interviews can be accessed on the website <https://www.weitererzaehlen.at/interviews>.

⁶ This primarily refers to the app “Fleeing the Holocaust”, in which contemporary witnesses tell their stories of escape. The Dachau Memorial has its own app of the same name, in which the rooms of the permanent exhibition can be visited in a virtual tour.

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Citation: Dr Wolfgang Bilewicz. "Shaping Memory: The Evolving Remembrance Culture at the Memorial Sites Mauthausen and Dachau - from Zero Hour to the 21st Century" *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol 9, no. 1, 2022, pp. 193-204. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.0901016>.

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