DIY² Lab – Summary Report

Remembrance and memorial site work in digital exchanges

IJAB

In March 2021, IJAB launched its new project DIY² Lab: Do-it-Yourself in Digital International Youth Work for experts, project managers and team leaders who want to explore the possibilities afforded by digital international youth work. The DIY² Labs are an opportunity for experts and team leaders to try out digital tools and methods and discuss practical as well as more fundamental issues associated with digital international youth work in the group. The events were all held on Zoom.

20 participants came together for the DIY² Lab on 8 July 2021 to explore remembrance and memorial site work in digital exchanges. Dr Matthias Heyl, director of educational services at Ravensbrück Memorial Site (a former concentration camp), delivered a presentation on how Ravensbrück's educational programme was adapting to digital settings and discussed the benefits as well as the limitations of the digital sphere.

Without giving to much away, the key takeaway from this event is that digital exchanges can be given a far stronger international character than an in-person exchange, given that it is easier to bring people from different continents together online

DIY² Lab

From January 2022, further DIY² Labs will take place monthly, one month in English, the next in German.

10 January 2022 (English)
10 February 2022 (German)
20 March 2022 (English)
7 April 2022 (German)

Programme

Check-in activity: Identity Map

How did you come to work in the field of remembrance and memorial site work?
Participants are split into groups of two, assigned to breakout sessions and given 20 minutes' time to consider this question, draw their personal "identity map" (using a blank sheet of A4 paper) and discuss it with their tandem partner. An identity map may feature a TV set, for instance, if the person in question learned about remembrance and memorial sites in a film or documentary; maybe it features a family, if their own family had some connection to the subject. The breakout sessions may end with the tandems discussing what they would particularly like to learn about today.

Questions collected during the breakout sessions:
- How can one recreate an excursion to a memorial site virtually?
- Is biographical work with contemporary witnesses the "future" of digital remembrance and memorial site work?
- How can a memorial site be "taught" in a digital, non-formal setting? What challenges may this present?
- What methods are the most promising when it comes to digital remembrance work in groups? There are many ways this can go wrong, e.g., causing emotional trauma, that are barely foreseeable because there is so little experience of working in the digital space.
- How can access to archives be ensured when working in a digital space? Archives provide opportunities to work with actual data and victims' biographies. Can digitalisation help to make better use of these opportunities?
- What suitable settings can help organisers to achieve their educational goals? How much time is required? Would, say, 90 minutes be enough?

Presentation by Dr Matthias Heyl from Ravensbrück Memorial Site

- The Ravensbrück Generations Forum has taken place since 2005, bringing 40-50 young people to the memorial site every year to spend four or five days talking to survivors. The side events planned around the actual agenda give the young participants a chance to learn that the survivors are not just sources of information, but also real people with real lives.
- More information on the Ravensbrück Generations Forum
- Sound in the Silence: The Ravensbrück Generations Forum has brought forth a German-US art project named Sound in the Silence in cooperation with US artist Dan Wolf and rap artists from the US and Germany. What may have initially seemed an odd way to approach the subject actually gave the young participants an option to shape history using their own ideas and voices.
- "Digital push": Owing to the pandemic, Sound in the Silence had to be transferred to the digital space. The artists showed great creativity in adapting to this, amending their methods in such a way that participants were able to provide creative input even from their own homes.

The benefits of this digital project were as follows:

- 160 students took part (as opposed to 30 as originally planned).
- The number of partner universities went from three to six.
- There are many ways to communicate with survivors online; participants were able to talk to survivors in different countries who could not have easily travelled.
- Digital preparation for visiting the memorial site. Answering the fundamental question "What does history have to do with me personally?" will feel different from one's perspective at home in front of a laptop than it would if one were at the memorial site in person. In the latter case, participants can be overwhelmed by the experience of being at a concentration camp and may be busy thinking about their response to being there. This would suggest that regardless of the memorial site in question, reflecting on such preparatory questions is a very effective way to prepare online for a visit to a memorial site.
- The creativity workshops developed in connection with the *Sound in the Silence* project are suitable for other projects, too; for instance, they could be adapted for use in international workcamps.
- Edu-Art (Education & Art) is ideal for use in the digital space. One way to deal with survivors' memories is to create graphic novels, which in turn can be used when preparing for the on-site youth exchange.

- To prepare for the exchange, participants can engage in biographical work using, e.g., archives such as the digital contemporary witness archive of Freie Universität Berlin, which contains memories of the German occupation of Greece: https://www.occupation-memories.org/de/index.html.
- Digital guided tours did not work well. One option would be to create an interactive guided tour together with the online group.
- An Augmented Reality tour with 360-degree images is currently being developed, allowing for virtual visits to the memorial site, too. A pilot project is ongoing to explore the use of Augmented Reality on site. During the presentation, some examples were shown which however do not appear advisable, e.g., holograms of survivors. The Shoah Foundation addressed 40,000 questions to a number of survivors and on that basis produced survivors' holograms who can be interviewed in virtual rooms. Experience has shown that young people tend to approach these settings as if they were in a game situation, e.g., asking questions that the holograms cannot answer.
- Gamers have proposed opening up a game-based approach to the subject. However, it seems less suited to the subject matter.
- Digital settings can make it possible to interact with people who normally would never have met or could not have communicated because of the distance.
- An idea for participating young refugees: they can use their native language to write a story about why they are interested in Ravensbrück. Their texts are recorded in the original language and in German, then provided to other young visitors to Ravensbrück who speak that language. This way, the authors become part of a living memorial site.

Performance of participant Kira's Poetry Slam contribution in preparation for the next round of discussions

Kira's contribution expresses the emotions and thoughts she had when visiting the memorial site. She creates a connection between her own personal situation and that of her peers.

YouTube link (in German): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTO7m_4-ADg

Outcome, questions and ideas from the discussion

- Connection to young people's personal situations: It is vital to motivate the participants to bring their personal experiences to the table when exploring history. Exploring the present and the future requires exploring the past, too.
- In both offline and online settings, it is worth remembering that young people have a "right to know" rather than an "obligation to remember". Digital remembrance work is possible if this is borne in mind.
- Exploring regional history: It is also important to widen the focus to include lesser known satellite camps (notably, e.g., Buchenwald). In periods where long-distance travel is difficult or impossible, remembrance work can also involve an element of **regional history**. Participants can be asked to identify historic "crime scenes" themselves. It is vital to illustrate that the memorial sites per se are/were not the only crime scenes, and that the events that took place there should be **contextualised** in a manner that extends the perspective to include contemporary social groups who for the most part backed the ideology of that period.
- Shift in perspective away from a form of teaching of history that prioritises present perspectives of the past. Rather, history is valuable in that it allows us to examine the present and the future. Anyone's life story is suited to this exercise.

Check-out exercise: Identity Map, plus the following question: "What do I need for my digital remembrance and memorial site project?"

- Thank you to memorial sites such as Ravensbrück as well as to the many archives!
- How does the group dynamic respond to the digital setting? How can I anticipate this and respond appropriately?
- I hope that memorial sites continue to operate in the digital sphere to help strengthen the democratic spirit!
- The matter of how to experience a memorial site at a digital level remains largely unexplored.

- The "digital push" has been beneficial in that international activities are now much easier; this option was long neglected in the past.
- The technical foundation of any digital activity must be of high quality.
- And yet: in-person activities are the real deal.
- In future, digital methods could also be combined with analogue methods, a process that can also involve the young participants, too. They can be more than mere consumers.
- Book recommendation mentioned during the discussion: Jáchym Topol: Die Teufelswerkstatt

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Digital Tools

Zoom (Videokonferenz-Tool): https://zoom.us

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IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany
Godesberger Allee 142-148
53175 Bonn
Germany

Telefon: 0228 9506-0
Fax: 0228 9506-199
E-Mail: info@ijab.de
Internet: https://www.ijab.de

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Responsible: Marie-Luise Dreber
Editors: Julia Hallebach (hallebach@ijab.de), Natali Petala-Weber (petala-weber@ijab.de), Ulrike Werner (werner@ijab.de)
Translator: Karin Walker

Photos:
Cover: Craig Cooper | Unsplash

If you have any questions regarding the project **Internationale Jugendarbeit.digital**, please contact:
digital@ijab.de

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