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Living History: Education for Human Rights

Evaluation of the Funding Programme “Meeting Living Witnesses – the Lives of Former Forced Labourers” – Main Outlines

Draft Report

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Living History: Education for Human Rights

Summary

How do young people remember the Holocaust after more than 60 years? How can encounters with survivors contribute to an active remembrance? How sustainable is living history? One of the greatest opportunities of encounter programmes with former forced labourers lies in making a change in perspective possible. The main benefits are the bridging of the historical gap and deepening the knowledge about one of the darkest sides of history, as well as the promotion of empathy and self-reflection. Many critics regard large events like commemoration ceremonies with a certain socio-political scepticism. Young people as representatives of a later generation in the 21st century are also supposed to have their say. Moreover, the long-disregarded victims deserve another form of respect than the spectacular events and at least a symbolic remuneration for the wrong that was done to them. The visits of former forced labourers in today's Germany are a first concrete step towards reconciliation and considerable contribution to reparation – in a non-material way. The former forced labourers consider meetings particularly with young people as their main objective.

In this context the "Remembrance and Future"-Fund of the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" in Berlin asked the Research Group Youth and Europe at the C·A·P in Munich to give strategic advice by evaluating the nearly 2 Million Euro funding programme "Meeting living witnesses – the lives of former forced labourers" (2002-2005). The opinions of over one thousand young people in Germany, over one hundred living witnesses in Europe and almost fifty institutions were considered in the qualitative approach of this evaluation. The results show that encounter programmes with survivors have a significant effect on the memory culture of young people, who do not pay much attention to official commemoration ceremonies.

The intensive study of the painful historical past mainly involves two elements: the individual and the social. If a sustainable debate on this topic should take place, a good linkage of both elements is one of the preconditions. The meeting with living witnesses is an opportunity to connect these two levels meaningfully. Getting to know victims of the Holocaust personally offers young people in particular the chance to hear their own German history from those who have experienced it themselves. This helps young people to come to a better understanding of the darkest hours of humanity.

The meetings have shown how important this way of commemorative work is for the development of society in Germany. The combined efforts of all those involved are needed to build on what has already been achieved and to lead young people into their future. Here the individual memory of the past is the first step to prevent such horrors from happening again. At the same time the meetings encourage the emotional aspects of learning – a prerequisite for the education of tolerance and democracy among young Germans in the 21st century.

1. Preliminary Thoughts

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War the “memory culture” is booming: Commemoration ceremonies are taking place everywhere, the media followed quick in succession with reports on the numerous aspects of injustice and on the suffering what National Socialist rule brought over Europe. Beside this public admonishing, reminding and commemoration, the victims of the Nazi regime cannot be forgotten, they have priority as living witnesses. In addition, young people as representatives of a later generation in another century are also given a chance to have their say. Meanwhile, many critics look at these events with a certain socio-political scepticism. The long-disregarded victims should deserve another form of respect than spectacular events, at least a symbolic remuneration for the wrong that was done to them. Are the numerous events an attempt to face the darkest chapters of German history – although late? And what comes next?

Regardless of the question, whether a “processing of National Socialist history” is possible at all, the intensive study of the painful historical past always has two elements: the individual and the social. If a sustainable debate should start, a good linkage of both elements is one of the preconditions. Meeting living witnesses is an opportunity to sensibly connect these two levels. Getting to know the victims of National Socialism offers particularly young people the chance of a personal confrontation with their own German history and thus to better understand it by hearing about it first-hand.

Sustainable debate
about the topic

One of the greatest opportunities of encounter programmes with former forced labourers is to make such change in perspective possible to shorten the historical distance, as well as to lead to empathy and self-reflection. The visits of former forced labourers in today’s Germany are thereby a first concrete step towards reconciliation. They contribute considerably to reparation – in a non-material way. Particularly the meetings between young people and former forced labourers are a main objective. The evaluation of the funding programme “Meeting with living witnesses – the paths of former forced labourers” shows that this element is not only most important to the survivors, but has also a significant effect on the memory culture of those young people, who do not pay much attention to official commemoration ceremonies.

Reconciliation and
Reparation

Nowadays, most young people are hardly realising that forced labour of foreign men and women was a mass phenomenon in National Socialist Germany. One must assume that far more than twelve million persons in the area of the German Reich were condemned to forced labour under unworthy, life-threatening circumstances. This included foreign civilian male and female workers, prisoners of war and concentration camp prisoners, who were brutally exploited. The years of suffering of these forced labourers crucially affected their future lives. Some of them are not able to and until today do not want to speak about those years. It is even more painful for them that the enemy picture shaped by Nazi propaganda latently affects the judgement of the German population. With this in mind, it appears essential to go beyond the short and symbolic range of official commemorations, to inform young people and to offer “human” access to this incomprehensible injustice.

Attitudes of the young
toward National Socialism

In the interviews the young participants in general rarely differentiated their opinions on National Socialism and hardly any opinion on the topic of forced labour. The pictures that the young people chose to characterise their viewpoint were mostly the same. The following pictures dominated:

- The unscrupulous extinction of human life (crematorium, concentration camp, selection, hangings, shootings)
- The sheer incredible extent of destruction (shoes, suitcases)
- Arbitrary discrimination, humiliation and the contempt for mankind as a basic motive of Nazi propaganda (numbers on arms, signs around necks, forced labour)
- The indoctrination and the ban of free expression of opinion (NSDAP party conference, the burning of books)
- Destruction through war (rubble, V2 rockets)
- Resistance as a brave attempt to resist the horror (assassination attempt on Hitler, Sophie Scholl)

Occasionally the participants chose pictures which could be put into a modern context: The Nuremberg trials and the question of compensation for the relatives of the victims, Milosevic before the war crimes tribunal as a warning that ethnic cleansing can still happen in today's Europe, anti-war demonstrations and pictures of neo-Nazis. These pictures were meant to emphasise the need to still be aware of Nazi tendencies today.

Lack of appropriate
educational support

The reasons for their selection (frightening, impressive) are among others: helplessness, incredulity and consternation, which the adolescents could hardly put into words. Obviously they lack appropriate educational support, which would allow them not to retreat into their consternation. In view of this striking speechlessness schools are called on to show their pupils ways to combine knowledge and emotions and thus enable a deeper, sensitive rational understanding.

In the last decades German and international historical studies cover most topics of National Socialism and the Holocaust extensively and concern in detail the topic of forced labour in the Nazi state; however, this scientific historical analysis has not yet penetrated into the general public consciousness or even the school curriculum. In this context, meetings with living witnesses, who report from the perspective of their individual fate, are tremendously important, in order to preserve the awareness of young people especially for topics from far in the past. During the interviews with the young participants of such meetings, all interviewees brought up exactly this point: The increased historical sensitivity and a deeper historical consciousness, which was encouraged by the meeting with former forced labourers.

Three main components
of a genuine dialogue

If a genuine dialogue with the living witnesses is seen to be the result of the meeting, it must be clarified that sustainable historical learning of the younger generation depends on three main components:

- a competent knowledge transfer as a stable cognitive orientation framework,
- an emotional intelligence as the motivating factor for the autonomous analysis of the topics under examination
- and the delineation of continuing action-oriented options, in order to continue the examination of the topic.

Surely one can and should not depend on witnesses who are still alive to cover all these components of the learning process. With their personally remembered life stories they can primarily address the emotional range of learning and crucially promote empathy. This is one of the critical elements in democracy and tolerance education of young Germans in the 21st century.

Appropriate content and educational imbedding, however, must be carried out by the classical institutions for education and the numerous mechanisms of non-school youth work. Therefore, this study pays special attention to the sustainability and the emotional quality of the meeting programme. Because many living witnesses often decide only at a high age to exchange their experience with young people. Therefore, this remembrance should be supported as long as possible.

2. Meeting with Living Witnesses

Most of the young people involved in this study could well remember the narrations of the survivors, although sometimes only in fragments. There are basically two topics, which particularly interested the participants: on the one hand the detailed narrations which reflected the brutality in National Socialism, and on the other hand the everyday life experiences of the living witnesses.

The circumstances in particular, however, under which the former forced labourers lived and worked, remain in detail in the memory of the young people:

“... and when eating the tables were also moved together, and she was allowed to sit at the table, but she had to sleep in the corridor, she didn't have her own room...”.

Stories like that allow teenagers to imagine to be in the same situation and compare the story with their own life.

Comparison with own lives

The predominant number of young people interviewed thought that a comparable injustice such as the National Socialist regime can happen again. Reasons mentioned were that “... humans are not incapable of learning” that “if the right person comes to power, then it could happen”. Young people having opinions like that also often draw a connection to today's economic situation and the electoral success of right-wing parties in Germany. In this context the economic and socio-cultural circumstances seem to play a particularly important role.

When asked which institutions could prevent such injustice nearly all young people mentioned international organisations like the UN or NATO. Democratic institutions like the “free press” or the constitution were regarded as guardians of democracy. Rather the intervention of other states such as the USA was seen to be more likely. Institutions like the German Federal Ministry of the Interior or the police were not really regarded as a serious option.

Guardians of democracy

In the opinion of these young people, a comparable injustice can be prevented with democratic structures and rarely via the society. Most young people share the opinion that comparable crimes can be committed again. Only individuals are regarded to be able to prevent this, institutions are hardly considered.

Statistics

Since the beginning of the funding programme in 2002, the future fund financially supported 112 projects with a total volume of approximately 1.9 million euro altogether. During the entire project period approximately 500 schools and youth institutions, over 800 living witnesses and more than 400 accompanying adults were addressed and more than 1000 meeting days between the young generation and former forced labourers were financed.

The number of project days, the grant sum, the number of the living witnesses involved, the location of the meeting and the number of young people involved varied from project to project. First of all, the large and various range of the programme must be underlined as a positive result.

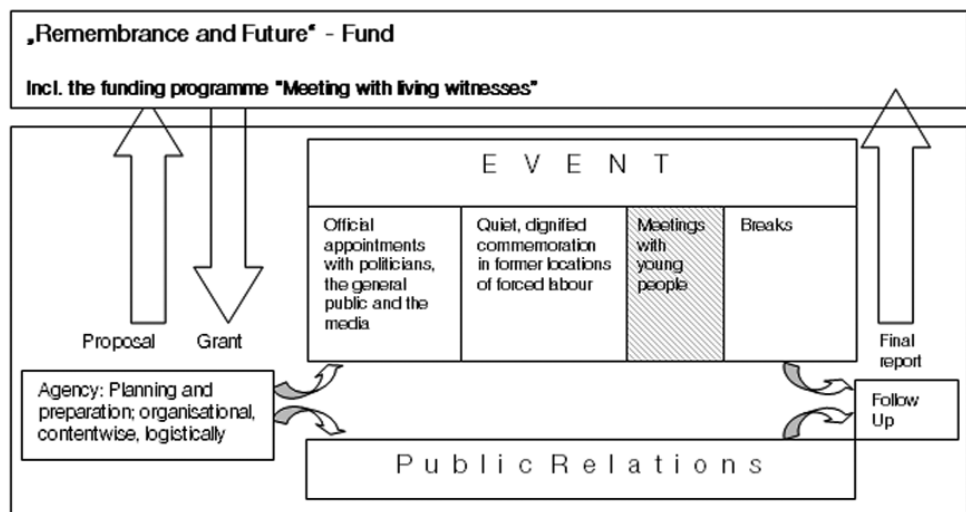
Over 93 Percent formal educational facilities

In regard to the institutions involved, a clear trend is recognisable; 83.57 percent of the institutions involved were schools. Only 9.74 percent further formal educational facilities follow and the remaining 6.69 percent were non-formal institutions. The funding programme is clearly focusing on formal educational facilities (93.31 percent) and reflects the difficulty of the organisations which are responsible for the project to find non-formal youth institutions with a high organisational level.

Of the 1391 survivors who were included in the project proposals, 831 actually participated. The clear majority of the living witnesses actually live in Central and Eastern Europe, whereby Israel lies clearly in front (21.02 percent), followed by Poland (19.26 percent), the Ukraine (16.67 percent), Belarus (7.48 percent) and Russia (7.11 percent). The native country of the respective living witnesses could unfortunately not be determined due to the state of records.

2.1 Structural Framework of the Funding Programme

Taking a closer look at the 112 projects involved it makes sense to first visualise the structural framework to which all proposed projects principally were bound. The following chart clarifies the process which a granted project in principle goes through. Even though project variety and the contents within the funding programme diverged strongly, the following essential structure can be shown:



In order to run a project in this funding programme, an organisation responsible for the project must have completed the entire organisational, content and logistical planning in advance, before submitting a project proposal to the “Remembrance and Future”- Fund. In case of positive evaluation and a grant, the respective organisation responsible for the project has to manage three demanding major tasks: First of all, the organization, secondly the contents and, thirdly, the logistics on two levels i.e. the meeting and public relations level.

Four elements can be identified throughout all of the events studied – although in a different form and weighting. The basic structure as a main characteristic of this funding programme constitutes the meetings with young people. This is the deciding factor in the grant process, therefore, the projects differ from a pure visiting programme.

The event management works parallel to public relations, which deals with all areas and is not limited to the official appointments. The organisation responsible for the project must be both, event manager and co-ordinator of public relations. He has to deal with a multiplicity of actors: the former forced labourers, politicians, young people and their institutions and the media. This complicated structure represents a complex, partially unclear situation for the organisation responsible for the project, in which it is difficult to keep the general idea.

Multiplicity of actors

The project organiser therefore, has to be highly competent in various areas already at the beginning of the project. Several organisations were not fully aware of this. A high quality of the meeting was ensured whenever the organisation responsible for the project could sensibly combine all relevant components. It should be considered to what extent such a complex structure should be maintained in the future. It is essential that the high standards required must be made clear to all those involved from the very beginning. It would make sense to offer efficient support at the same time.

2.2 Preparation and Follow-up

National Socialism has been on school curricula for decades, however, the topic of forced labour finds little explicit consideration. The success of the meeting with former forced labourers therefore depends crucially on a good preparation and follow-up work with specific regard to the contents. This substantial element of the meeting between young people and living witnesses has several decisive functions. On the one hand, the analysis of the topic itself, whereby the topics of “forced labour”, “concentration camps”, “the resistance” or “Ghettos” require a differentiated view. On the other hand, the mental and emotional preparation and follow-up of the meetings with the living witnesses in order to enable the young participants to develop their own individual interest in the topic. The integration of young people into the preparation and follow-up of the programme also promotes a sense of autonomy and awakens a consciousness for commitment to their environment.

Maximum integration of young participants

An overview of the important dimensions should be considered in the preparatory and follow-up stages. The functions and how to implement them are shown in the following table:

Dimensions	Preparation	Follow-up
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · introduction of the topic of forced labour in the Third Reich · discussion and explanation of generic key terms · exploration of the biography of the contemporary witness · establishment of a connection to the country of origin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · placing the individual biography in a historical context · topic-orientated excursions to expand the historical horizon (visiting exhibitions or commemorative sites) · establishment of a connection to current topics such as injustice, racism and xenophobia
Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · clarification of expectations · formulation of questions for the living witness · viewing and discussing a relevant film or visual material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · establishing a connection to personal everyday life · writing thank you letters to the contemporary witnesses · documentation of the meeting (e.g. in the school newspaper, website or classroom wall) · Interview with the witness · Discussion of a possible follow-up meeting or event
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · exploring the possibility of involving the young participants (preparing the room, collecting the contemporary witness, making contact and arrangements in advance, researching in archives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · see Preparation

The Foundation tries to ensure a high standard of preparation and follow-up when outlining this standards explicitly in the project proposal. How to actually fulfil this requirement is left up to the organisation submitting the proposal. A perusal of the final reports shows that the preparatory and follow-up stages differ very much. Some of these are quite intensive, due to longer-term working groups. Quiet often, however, when implementing the project preparation and the follow-up these were completely disregarded out of financial reasons or due to time or personnel restraints. The project-specific variety is reflected in the type of preparation and follow-up, which makes comparison of the projects difficult. As a result there are very different models, focuses and educational approaches to implementing the projects.

Statistics In order to show the different quality and intensity of the preparatory and follow-up stages, three categories have been defined for the evaluation of the project proposals and/or the final reports.

Category 1 covers all projects, documenting the content and organisational preparation and follow-up, which lasted longer than one day in each case and in addition special materials were prepared.

Category 2 covers all projects, which have had a preparation, but however no information about any follow-up activities is available. In addition the preparation and follow-up was separated contentwise and organisationally, so that either a preparation for the content or an organisational preparation and follow-up took place.

Category 3 summarises all those projects, where it is not clear if any preparation or follow-up was done. In these projects the activities which required preparation and follow-up were left to the schools themselves, so that the organisations responsible for the project could provide no relevant data.

Barely 45 percent of the projects fell into category 2, followed by 36.5 percent in category 1 and finally 18 percent of those projects, which do not give any information about preparation and follow-ups. The conspicuously high number of projects in the first category must, however, be qualified. Many organisations outlined the preparatory and follow-up stages in their project proposals without going into detail; however, they did not document these stages in their final report. In this category are also organisations that planned preparation and follow-up work over several days in their project proposal, without making clear in what form this work took place. It's worth to stress that the efforts of the organizers to accompany the meeting with appropriate preparation and follow-up work were clearly present.

The multiplicity of the films on the Second World War makes it difficult to make a precise classification, however, certain, rather popular films such as Steven Spielberg's "Schindler's List" are high on the list of those films, which teachers used. The literature used for preparation is similar. Even if these media offer a comparatively simple and easy entrance to the difficult and complex topic field "National Socialism – Anti-semitism – concentration camp", they do not open the path to a differentiated meetings. As a result the conversation often turns to the Resistance or to the topic of victims of the Nazi regime in general, even though the living witness was not automatically in the Resistance. Also the distinction between forced labourers from Western Europe and forced labourers from central and Eastern Europe is not included into the preparation of a meeting, although an understanding of this is of crucial importance. The teasing out of topics is rare and is often only on the basis of literature written by the living witnesses themselves.

Type of preparation

Unspecified approach

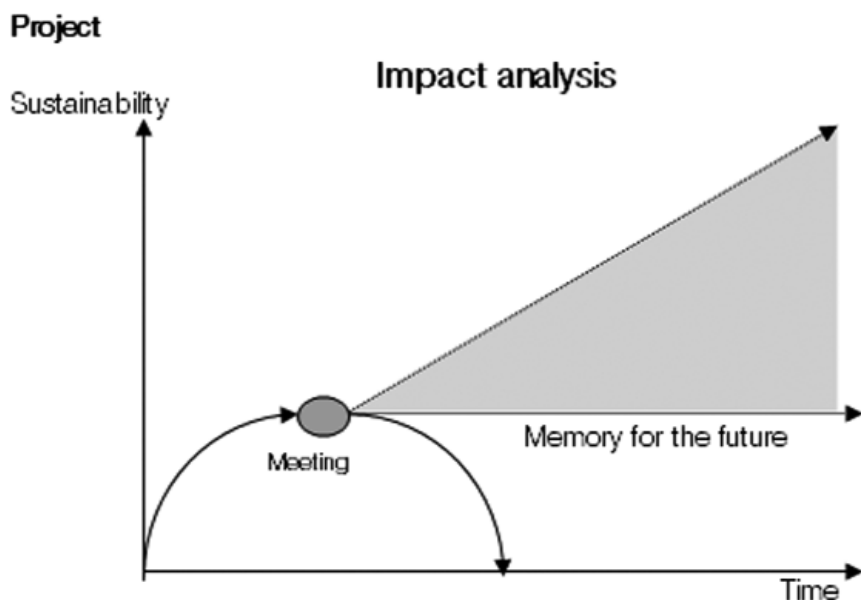
Outstanding and well-researched literature is available to properly prepare those facilitators, who are entrusted with the preparation of the content and educational aspects. The organisational preparation focuses on the integration of the young people in the planning and conception of the programme in taking on certain tasks which are important for the meeting. In addition, research in city archives or the establishment of contact with the living witness are also forms of organisational preparation. This form is usually selected by schools, when they themselves are the project organisers, as the contact between the organisers and participants is close. Young persons then have the possibility of bringing their own ideas and conceptions into the programme. They are involved in the implementation and contribute to the realisation of the project. The character of the meeting for the young people changes from a mere instruction unit on forced labourers and National Socialism to an overall project, which does not have to take place in a school context, but can also be a part of pupils' extra-curricular activities.

3. The Sustainability of the Project for Young People

The sustainability of the project cannot be assessed by reminding the project and/or the meeting, but by its further preoccupation with the topic. Here we need to differentiate between two elements: the individual and the social. The social element describes the extent to which young people study German history on their own and are motivated to learn more about the topics of forced labour and National Socialism in their spare time (e.g. reading books, watching documentaries, visiting exhibitions and events). The social element is the taking over social responsibility in their direct neighbourhood, for example talking about their meeting with the living witness at home, in school or in youth clubs. The extent to which both elements are present beyond the meeting determines the success and the lasting effect of the entire project in the long run. This is closely related to the follow-up on the topic with the participants, as the discourse on the meeting and the reflection on the affect of the meeting lead to further questions and opinions, the basis for a further preoccupation with the topic.

Increasing the level

The effect of a meeting project on those involved is basically a process in which few relevant factors can significantly influence the sustainability of the learning effect. This process can be visualised as a coordinate system in which the horizontal axis represents the level of sustainability and the vertical time. At the start of a project it is based on a methodological approach to teaching history and promoting empathy. The more specific the formulation of the approach and the appropriate implementation, the higher the level of sustainability. Also valuable for increasing the sustainable affect of a project is involving the young participants in the content, conceptual and organisational planning of the meeting project.



The highlight of a project is undoubtedly the personal meeting with the living witnesses, a moment that also has a strong emotional effect. In numerous projects, particularly with those without any type of follow-up, the potential of this high level of attention to content and emotional sensitivity for the topic of forced labour is lost. Without tangible educational offers for continued analysis a very often

vague memory of the meeting remains, however not of the contents. If a current socio-political topic is considered in the conceptual stage of a meeting project, an action-oriented aspect is added. This ensures that the memory of the project can be sustained long into the future and that the awakened motivation may result into a commitment to a conscious debate on injustice and the disregard of human rights.

The questionnaires completed by the pupils who participated in the project show that around 20 percent of the young people surveyed want to continue the topics of National Socialism and forced labour, but do not know what to do. Despite a positive reaction to the meeting, they remain positive. In the above mentioned percentage included are the 14 percent who only wish to continue with the topics in school. A total of a third of the young people asked are prepared to continue with the topic, but do not know how or are waiting for the topic to come up again on its own. "I hope, but don't know how" was a typical statement made by one girl. The teenagers tend to see the necessity to get more involved in the topic. However, they lack ideas on how to demonstrate their commitment to the topic. They often look to their schools, seeing this as their role.

Lack of ideas

An impressive 38.34 percent of the young people involved in the meeting projects want to continue to explore the topic further on their own. Particularly books, TV and the internet are seen as possible media to help them further explore the topic, something they do feel the need to do. This high level of potential for motivation could be used for follow-up projects, with appropriate educational back-up. If the continuation with the topic is totally left up to the teenagers, the results are not proved satisfactory.

Statistics

Around 15 percent of the young participants do not wish to continue the exploring of the topic after the meeting. The reason for this is often the feeling that they have looked at National Socialism enough. A continuation of the topic would be too much. It is often pointed out that they, the younger generation, are not at fault for the crimes of National Socialism and that other topics are more important for them. In these cases the connection to their own modern lives has obviously not been made. The meeting is seen purely as a history lesson, in which they can learn dates and facts, and little more. The value of the meeting is reduced to the memory of historical facts, which are not attractive enough for young people to look at the topic above and beyond the extent to which it is covered in school.

4. Perspectives for the Future

The funding programme "Meeting living witnesses – the lives of former forced labourers" allowed the Foundation to cover a number of areas and to contribute to a sustainable culture of remembrance in Germany. The statistics, but also the statements of the living witnesses and the young people, are impressive and convincing. The evaluation results show a certain number of central areas which are crucial for the further development of the funding programme.

The evaluation of the funding programme made clear in which way the meeting programme was beneficial for the young people of today, and for the former forced labourers. In addition an insight into such meetings was possible through the results of the evaluation. This fulfils a directive function for future project work and

adds to our general level of knowledge. The experience gathered helps to make expectations clearer for all involved and to thus make the best of the potential and the opportunities that arise. Furthermore, it becomes clear where improvement is needed and in which areas the young people involved need more educational back-up.

Awareness of the
opportunities

The evaluation of the projects showed that the preparation of and the follow-up work with the pupils involved are key elements, of which some motivated organisations did a good job. Particularly the follow-up after a meeting give the participants the chance to find a connection between their own lives and the topics of National Socialism, forced labour or the Holocaust. This allows them to be aware of opportunities and perspectives for the future. In order to make the contact between the young people and the living witnesses as intensive as possible, some projects involved the teenagers in official appointments, visiting graves and commemorative events; an approach that has proven to be effective.

The public relations work of the individual organisations running projects did not clearly highlight the cooperation with the Future Funds. A reference to the funding by the Future Funds was rare and often hidden. A co-operation as partners was similarly ignored. This should be thought over as an opportunity that the general public becomes more aware of the Future Funds and that their work is undoubtedly lost.

The evaluation showed that a high percentage of young people are highly motivated to continue exploring the topics of forced labour and National Socialism. This is an unused potential for sustainable commemorative work in Germany. It is particularly important for the next generation, but also for society as a whole, to use this potential.

Awareness of the
varieties

Numerous possible ways of running projects have brought up a few new ideas, which offer new points of reference between those involved in the meetings. Alongside the individual interest in the topics, some schools and numerous youth projects dealt with the topic of forced labour as groups. This often just involved a presentation of the results of the project using audio and video recordings, newspaper articles, exhibitions, drama performances and written documentation. However, some schools kept in touch with the living witnesses and are planning further meetings. A number of schools have started up partnerships with living witnesses from different countries and hope to carry on the fruitful exchange with them.

Awareness of the
educational dimension

Meetings can be influenced by a variety of direct and indirect factors, such as seating arrangements, the presence of the teacher or the media and the ability of the living witnesses to get their story across. The meetings were particularly intensive when school structures were ignored or left behind and a project-type atmosphere could be created.

The participatory elements of a meeting were gladly used by the young participants, but they did not discover them themselves. The idea to get more involved usually came from the teachers or group leaders. As a rule, the general experience showed that pupils can be entrusted with more concrete involvement and with the conceptual preparation. The evaluation made clear that there is a positive correlation between the extent of the involvement of the pupils and the sustainability of the learning effect.

Stories told by the living witnesses are kept in mind when everyday life and personal fates are highlighted and compared to modern life. However, it has become clear that these do not necessarily show young people how to concretely prevent such injustice. Hope is put in international organisations or other states and the possibilities of democratic institutions, but the chance offered by individual involvement is often ignored.

The pupils were not able to or only partly able to see the connection between the past and their daily life. The preparation and follow-up work is essential in enabling the pupils to get the most out of the meeting.

Awareness of
nowadays relevance

On the basis of the evaluation there are four main areas which need to be improved:

- The structure and construction of the project
- The participation of the young participants
- The educational approach
- The anchoring of the programme in society

The central perspective for the future should be to involve more living witnesses, as far as possible, and not to forget that the next generation is a very important social resource. The evaluation was able to show that meeting programmes in particular are suitable to create awareness for democracy and responsibility for one's environment from the memories of the past.

The meetings have shown how important this form of commemorative work for the development of society is. The combined efforts of all those involved are necessary to further develop what has already been achieved and to lead society into the future with memories of the past and the responsibility to prevent such horrors to happen again. At the same time the meetings encouraged the emotional aspect of learning and empathy – a prerequisite for the training of tolerance and democracy among young Germans in the 21st century.

C·A·P
Center for Applied
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© 2006
ISBN 3-933456-40-1

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