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# “How Do You Wish to Remember?” – Youth Participation and Culture of Remembrance Using Geo-Information

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## Abstract

Democratic societies can function only when their citizens are actively committed to co-existing with equal rights. The remembrance of the crimes committed under National Socialism can also provide an impetus to reflect on current ills. The youth participation project “*Wie wollt ihr euch erinnern?*” (“How do you wish to remember?”), which enabled young people to get involved in the creation of a new memorial and education centre in Hamburg, is an example of how geo-information can be used in extra-curricular education work for the purposes of civic education.

## 1 Introduction

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNITED NATIONS 2012), children and young people should have the freedom to participate in cultural life and the arts.<sup>1</sup> Participation also includes the right to be involved in decision-making and creative processes, so that youth participation can be defined as an active form of “citizenship education” or “civic education”. Yet when it comes to the specific implementation of youth participation at the local level, there is still much room for improvement. Away from the established opportunities for young people to engage, such as in youth associations, party-based organisations, or similar associations, various other models of youth participation are currently being explored (BERTELSMANN FOUNDATION 2010). Here, the focus is also on achieving greater involvement of children and young people in public planning and creative processes. Yet in previous approaches, little to no regard has been paid to the question as to what role geo-information can play in the context of youth participation, or what opportunities engagement or learning with geo-information affords. This is surprising when one considers that the in-depth evaluation of geo-information forms the cornerstone of sustainable spatial planning.

„*Wie wollt ihr euch erinnern?*“ (“How do you wish to remember?”) was the title of a youth participation project carried out by Hamburg's Ministry of Culture and involving over 40

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<sup>1</sup> “Article 31.1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.”

participating school students (HAMBURG MINISTRY OF CULTURE 2012). The project was set up to allow participants to actively contribute their ideas for a memorial and accompanying exhibition on the site of a former railway station called Hannoverscher Bahnhof. Evidence shows that between 1940 and 1945, this railway station, which directly bordered Hamburg's historic city centre, was the processing and departure point for twenty deportation trains with around 7,700 people on board, of whom at least 6,500 did not live to see the end of National Socialist rule (APEL, BAJOHR & PREHN 2007).

Asking young people how they wish to remember the crimes of National Socialism means a change in educational remembrance work. This change goes hand-in-hand with the changing conditions under which children and young people are growing up. In most instances, today's generation of young people have no living relatives who could have been perpetrators or victims during the National Socialist era, meaning that there are fewer and fewer points of contact with the past available to young people. Then there is the fact that, in a major city such as Hamburg, around half the population under the age of 18 has a migration background; of these, many hail from countries which were outside the Greater German Reich's sphere of influence (STATISTIK NORD 2011). This makes it increasingly difficult to engage with the young people thematically via their individual family history. The events involving living witnesses to the National Socialist era, which have been an important pillar of remembrance work in recent years, will also soon become impossible due to mortality reasons. ASSMANN (2013, 12) describes this as the "turning point in the culture of remembrance", as artefacts and historical places become increasingly important in education and remembrance work.

In what follows, the example of the site development work carried out as part of the youth participation project is to be used to highlight how working with geo-information can be utilised to initiate engagement with historical events and facilitate the "readability of the landscape" (SCHLÖGEL 2006). However, before discussing the sequence of the event, the learning content and the teaching materials, the initial focus will be on the historical site of the Hannoverscher Bahnhof, and the specifics of the youth participation project.

## 2 The Historical Site of the "Hannoverscher Bahnhof"

The Hannoverscher Bahnhof was opened in 1872 as a terminus on the south-eastern edge of the historic city centre, or rather, on the close by island Graasbrookinsel. From here, a two-track route created a connection to the Prussian city of Harburg on the other bank of the River Elbe. This city was in turn connected to the Lüneburg-Celle-[Hanover] rail link and the Bremen-Ruhr-[Paris] route, which had already been partially completed by the railway company in charge of building it, Köln-Mindener-Eisenbahngesellschaft.

From the 1880s onwards, the large increases in the volume of rail traffic resulted in Hamburg's railway terminals regularly reaching the limits of their capacity. For this reason, the Central Station of Hamburg was built in 1906 for continuous rail traffic, and is where passenger transport services were consolidated. As a result, the Hannoverscher Bahnhof was expanded into a central freight station with additional sheds for express goods and general freight. According to FRÜHAUF (1994, 79), it developed into one of Germany's largest transshipment terminals for general freight. In terms of passenger transport, the railway station was now used only for special transport arrangements, such as for "steerage passengers and

re-migrants from the Hamburg-America Line”, tackling the volume of Sunday traffic when people went on excursions to the Lüneburg Heath during the war year of 1914, and ultimately for the Red Cross trains carrying the war-wounded (MELHOP 1925, 361-362). The railway station was also occasionally used for special instances of passenger transport in the Weimar Republic era. The minimal importance of passenger transport during this period becomes apparent not least through the fact that no arrangements were made to maintain the roof of the hall, which was finally demolished in 1932 (APEL 2009, 17). Contemporary witness accounts (APEL 2009) support the assumption that in the 1930s, this railway station at the centre of an area characterised by the port and commercial sectors, was – if at all – known as a freight terminal. Anyone not purposefully seeking out this site for commercial reasons would have no other point of contact with the Hannoverscher Bahnhof, as it was situated away from any through roads or leisure facilities.

In this regard, the railway station was perfectly suited in the eyes of the National Socialist perpetrators for carrying out deportations in an as speedy, inconspicuous, and therefore undisrupted manner as possible. The first train carrying deportees was put together in May 1940, when around 910 Sinti and Roma, predominantly from northern Germany, were deported to Belzec in freight carriages (PREHN 2012). The deportation of Hamburg's Jewish population began in October 1941 with transports to the so-called “Judenghetos” (“Jewish ghettos”) in “Litzmannstadt” (Łódź), Minsk, and Riga. These were followed by larger-scale transports to the concentration camps at Auschwitz and Theresienstadt in the summer of 1942. These were also the destinations of the deportations carried out in the spring and summer of 1943, the spring of 1944, and early in 1945. There are records of some 7,200 people being deported in total via the Hannoverscher Bahnhof, due to the National Socialist racial ideology. The majority of these people died before the end of the Nazi tyranny (APEL, BAJOHR & PREHN 2007, 2-3).

Immediately following the war, the railway station once again exclusively served as a freight terminal. Damages to the tracks inflicted during the war were repaired relatively quickly. In October 1955, the distinctive station building was then demolished (NECKER 2009), leaving only a few, barely noticeable buildings behind to bear witness to the Hannoverscher Bahnhof's past as a commuter station and to the history of the deportations (FRÜHAUF 1994; PREHN 2009).

No engagement with the deportations had taken place here, and no memorial had been erected at the site. Most of the victims were either dead, still being marginalised, or had left their home country for good, while the perpetrators and collaborators preferred not to discuss the crimes which had occurred. During this period, the focus in society was on acknowledging any injustice in the first place, and on ‘restoring’ the rights of the survivors. Given the great opposition to the creation of appropriate forms of remembrance, one had to deem it a great success that at least the main locations where the National Socialists' mass murders took place, such as the concentration camps, could be transformed into sites of remembrance and education with the involvement of victims' groups.

The history of the former Hannoverscher Bahnhof as a symbol of the deportation of sections of Hamburg's population was therefore increasingly forgotten, or rather, not brought to the public's attention. This was also due to the fact that the surrounding area continued to be used as a commercial port, meaning the location was of little public interest. Without any further information about this place, i.e. geo-information, there is nothing to indicate to

those not involved that this was a former railway station from which parts of Hamburg's population were "Sent to Their Deaths" (APEL 2009).

Only when the port area near the inner city was redeveloped into a mixed-use city quarter, the "HafenCity", the railway station once again gained the focus of any attention. Its central area, where the tracks and the reception building for passengers once stood, is to be turned into a park, and residential and office buildings are to be built on the outer areas of the station grounds. This redevelopment offers the hitherto missed opportunity to create both a place of remembrance and an education and documentation centre close to the inner city, which also finds an audience among people who happen to be in the area by chance or for other reasons, and who are stimulated to engage with the past and present thanks to the information provided.

### 3 The Participation Project "*Wie wollt ihr euch erinnern?*"

A more intensive engagement with the historical site of the "Hannoverscher Bahnhof" only began with the planning of the eastern part of the HafenCity in the 2000s. This engagement manifested itself in the creation of a round table forum chaired by the Hamburg Ministry of Culture and involving various institutions focusing on "the appropriate use of the historical legacy and the former place of deportation" (GARBE 2009, 279). Those involved included the Hamburg state parliament, the Hamburg-Mitte district assembly, the company Hafen-City GmbH, Hamburg's museums, the organisations the Jewish Community of Hamburg and the Roma and Sinti Union, and the Auschwitz Committee. This forum formulated the key demand that the site of the former railway station include not only a specially designed memorial, but also an information and education centre which facilitated "engagement with history against the backdrop of potential threats in today's society", and, which, as an "anti-racist place of remembrance", took a preventative approach in "addressing potential threats to democracy" (FISCHER 2009, 253).

In order to achieve greater diversity in the ideas of how to turn this demand into reality, the youth participation project "*Wie wollt ihr euch erinnern?*" ("How do you wish to remember?") was set up by the operators of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial and by the Landesjugendring Hamburg (Hamburg Young People's Association) in the autumn of 2010. The aim was not only to let young people participate in the designing of the memorial, exhibition, and educational offering, but also to gain the longer-term support of the participants for the information and documentation centre being created (LUDWIG 2012).

According to criteria such as school type, school, place of residence, age and sex, 40 school students between the ages of 16 and 19 were eventually chosen for the participation project. The aim was to obtain a diverse mix of different views. Between autumn 2011 and June 2012, they took part in a total of eight events, each of which took place at a different location. Renowned institutions such as the Alfred Toepfer Foundation F.V.S., the Moses Mendelssohn Foundation, the Körber Foundation, the NORDMETALL Foundation, the Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte Hamburg (Hamburg Research Centre for Contemporary History), the Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (State Centre for Political Education), the Restitution Office of the Hamburg Ministry of Social Affairs, the Jewish Community of Hamburg, the Roma and Sinti Union, HafenCity GmbH and the Gewerkschaft für Erziehung und Wissenschaft (Union for Education and Science) all supported the project finan-

cially and thematically. A 20-person advisory committee was formed among the sponsors, from the spheres of politics, science, and culture. It was chaired by the Hamburg Ministry of Culture, which provided support for the conceptual work of the project (HAMBURG MINISTRY OF CULTURE 2012).

The Institute of Geography at the University of Hamburg was another of the event's supporters, and provided technical equipment, expertise, and source material for the opening event, which was dedicated to the theme of "Engagement with the site". This part of the youth participation project, which constitutes only a small component when viewed in the context of the overall event, is to form the main focus of what follows, as this is where the link between place and history was most intensively engaged with (REYMERS & KROPP 2012).

## 4 Didactic Objectives and Learning Content

The objective of the participation project was to foster young people's pro-activity and allow them to participate in the designing of their living environment in line with the principles of civic commitment. The remembrance of the National Socialist crimes and the lessons to be learned from these for the present are a vital part of our democratic society. "Enacted democracy" also means not allowing the culture of remembrance to become a static ritual, but promoting its continuous development through the influence of every individual. In this context, the ideas of the next generation for expanding the existing culture of remembrance are particularly welcome. The objective must therefore be to improve communication skills and provide the stimulus to engage with history and the present.

Geo-information can support this process. The youth participation project also focused on using the methods of cultural landscape research in order to enable people to more effectively orientate themselves spatially and temporally (SCHREIBER & GRUBER 2009), and to reinforce spatially networked thinking. The engagement with participant-generated data during group-work sessions here not only supports participants' skills of description, but also their skills of interaction, conflict acceptance, and rational division of tasks. The use of GIS and GPS in processing a specific planning task in turn meets the requirements for a learning approach in secondary and extra-curricular education, which prepares participants for university and professional life.

The point is not only to consume geo-information, but also to analyse self-collected data. This knowledge should enable well-argued involvement in the planning process and the consideration of different ideas. This space is to be understood as a social construction; its use is subject to joint negotiation processes. Using the example of the Hannoverscher Bahnhof, this means that the historical place is only a wasteland to some, but a place of remembrance to others. In shaping the future, there will also be people who have different ideas on how to use the park. As many of these different interests as possible have to be included in such a design process, in order to find a sustainable compromise.

In the following table, the structure of the introductory event is illuminated via the different methods used. These were intended to address and consolidate the various skills of the participants. Even though this was an extracurricular project, the focus on skills and the

requirements for the participating age group were taken from the curricula of the Hamburg Ministry of Schools.

**Table 1:** Approach and learning objectives (adapted from BRAUCKMANN 2012)

	Approach	Methods used	Skills
Plenary session	Introduction (presentation of various maps/plans and the historic origins of the site being examined)	Map reading/comparing maps	Analytical skills Spatial orientation Temporal orientation
			Social skills (esp. interaction)
Group work	Project-orientated tour of the site (mapping)	Map key	Visual and descriptive skills Spatial orientation Temporal orientation
	Supported evaluation	Geo-information system	Analytical skills Media skills/media design
	Presentation of the group results	Presentation/discussion	Communication skills Conflict acceptance and conflict management
			Social skills (esp. team work, interaction, division of tasks)
Plenary session	Summary of the interim results	Discussion	Ensuring results Linking own results with learning content
	Developing own ideas based on project work	Self-organised group	Pro-activity Enactive learning
			Social skills (esp. interaction)

## 5 Procedure

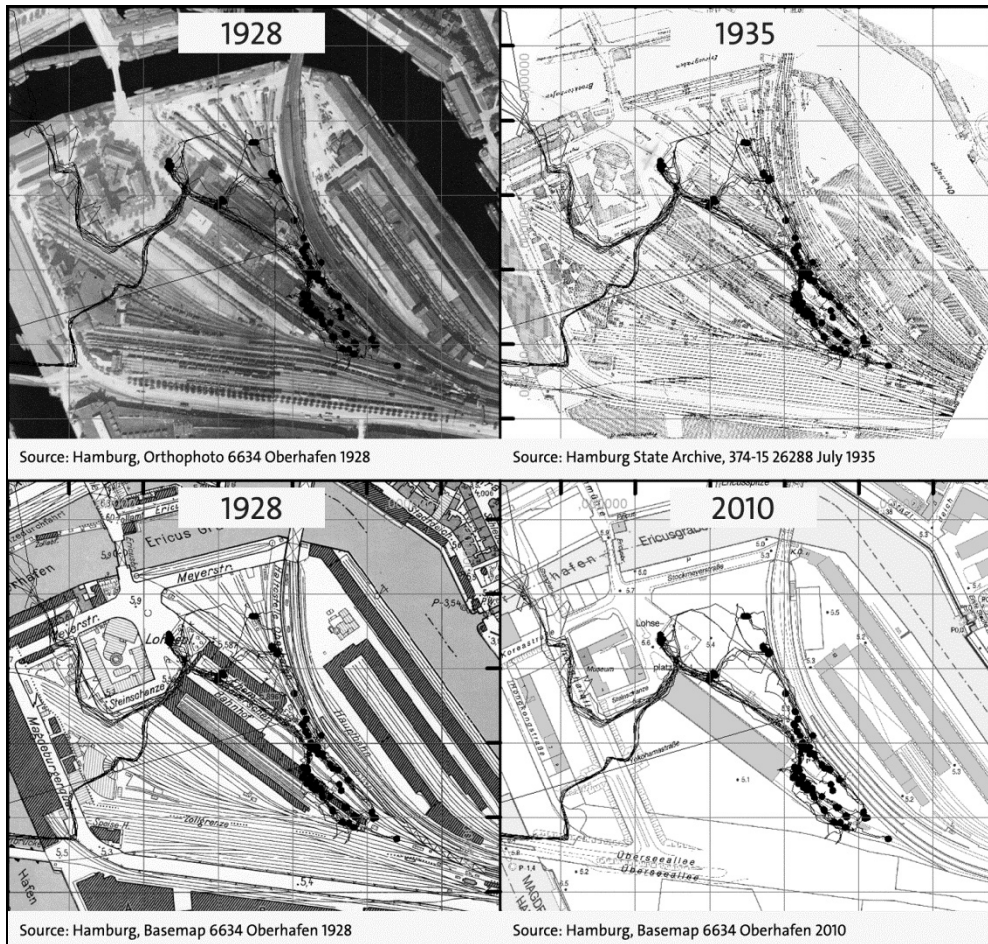
“The engagement with the site” initially began with a 45-minute talk in which the methods of historico-geographical cultural landscape research and their connections with other scientific disciplines and non-university-based professions were presented. In specific terms, the change in the cultural landscape to be investigated was discussed using the example of the Hannoverscher Bahnhof. For this purpose, various geo-data were presented in visual format using a geographic information system (GIS). These were mainly the floor plans of buildings and schematic track layouts, which had been digitalised using various historical maps and plans. Photographs and spatially attributable descriptions were also stored in the

GIS. This made it possible to present the functionality of a GIS as a tool for displaying and evaluating spatial data, and to demonstrate the diversity of geo-information. In the talk, it became apparent that certain “anchor points” or “landmarks”, which have distinctive features and which continue to exist over longer periods, are of great importance for spatial-temporal orientation work. Only once geo-information is linked to the specific site does the “readability of the landscape” emerge (SCHLÖGEL 2006), which in turn allows for the interpretation of further historical relics. For this reason, the young people were also presented with various examples of elements from the “cultural landscape of the railway” (BRAUCKMANN 2010), which potentially might be encountered on the site of the former railway station.

Immediately following the talk, groups of four or five people were formed, and each group presented with a GPS device, digital camera, numerous maps (see Fig. 1), and record sheets. With the help of the GPS device, the school students were meant to not only document their section of the grounds of the former station and determine their positions, but also record spots which they felt were interesting or particularly representative of the site. Their next task was to capture such landscape impressions with the camera, and document them in the record sheet. It was important to point out to the participants that they should record not only relics which they associated with the deportations or the Nazi era, but also elements which might serve as evidence of the changes to the cultural landscape. Because they only had one hour for touring the site, the young people were able to view and map only a section of the grounds, which cover around 10.5 hectares. Yet even this brief overview stimulated them to learn more about the location, its history and the relics the participants discovered.

Following their work on-site, the participants entered the GPS data into the GIS, and linked it to the information from the record sheets and photographs. They then selected different background maps on which their route and waypoints were marked. Using the data taken from the site and those collated in the GIS, the groups each created a poster which was presented to the advisory committee the next day.

During the course of the event, it became apparent that the fundamental engagement with the site via geo-information was an important cornerstone for the rest of the project work. The programme which followed included talks with living witnesses, a visit to the research centre of the Neuengamme concentration camp memorial, and a trip to the deportation memorials in Berlin (HAMBURG MINISTRY OF CULTURE 2012). The young people then developed their own ideas for remembering the National Socialist crimes and addressing current threats to democracy. For this purpose, the participants created their own piece of music, video clips and accompanying material. For their part, the working group “*Wegweiser*” (“Signposts”) engaged with a decidedly site-specific issue, creating a concept for how the individual places of persecution might be linked up (HAMBURG YOUNG PEOPLE’S ASSOCIATION 2012, 5). The focus here was primarily on spatially highlighting the fact that the persecutions did not begin with the deportations to the forced labour and extermination camps, but with the removal of rights and ostracism of the victims in the respective residential areas. One idea the working group had was for a piece of application software (an “app2), via which these stations could be displayed on mobile devices using geo-information and GPS, thereby facilitating engagement with this topic in relation to the history of people’s immediate surroundings.



**Fig. 1:** Various maps and plans with which the young people examined the site of the former railway station (New compiled by Brauckmann 2015 with tracks and points the youths marked)

## 6 Conclusion

Youth participation is an important component of civic education. With commitment and pro-activity, young people can help shape their own living environment and internalise democratic values. Remembering the National Socialist crimes is one of the cornerstones of German democracy. Here, it is important to internalise that the stigmatisation and removal of rights experienced by parts of the population, which ultimately ended in systematic mass murder, clearly began before 1933 and progressively intensified. This is what democratic education must take as its starting point, teaching this history as part of the present, and investigating its effects on the present.



According to ASSMANN (2013, 12), we currently find ourselves at a “turning point in the culture of remembrance”. The generation of living witnesses will soon be unable to give their accounts; at the same time, a growing number of young people do not have a link via their own family history to either perpetrators or victims. With the upcoming generation, it is therefore important to find new ways both to remember the National Socialist crimes and to continue to tackle current issues such as ostracism. The youth participation project “*Wie wollt ihr euch erinnern?*” can be viewed as an example of the form such continued development of the culture of remembrance might take. Against the backdrop of the fact that a site of remembrance and associated documentation centre are currently being developed close to the inner city, this project above all focused on incorporating the conceptual ideas of young people.

Historical sites can stimulate both an engagement with history and the corresponding communication processes. However, to facilitate the “readability of the landscape” (SCHLÖGEL 2006), spatially related information must be provided. The more geo-information is made available, the greater the success will be in understanding the uniqueness of a place and its history.

Using methods of cultural landscape research, the project's participants were provided with an impression of the grounds of the former Hannoverscher Bahnhof scheduled for development. From here, around 7,700 people who had previously already been stigmatised as “Jews” and “gypsies” were deported via 20 transport trains to the forced labour and exterminations camps, and thus for the most part “Sent to Their Deaths” (APEL 2009).

The joint work carried out with the young people showed that they were very committed, and they actively requested additional information about the site. They were also enabled to use geo-information to support their own learning progress. This made it apparent that a comprehensive engagement with geo-information can foster involvement in planning processes. Later in the project, one group used its own initiative to investigate ways of better linking up the various places and stations where people were ostracised and persecuted. To this end, they tackled the question of how geo-information can be optimally presented and made available.

During the course of 2015, the Lohse Park will now be opened on part of the former grounds of the railway station. This park will feature a small memorial which will function as a site of remembrance for the deportations. The opening date for the education and documentation centre is as yet unknown. It is to be hoped that many of the young people's ideas will then be incorporated, and further opportunities for youth participation made available.

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