



Visits, Seminars and Study Days

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HISTORICAL SITE AND MEMORIAL

The present Memorial Site - formerly the villa of an industrialist - was used between 1941 and 1945 as a guest house for the SS. On January 20, 1942, fifteen high-ranking representatives of the SS, the NSDAP and various ministries discussed here how to cooperate on the planned deportation and murder of all European Jews. The SS-officers reported quite frankly to the various state secretaries present about the murderous actions that had been carried out in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union since August 1941 by Special Units ("*Einsatzgruppen*"), including the killing methods. The representatives of the ministries made suggestions reflecting the specific interests of their respective departments but did not raise any basic objections whatsoever regarding the planned systematic and indiscriminate murder of Jewish children, women and men. The minutes of this meeting were taken by Adolf Eichmann, the expert for deportation in the Reich Security Main Office. They document the appalling fact that the traditional state administrative agencies had become accomplices to a monstrous crime which anticipated the murder of 11 million human beings.

The most characteristic feature of the genocide of the European Jews is its bureaucratic organisation, whereby, besides the SS, state institutions and members of many different professional groups were to varying degrees accomplices on account of their knowledge and responsibility, while most Germans were at least passive observers of the deportations. Therefore the central objectives of the Memorial Site within the "house of the perpetrators" are: to provide information about the fate of the victims and to remember them by means of a permanent exhibition, a library, and educational work, and also to inform about the perpetrators and the organisation of their crimes. This also includes the historical, ideological and structural background (i.e., the history of the Jews, the crisis of democracy, racism, anti-Semitism, authoritarian society) as well as the aftermath of National Socialism and the question of how Germany has dealt with its past since 1945. In addition the connections between the murder of the European Jews and the other racially motivated mass crimes of the National Socialists are being investigated: the murder of the mentally ill and the physically handicapped; the persecution and murder of the Sinti and Roma; the enslavement and murder of a large segment of the non-Jewish population in eastern Europe as a result of the German policy of conquest and Germanisation; and, finally, the murder of millions of Soviet Russian prisoners of war.

THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The educational opportunities at the house are addressed to pupils and other young people, and also to adults.

Generally the seminars for adults are vocationally oriented. Their central theme is how the respective occupational groups to which the seminar participants belong acted during the time of National Socialism. Proceeding from there, the discussion concentrates on the significance which the history of National Socialist crimes has in our own time.

In courses for teachers and trainee teachers, the educational programme of the house is discussed. Beyond that, various possibilities and problems associated with the question of how to deal with National Socialism during lessons in school are investigated.

The educational work with pupils in the House of the Wannsee Conference does not aim to substitute the lessons taught in school about the history of National Socialist persecution of the Jews. Instead, the opportunities offered by this historical site should be utilised to gain deeper insights into significant aspects of the genocide of the Jews, and to deal with one's own emotional reactions caused by confrontation with these events. Furthermore, with the aid of the exhibits and the various sources and media available, the house as a place of learning facilitates in-depth study of a range of particular topics. The absence of institutional constraints such as curricular guidelines and rigid time schedules allows for methods of teaching and learning that motivate participants to try, actively and self-critically, to gain insights into the history of National Socialist crimes and their effects on the present.

VOCATIONALLY ORIENTED SEMINARS FOR ADULTS

The "Meeting of the State Secretaries at the Grossen Wannsee", as the Wannsee Conference is called in contemporary documents, connotes the cooperation between the traditional institutions of the German state and the newly created organisations of the National Socialist regime in the planning and organisation of the Holocaust. At this historic site the question arises of how to explain the willing participation of so many civil servants in the National Socialist crimes. For this reason, the ideologies and personal motives of the perpetrators must be examined alongside the political structures in order to determine why they developed initiatives in their daily routine or implemented instructions that actively facilitated criminal acts for which they never felt personally responsible. At the same time, we also must ask in how far the National Socialist genocide is rooted in specific German traditions, and why nearly all professional groups and institutions, numerous occupational organisations and professional associations participated in the systematic segregation, discrimination, deprivation of rights and expropriation of the Jews. The ideological and political preparation, the systematic planning and execution of mass murder that was carried out relentlessly and with technical-bureaucratic perfection as an administrative process must be investigated with these questions in mind.

The Memorial and Educational Site offers one day seminars and seminars running for several days to adults who continue with their professional education or are interested in history and politics, and to instructors and teachers. In vocationally oriented seminars, men and women from various branches of the civil service such as the judiciary, municipal administration, the tax office, health and social services, the military and the police, and also individuals associated with institutions of research and culture, investigate how members of their own vocational groups participated, by division of labour, in the preparation and execution of the "Final Solution". Furthermore, the alternative behaviour of the few who refused to co-operate and who tried to help those being persecuted can be discussed by way of example. For these studies they use documents and periodicals dating from the National Socialist period.

Although today we live under very different political circumstances in a constitutional democratic state, the history of the National Socialist crimes raises a number of politically relevant questions: which structures, which ways of thinking, speaking and behaving are responsible for denying equal rights to

other people, and for treating them like objects? What prompts people to look away in the face of discrimination and violence, or to remain indifferent to the suffering of others? Conversely, where does the ability to oppose such tendencies originate, and how can it be encouraged?

The focus and working procedures of the seminars are determined by the level of knowledge, interests and requirements of the participants. The presupposition is that dealing with history in the Memorial Site should be an active process. The most important methods are discussion, group work, autonomous research using documents and autobiographical testimonies, and also talks with survivors and consultation with experts in the field.

Seminar days are usually conducted in cooperation with partners such as unions, professional associations and other sponsors of educational activities. Qualified educational staff members of the House of the Wannsee Conference organise educational events with their respective partners, prepare public lectures and working material, act as moderators during group discussions and offer assistance to those working with documents. Moreover, the team provides advice and assistance to groups in relation to their conception and organisation of educational events; the latter may also include various other locations in Berlin and the surrounding area.



SEMINARS FOR TRAINEE TEACHERS AND TEACHERS

The House of the Wannsee Conference offers supplementary training to trainee teachers and the teaching staff of a school or of one of its departments.

One aspect of these seminars is the question of how to study history at a historical site. The building and its history as well as the educational opportunities are presented and discussed in detail. The expectations that participants may have in connection with their visit to the Memorial Site, as well as their possible misgivings and fears, can be discussed and related to the various possibilities offered by the House of the Wannsee Conference. On this basis, the participants can then decide whether they would consider a visit with their students to the Memorial and Educational Site meaningful. The planning of a visit to the Memorial Site is thoroughly discussed, including the following elements:

- the appropriate working approaches for the group concerned,
- the choice of particular topics,
- a discussion of the particular educational opportunities available at the House of the Wannsee Conference,
- a discussion of how to plan for a visit,
- useful follow-up activities.

An additional objective of the seminars is to reflect on how National Socialism is dealt with at schools, and then to investigate which changes are both necessary and possible within the educational framework. This does not merely mean discovering and discussing new findings and theses of historical investigations. Starting with the question of what can be achieved by discussing National Socialism in class, didactic reflections are raised and concepts developed. In the process, the age of the pupils and their prior acquaintance with the subject matter will have to be considered, particularly in conjunction

with their prevailing attitudes. Any discussion must take into consideration how to deal with the defensive attitudes of some pupils, with their possible aversion to the subject matter, but also with the fascination which National Socialism holds for other pupils, and not only for those who see themselves as right extremists. The possibility of countering widespread historical untruths and attempts to relativise National Socialist crimes could provide another focal point of attention for working groups.

Success or failure of the seminars depends on the extent to which the participants articulate their interests and also contribute their prior experiences. That is why the focal points of attention should be agreed upon beforehand. Any discussion of National Socialism cannot be simply restricted to the acquisition of historical knowledge. This is an educational task which cannot be left exclusively to history and political science classes.

For this reason, educational courses are offered to teachers of other fields as well, such as German, music, art, sports, biology, and also for teachers of vocational training in various subjects. During these seminars specific topics and approaches relevant to the various school subjects are presented as well as methodological ideas for interdisciplinary programmes.



Furthermore, suggestions for long-term projects are made which will enable students to study aspects of National Socialism independently, to gain deeper understanding while investigating local history and biographies, and also to discover new questions that might be investigated. The staff members also provide information to facilitate contact with other relevant institutions.

PROGRAMMS AVAILABLE FOR PUPILS AND OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE

The House of the Wannsee Conference offers a range of possibilities to youth groups and school classes in order to deal with the history of the persecution and extermination of the European Jews and of National Socialism in general, but also with its historical background and after-effects. All educational courses are prepared and supervised by staff members who are experienced in dealing with the historical and educational aspects involved. The educational opportunities are not restricted to courses in history and political science but also include such areas as literature, religion, philosophy, art, biology and sport.

In the permanent exhibition, basic information about the historical background and the process of the extermination of the European Jews is provided. In addition, either during a study day or while working on a project for several days, study groups may investigate and discuss a given topic dealing with the history of National Socialism and its consequences. Furthermore, staff members of the educational department offer their support for the preparation and supervision of

- city tours
- international meetings
- educational trips
- extended work on a given project.

The formulation of questions and the structure of work involved are largely determined by the pupils' level of knowledge, their interests and needs. Consequently, as far as contents and methods are concerned, learning processes at the Memorial and Educational Site are conceptualised in different ways depending on the time available. A preliminary telephone conversation with staff members of the Memorial Site and the participation of pupils in the choice of the topics they want to deal with during the seminar will contribute to the success of any visit.

A guided tour through the permanent exhibition provides visual impressions and information concerning the National Socialist persecution of the Jews: their systematic and brutal isolation, deprivation of rights, expulsion and extermination by shooting in open fields and mass murder in the camps. Within the

framework of the guided tours, discussions are held about the events which the exhibits convey and about their causes. Such a tour lasts for approximately two hours.

Furthermore, groups may make use of various methodological possibilities such as investigating the exhibition on their own in small groups supported by staff members. Work in such small groups usually requires approximately three hours.

Groups deal with specific topics during study days. Such a day generally consists of four sessions of ninety minutes, including a break for lunch (an inexpensive meal can be ordered if required). Study days enable participants to investigate a chosen topic using various materials and media. Topics should be determined beforehand on the basis of preliminary consultation with the participants. Staff members of the Memorial and Educational Site will then develop a concept for the chosen topic designed according to the needs of each particular group, and will also provide suitable material. The programme enables the participants to formulate their own questions, to investigate them independently and then to discuss the findings within the group.

Seminars lasting for several days can also be arranged. Frequently, a combination of study days at the House of the Wannsee Conference and city tours or visits of other memorial sites and exhibitions concerning Jewish life in Berlin may be possible.

WORKING IN SMALL GROUPS WITHIN THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION

The educational department offers to groups interested in the permanent exhibition the opportunity to work in small groups supported by staff members. This method is particularly suitable for pupils who find it difficult to concentrate for an extended period of time on a detailed guided tour. They can be motivated by their active contribution to the reception of the exhibition. Since pupils differ in learning preferences and learning habits, different models of how to work in small groups have been developed. Teachers and staff members of the educational department can clarify before the visit which particular model seems best suited for the class in question.

I. Work in small groups with questions and discussion based on a questionnaire

At the beginning of the visit, the pupils are introduced to the topics and set-up of the exhibition. They are then provided with a sheet with questions related to the exhibition on the basis of which they can work in small groups. Each group will work in two or three rooms of the exhibition. The pupils working in Room 1 of the permanent exhibition (Dictatorship in Germany) may then deal with the question: "How were the German Jews turned into foreigners among the German people?" Or they may be asked in Room 7 (Deportations): "How did the remaining non-Jewish population react to the deportations of Jews? Make sure to include the photographs in your answer." The questionnaires vary in complexity and emphasis.

The responses to the questions posed are not just to be copied from the introduction and commentary found in the exhibition. The pupils can only answer the questions in a meaningful way if they take note of the exhibition's historic photographs and documents, and then give some thought of their own to them. This task requires them to concern themselves actively with the photographs, written sources and

annotated texts. Beyond that, the young people are also given the opportunity to visit those rooms of the exhibition in which they did not work with their small group. Afterwards, all members of the group will meet in a plenary session to talk about their impressions, discoveries and questions. In this way, the participants are encouraged to discuss the contents of the exhibition.

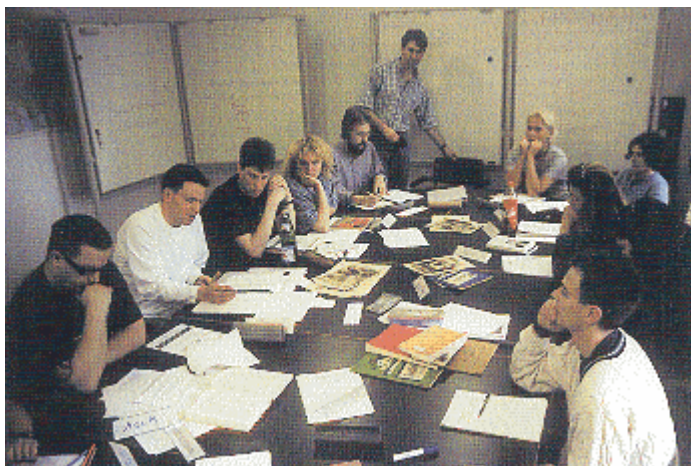
II. Work in small groups with a subsequent guided tour “for pupils by pupils”

The technique of a guided tour “for pupils by pupils” is used with pupils aged 14 to 16 who work in small groups. This approach encourages the pupils to determine for themselves the principal focal points of the permanent exhibition, thereby enhancing their willingness to take notice of new items of information.

The pupils prepare a guided tour for their classmates through one of the rooms of the exhibition. The presentation of each room generally lasts from five to seven minutes. The pupils can choose the room on which they want to concentrate. The staff members of the educational department take care that sufficient rooms of the exhibition are included in order to make sure that the process of deprivation of rights, segregation, and finally extermination will emerge clearly.

To assist those pupils working in small groups, they receive an easily understandable introductory text relating to the contents of the room they have chosen, a glossary, and a chronology. In addition they are provided with an autobiographical text written by a survivor which relates to the events displayed in the chosen room from the victims' point of view. The objective of preparing an autonomous guided tour is not merely to present facts to one's fellow pupils but also to find an individual approach to the contents of the exhibition, and then to discuss these with fellow pupils. For this reason, the young people are asked to introduce the subject of their chosen room briefly to their fellow pupils, and then to concentrate on two or three displays which they found particularly significant.

Once the preparation has been concluded, the pupils take turns guiding each other through the rooms on which they have concentrated. The staff member in charge joins this guided tour and provides information about the Wannsee Conference in the room where it was held.



STUDY DAYS FOR PUPILS AGED 11 TO 13

When working with pupils aged 11 to 13 the pedagogical aim is to offer an initial orientation in and emotional preparation for the subject matter. Their interest should be stimulated for the future study of the history of National Socialism and the persecution of the Jews. Our aim is to give them a chance to develop empathy with the victims. Therefore they approach the theme by getting to know individual biographies of persecuted children.

At the same time, they learn about the process during which the victims were deprived of their individuality and turned into an anonymous mass. The focus is on the phase of deprivation of rights and social isolation. In addition, the range of possible responses and action available to the non-Jewish population is described. Thereby, the pupils learn that the so-called "Jewish Policy" was a crime which could only be committed because of active and passive support on the part of many contemporary citizens. The pupils also learn what high degree of injustice had already been committed against the Jews when they were socially isolated and deprived of their rights. Thus, the pupils' sense of justice can be enhanced. In the House of the Wannsee Conference, pupils aged 11 to 13 do not focus on the policy of extermination by the National Socialists.

A study day for pupils aged 11 to 13 contains the following phases:

- a discussion based on a series of posters in order to identify the information which the children already have, and also to determine jointly with them the process of social isolation.
- a visit to those rooms of the permanent exhibition where the social isolation of the Jews and their discrimination are the central topic.
- a film on an individual victim's fate
- independent creative work.

Study days are designed according to the knowledge and needs of the individual pupils, in terms of their general content such as the study of an individual victim's fate, and in terms of the time devoted to the various topics.

STUDY DAYS FOR STUDENTS OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOLS

Students enrolled in vocational training schools are an important target group for educational work in the House of the Wannsee Conference. Their day-to-day experience differs from those of the other pupils. During their visit to the House of the Wannsee Conference they frequently deal with National Socialism for the last time before leaving school.

Experience shows that these groups usually benefit more from a study day than from a guided tour through the exhibition. The former offers greater possibility for discussion and more time to clarify the students' own views. Here, too, the study days are designed according to the profile of each given group - its composition, prior knowledge, and the interests voiced by the students.

When working with students already engaged in vocational training or attending vocational training schools, topics which concentrate on the participants' own vocation and its history at the time of National Socialism seem most appropriate. This enables them to clarify how those who worked in the given vocation were influenced, and what their responsibility and scope of action was.

Aspects to be discussed include the mechanisms of exclusion that affected people at their place of work and in their respective working environments, but also the attempts to integrate workers into the "People's Community" ["*Volksgemeinschaft*"] by means of special gratuities and offers leading to better jobs. In addition, laws and prohibitions that were revised and which applied to those to be trained must be discussed, but also the policies of occupational associations and organisations that were trying to

ingratiate themselves with the National Socialist regime. Finally, wage and social policies, control mechanisms, and intrusions into the sphere of private life are discussed.

Since events that incurred in daily life are chosen as a point of departure, students can visualise such events on the basis of their own experience while at the same time recognising characteristic features of the National Socialist regime. The lure of the "German national comrade [*Volksgenosse*]" is elucidated as well as the suppression of those who were being excluded because they were "alien to the people's community" or "racially inferior" and "members of an alien race". In other words, the racism which formed the basis of all National Socialist politics and which ultimately led to extermination is discussed as well. This approach makes it possible to combine the history of daily life under National Socialism with the central theme of the House of the Wannsee Conference, the persecution and extermination of the Jews.

After basic information has been transmitted during a study day, specially selected descriptive material from documents, biographies, photographs, professional journals, and advertisements is made available to working groups. The material is selected in such a way that the perspectives of victims and perpetrators contrast with one another. Working groups interpret and evaluate the authentic material independently within a set period of between one to two hours. To assist in this study, a specially prepared book trolley with dictionaries and other works of reference as well as the library are at their disposal. In a concluding session, the results of the research are presented to the fellow-students, and the conclusions reached by the various working groups linked to each other. During this process questions about the actual significance of the historical events for the students' respective vocations are discussed.

Study days with specific vocational approaches to various topics have been developed and tested. These include "Nourishment and Politics during the National Socialist Era" for trainees in the field of "Gastronomy/Cook"; "The Cult of the Body and Aesthetic Standardisation" for those training to become hairdressers; "Conformity versus Young People Refusing to Conform During National Socialism" for those undergoing training to work with children and young people in a range of different professions; and, finally, "Eugenics and 'Euthanasia'" for prospective nurses and hospital orderlies. Topics such as these can usually be worked on successfully with trainees in related vocational fields, too. Experience with this approach has been very positive. It encourages lively discussion among vocational trainees about the extent of suppression under a dictatorship and stimulates a wish to learn more even among those students who are convinced that they already know everything about the "Third Reich" and therefore initially do not welcome another discussion about the history of National Socialist crimes.

METHODOLOGICAL ELEMENTS DURING STUDY DAYS

The following overview of possible methodological conceptions of the study days is depicted in key words because the elements named here are selected flexibly on the basis of the topics and the groups involved.

Confrontation with the site

Visiting the exhibition - alternative possibilities:

- with a guide and questions from the participants
- in small groups
- individually collecting personal impressions and questions

Intensification

A topic is discussed by way of example and with special consideration of the participants' wishes and prior knowledge.

Working procedures:

- discussion of questions posed by the participants
- talking with survivors
- lecture
- interpretations of texts and photos
- use of other media for discussions
- discussion within the group about emotions when dealing with the subject matter in question.
Media: books, documents, videos, films, slides, tape recordings

Individual research and creative efforts

Possible approaches:

- individuals choose between the media available
- reading documents and books in the library
- discussion groups
- producing groups (painting, writing, collages, preparing news reports, photo documentations, interviews)

Summarising

- individual groups present their work
- evaluation of experiences during the study day

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