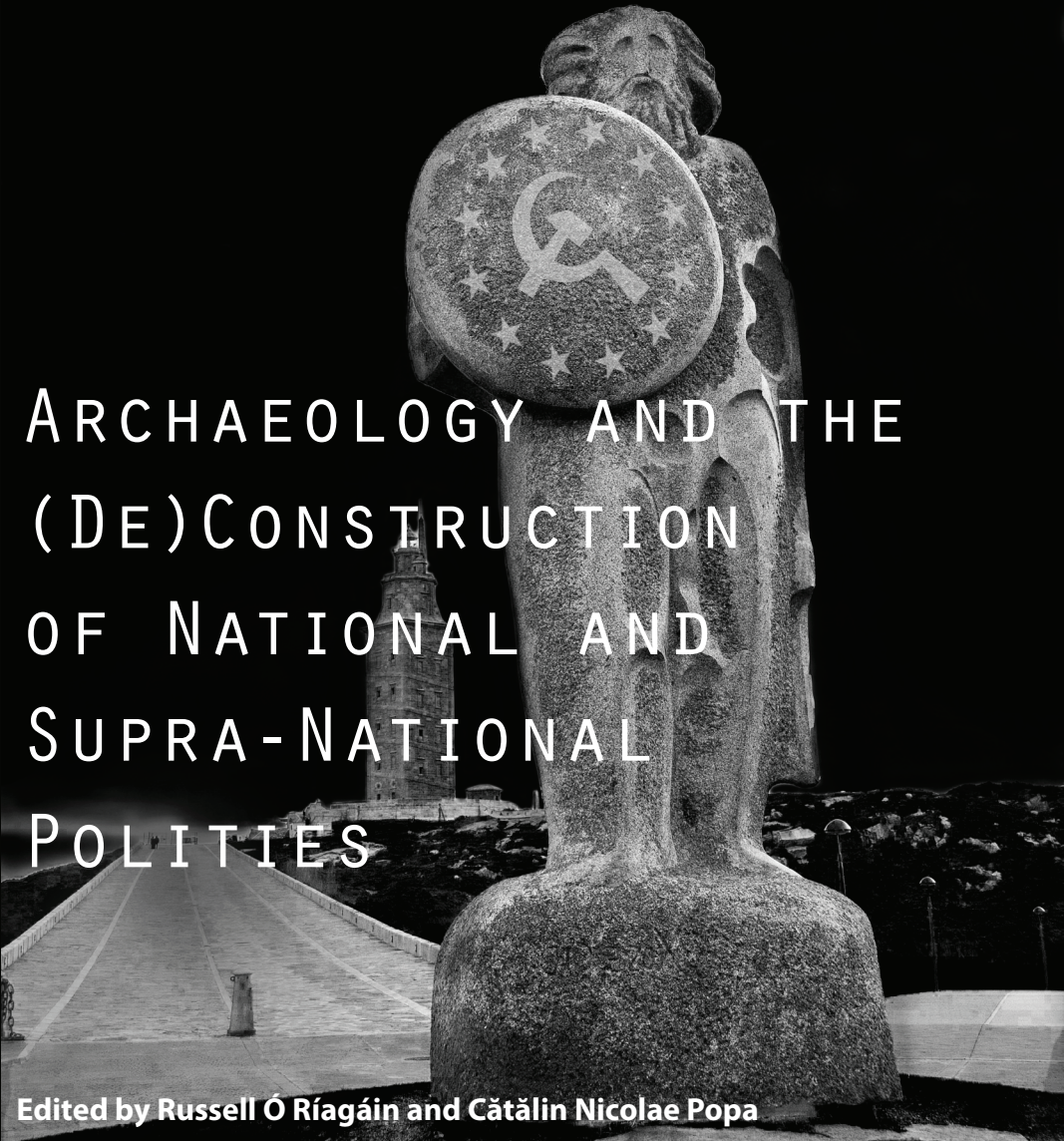


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ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE (DE)CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL AND SUPRA-NATIONAL POLITIES

Edited by Russell Ó Ríagáin and Cătălin Nicolae Popa

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Division of Archaeology, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology
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Theme Editor Russell Ó Ríagáin and Cătălin Nicolae Popa

Production Cătălin Nicolae Popa

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Identity Establishing Heritage Sites? Memory, Remembrance and Commemoration at Monuments and Memorials

Claudia Theune

Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte, Universität Wien
claudia.theune@univie.ac.at

In this paper the formation of identity-establishing heritage sites is discussed. In addition to general theoretical considerations, examples from different countries and different times will be presented, which embody positively connoted places that were actively incorporated in the construction of national identities. On the other hand there are places like the former Nazi concentration camps that do not have positive connotations. They are traumatized places symbolizing a painful past. Nevertheless, even these places can become national heritage sites.

At first glance, memory is something very personal, intimate and individual. We remember the beautiful or less beautiful events and experiences in our lives. Special events and experiences in the family, our circle of friends or colleagues and sometimes even trivial happenings

remain in our memory and can be remembered through images or conversations. Often we combine the memory of an event with a specific place where this event occurred. The image of such a place is regenerated in our mind when we remember. This allows the place to become a symbol for an event. Places most likely to be connected with private memories are the family home, holiday destinations or other places of the private domain.

Significant events that affect a broader public—be they political events, natural catastrophes or others—also become inscribed in our memory through news from the radio, television or newspapers. For nations or large communities and groups, collective memory is usually more linked to public places and environments rather than private spaces. For many people, New York's Ground Zero will always remain a physical manifestation of the terror attacks on the World Trade Center on 9 September 2001.

What one individual specifically remembers about a certain event does not have to be identical with another person's memories of the same event. Similarities in individual memories are, however, a first step towards a shared, collective memory in the family, a greater circle of friends or acquaintances, a community, a town or a nation. Through stories, reports and pictures these memories remain present in our minds. They can also help us to recall memories we thought were lost, and to share them with each other. Whether or not an event will permanently remain in our memories depends largely on the extent to which this event is repeatedly recalled in an active and deliberate manner. Through the process of conscious and specific remembering, souvenirs and memorabilia are created (Assmann 1999: 33–35; Erll 2011; Theune 2011a). Images, texts and also places help to keep memories alive and serve as media of memory storage and material indices of past events (Assmann 1999: 149–151; Erll 2005; Jones 2003: 21–24). Through targeted and conscious remembrance, certain events can then become rooted in cultural memory. Such memories may be beautiful and positive, but they can also be traumatic memories manifested in traumatic places. Not only

positively experienced events get inscribed in collective memory but also events associated with terror and suffering.

Events embedded in collective memory need not necessarily be experienced by us ourselves. We can physically be in a different place to where an event is taking place or not be personally attached to an event and yet still become connected to it through different media. Through the act of sharing, we create a memory for ourselves and we might even construct a personal relationship to a previously impersonal event. But we also have to distinguish between our own memories and the memories of former generations that have been passed down to this day. Even here, the term 'memory' has become crucial, although the term 'commemoration' might be more appropriate, as in such cases it is not our personal experiences and memories that connect us with an event, but pictures or stories told by others. So when we think about such past events we commemorate rather than actually remember them.

Places to which particular memories are connected are designated as 'realms of memory'. It is at these places that the cultural memory of a social group or a nation becomes manifest, and cultural identity can be developed and confirmed by storing "knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity" (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995: 130). The concept of 'realms of memory' (*lieux de memories*) was developed by the French historian Pierre Nora (1998), who has described such places as being symbolically determined. 'Realms of memory' are not necessarily geographically specific buildings or places, but can also describe people, events, books and objects that embody certain memories. However, it should be emphasized that we have to distinguish between 'realms of memory' where identity-establishing processes take place from places that mainly serve for commemoration, which then should be referred to as memorials.

Historical monuments often become 'realms of memory' when used for the construction of group identity; otherwise they are simply memorials. The English terms 'heritage site', 'heritage' and 'cultural

heritage' reveal much more than their German equivalents. In Germany and Austria, cultural heritage is literally called 'monument care' or 'historic preservation' ('*Denkmalpflege*' or '*Denkmalschutz*'). These may be regarded as neutral terms that carry neither positive nor negative connotations. The term 'heritage', however, represents a different concept. It embodies a notion of national importance and national relevance. Archaeological sites can become very special places of remembrance with a specific meaning for members of a group or a nation regardless of their age. 'Realms of memory' can be sites from contemporary history, the recent past, the Middle Ages or prehistory. Thus archaeological sites from all periods have the potential to become cultural heritage and gain importance and meaning for a certain group.

Through the Valetta Treaty of the Malta Convention (1992) and its implementation in national legislation, a change in archaeological concepts of time began. The Valetta Treaty was a milestone for archaeology in Europe. The time limit often defined by national laws for the protection and conservation of ancient monuments, which traditionally categorized archaeological sites as not being younger than the Middle Ages, was repealed. In Article 1, it is acknowledged that archaeological monuments are:

a source of the European collective memory and ... an instrument for historical and scientific study (Valetta Treaty 1992).

It includes:

all remains and objects and any other traces of mankind from past epochs ... which help to retrace the history of mankind and its relation with the natural environment (Valetta Treaty 1992).

Often archaeological research and excavations take place in locations that essentially contribute to a better understanding of past

lifestyles and communities. However, not all of these sites necessarily belong to our cultural heritage, represent 'realms of memory' or become memorials. Mostly, archaeological investigations occur on significant heritage sites which constitute the cultural heritage of communities and nations and therefore can be regarded as 'realms of memory' in the sense of Pierre Nora (1998). However, contrary to this, there are also excavations at sites from recent history that do not have positive connotations and are rather memorials—places that serve as reminders of pain and terror, such as former concentration camps. The objectives of excavations at former concentration camps differ (Theune 2010: 3). Different countries have different interests in investigating these places depending on their historical connection to National Socialism. For Germany and Austria as successor states of the Third Reich, the research in concentration camps serves as a means to deal with a heavy legacy, while for Poland as one of the main victims of the Nazis the notion of survival becomes manifest in these places. Archaeological research in the various camps helps to rediscover forgotten places of Nazi terror, to detect the spatial dimensions, important structures and buildings and make them visible again.

The following examples of archaeological sites and objects, dating from prehistory to the recent past, shall serve as a basis for a discussion of their meaning for society and cultural heritage. Some of the mentioned sites can be considered as places where identity is shaped, produced and reproduced. In opposition, the role of former Nazi concentration camps will be discussed in regard to their meaning for cultural memory as memorials, but not as 'realms of memory' (Nora 1998).

One of the most significant archaeological finds in Austria is the so-called Venus of Willendorf (Antl-Weiser 2008). The *circa* 25,000 year old figurine can be dated to a very early phase of human history. It is displayed in a high-security vitrine in the Vienna Natural History Museum. Found in 1908, the 100th anniversary of the figurine's discovery was celebrated four years ago. The statuette was presented to the public as the "oldest Austrian". With this exhibition it was suggested that the Venus is closely associated with Austria. Without a doubt it is a very significant

find that was excavated on modern Austrian territory, but it certainly is not Austrian, not even European. It is a testimony of early life in the region northwest of modern Vienna and an important example of Stone Age art. However, the circumstances of its discovery make it one of the most important objects of cultural heritage in Austria.

Stonehenge (Chippindale 2004) can certainly be addressed as a national, English monument with a positive connotation. It is a prehistoric site embedded in a ritual and/or religious landscape. A lot of money has been invested in new research on the surrounding area of the stone circle. The recent investigations are focusing not only on the actual stone circle, but more on the landscape in its broader context and transformation through time (Underhill 2011). It was temporarily considered that a nearby road be relocated to make the importance of the site and its environment more visible within the modern landscape. Large amounts of money have been put into the redesign of the visitor centre and parking area. Since the Middle Ages, people have been historically interested in Stonehenge and the site takes a leading position among British heritage sites. But for people in the Neolithic and the Bronze Age the site surely embodied other meanings. Stonehenge is unique and it is one of the most important archaeological heritage sites of the world. Certainly the English are proud that Stonehenge is located on the British Isles. But why does this particular place have a positive connotation and what does it mean for people today?

The examples mentioned above both date to prehistoric periods. The Venus of Willendorf is considered to be of outstanding importance for the history of Austria and Stonehenge plays a very prominent role in English heritage. However, both of them originally had nothing to do with today's nations. Too large is the time interval that lies between now and then. And the interpretation of archaeological sites, features or finds without additional sources like written records or images is limited. We can perhaps say something about basic structures in the Stone Age or the Bronze Age, but we can find out only very little about single events and groups. Yet, the redefinition of these places and things as new references

to the present creates and strengthens modern identities through a fictive notion of long-lasting continuity of cultural practices.

Nidaros cathedral in Trondheim is one of the main national monuments of Norway (Andås 2007). The earliest building, a wooden church, was built over the grave of King Olav Haraldsson who died in AD 1030. Soon after his death he was canonized and many pilgrims came to Nidaros (today's Trondheim) for worship. In 1070 a stone church was built, which was extended several times in subsequent years. Norwegian kings were traditionally crowned at this site. The church was massively damaged by severe fires in 1328, 1432 and 1531. Further fires destroyed the church in 1708 and 1719. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the cathedral was in poor condition. The first attempts to stop the building from further decay in the first half of the nineteenth century failed due to a lack of funding. However, through the coronation of King Carl Johan on 7 September 1818 the cathedral once again became a centre of the Norwegian monarchy. This event clearly served as a reinstallation ceremony for the church's status as a royal place. The actual reconstruction works at the cathedral began in 1869, although this process ended officially only approximately ten years ago in 2001. Only a few images and paintings, which were lacking details of the original church's façade, were available for the reconstruction of the building. The new cathedral is mainly based on speculations about its original appearance. The westwork is a stereotypical reproduction of the English Gothic style including many statues, while a printing of the original cathedral from 1661 shows not more than 20 statues.

Tourist guides of the cathedral give the impression that it is an original Gothic, medieval church. Hardly any of these books mention that the church is a modern building. The official website of the city of Trondheim states:

Norway's national sanctuary, Nidaros Cathedral was built over the grave of St. Olav, Norway's patron saint whose reputation shone far beyond the borders of his country. Construction

started in 1070, but the oldest parts still in existence are from the middle of the twelfth century. Ravaged by fire on several occasions, the church was rebuilt each time—mainly in the Gothic style, but the oldest parts around the transept reflect the Roman style. (City of Trondheim 2011)

Here it becomes very clear how the politics and history of events affect the connotation of archaeological or historical sites and therefore support a development of positively or negatively connoted monuments.

We can see similar mechanisms at work when we look at a contemporary archaeological example from the United States. On 7 December 1941 the Japanese attacked the Americans at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii (Lenihan et al. 2005). During the attack the battleship USS Arizona was bombed and sunk. The wreck still lies at the bottom of the sea at the harbour. The ship has been investigated archaeologically and thus has become an archaeological site. Today there is a museum above the wreck in the port and its location has been declared a national monument. We know precisely the history of events at the site. The importance of Pearl Harbor's modern interpretation derives from its usage as America's reason for entering World War Two. The Americans began with a defeat, but in the end they won the war. These events transformed this place of loss and defeat into a positive heritage site that symbolizes America's idea of recovery and success.

The situation is different at Little Big Horn (Fox 1993). Here the 'white' Americans lost a battle against the indigenous population. It was one of the few major victories of the Native Americans against white immigrants. Nevertheless the battle's result could not prevent the near extermination and oppression of America's indigenous people. New excavations and the detailed evaluation of eyewitness reports have shown that the US Army's version of the events was not true. These new results suggest that instead of a heroic battle that was unfortunately lost, it was rather Custer's fatal misjudgement of the situation that led to the defeat of his regiment. In addition, it appears that the Native Americans were equipped with

better guns than Custer's units. Today Little Big Horn has an ambivalent connotation. While the descendants of the white immigrants idealized the place for a long time as a reminder of a glorious but defeated army, it has now transformed into a symbol of a problematic colonial history. For the people of the Sioux or Lakota on the other hand, Little Big Horn became a symbol of resistance and strengthened the common identity of the Natives (see also Carman and Carman 2012; Scott 2009).

We have to be aware that the meaning of an identity-establishing place is mostly target-oriented and controlled consciously (Assmann 2007; Nora 1998). Some monuments, that were once important, have lost their relevance and have never regained their former importance. For some, this loss of relevance continues into the present. On the other hand, there are places that once had suffered a decline of relevance only to be later recalled into collective memory and become national monuments. In such cases it does not matter whether a site is directly connected to the recent history of a group or if it is from a distant past. The case is different when looking at examples that do not necessarily represent positively connoted heritage sites.

One of the most recent historical monuments under current archaeological investigation is the Berlin Wall (Klausmeier and Schlusche 2011). From 1961 to 1989 the Wall split not only a whole city but an entire nation, probably the whole of Europe and the world into two parts. At first, the Wall consisted only of barbed wire but soon it became a wall of stone and concrete. It was changed four times by reinforcement. Through the installation of the so-called Hinterlandmauer, Postenwege, illuminated streets, watch towers, control sections and spring guns, the Wall became an insurmountable border for people. Approximately 100 people died when trying to escape from East to West Berlin. On 9 November 1989 the checkpoints of the Wall were opened. Following this the borders to the rest of Europe were overcome and a year later Germany was reunited. Quickly the Berlin Wall and other elements of the Iron Curtain across Europe were torn down. Since then the fall of the Berlin Wall has been celebrated each year on the 9th of November and it

has not only become rooted in Germany's cultural memory but has been transformed into a part of global cultural memory. Countless tourists visit the central places at the former Berlin Wall in Berlin, have their picture taken in front of the Wall and buy souvenirs. Thus the underground and overground remaining relicts of the Wall have also become economically important aspects of tourism in Berlin. Parts of the Wall can still be visited today, for example at the Berlin Wall Memorial in Bernauer Straße, in the Niederkirchnerstraße, at the former border crossings such as Checkpoint Charlie, at the Potsdamer Platz, the East-Side Gallery or near the Ostbahnhof. Some of the wall pieces have been erected again, but not in their original position. Rows of paving stones mark the former route of the Wall and can be followed to walk the former border. Excavations in recent years at the Bernauer Strasse and at other places show that the Berlin Wall is now an archaeological site (Klausmeier and Schlusche 2011).

At the Brandenburg Gate and at many other places in Berlin almost nothing reminds people of the Berlin Wall. Nonetheless the Brandenburg gate stands for the fall of the Wall. It is still an important traffic link within Berlin. With the construction of the Wall it was closed for almost 40 years. Its re-opening in November 1989 made it a symbol for the reunion of Germany and thus a 'realm of memory' in the sense of Nora's (1998) *'lieux de memoires'*. Two years before that event, on 12 June 1987, the American President Ronald Reagan gave a speech on the west side of the Brandenburg Gate demanding: "Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" (Reagan 1987).

However, in our cultural memory the Wall also symbolizes the separation of families and friends for long periods of time, the despair and anguish of people who tried to escape. Small memorials with commemorative plaques remind us of the people that were killed at the Wall. In Bernauer Straße a memorial [*sic*] was built. Here, places that do not have a positive identity-establishing meaning were deliberately created. Separation and differences dominate their meaning. But as they stand for a period of Germany's disjointedness that has been overcome by a huge effort of both politics and people they are perceived as

material manifestations of the nation's attempt of renewal and therefore contribute to a newly established national solidarity.

Even more important as places for commemoration and antipodes to identity-establishing places for the German people are the former concentration camps of the National Socialists. We know many details of the concentration camps and the enormous amount of people that were imprisoned, forced to work, deprived of their rights, tortured and murdered at these places (Benz and Distel 2005). During the last days of the Second World War the Nazis tried to obliterate their tracks. The technical equipment for the gas chambers was dismantled and hidden (Morsch 2008: 59). Many barracks in the concentration camps and sub-camps were demolished in the period after the war and rebuilt in other places, as building material was a rare commodity. In the last 60 years many camps have been built over and forgotten. In some places there was not even an interest to turn these locations into memorials and heritage sites. At the very least, memorial plaques are installed at these sites today. Recently, also, the reconstruction of some of the barracks has been considered at some memorials. However, thought has also been given to closing sensitive places to visitors completely, for example the former gas chambers.

As Germany is the successor state of the Nazi-dictatorship, the former concentration camps do not represent places of identity-establishing memory in Germany as they embody a shameful and inhuman history. Sites such as the concentration camps or the buildings of the Gestapo, the *Reichsführung-SS* or the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* in Berlin, which are today known as 'topography of terror', were banned from Germany's cultural memory for a long time (Nachama 2010). They have become 'traumatized places' or 'memorials against will' (Assmann 1999: 334–336). Following the discussion in the 1980s that strongly demanded a deliberate commemoration of the victims of National Socialism, these places became centrally rooted memorials. However, for the survivors of the camps and their relatives the places symbolize a collective enemy and a fight for survival and thus can be understood as 'realms of memory'.

The meaning of a place and its connotation is always dependent on the perspective and the memories connected to it.

Since the 1990s, excavations have been undertaken in almost all major concentration camps (Theune 2010). It is rather recently that we have started to actively deal with this heavy legacy from our history and therefore also started to explore places of terror archaeologically.

For the German people, the concentration camps certainly have a negative connotation. But today it is our duty to confront ourselves with this part of our history and thus emphasize the values of democracy and prevent such terrible events from being repeated. Almost all Germans have learned that also these terrible events are part of our history and that we must accept that history. Without the intention of comparing the Nazi period with other periods of history or other countries and other crimes, it has to be noted that probably most nations have experienced dark phases and that crimes against their own people, neighbours or other humans is a sad but undeniably reoccurring truth. If there are any monuments or memorials which remind of these crimes, they are most likely negatively connoted heritage sites at first. But even these places are important and need to be incorporated in order to have a broad and complete history.

For countries like Poland, which has to be thought of as one of the main victims of National Socialism and the Second World War, it is easier to consider the Nazi camps as identity-establishing places.

Though a comparison with other historical events is particularly difficult in the case of Poland, there may be parallels for the development of the connotation of the Polish extermination camps from the National Socialist period. Like Pearl Harbor, the extermination camps in Poland were initially places of defeat and loss, but in the end they also stood for survival. This development in symbolic meaning from places of humiliation and helplessness to places of resistance and survival were

identity-establishing for the Polish people and led to a redefinition of the sites in Polish cultural memory.

Further it has to be noted that since the 1990s archaeological activities are an active part of political education in several European countries, i.e. organized by the memorials in Germany and Austria. For instance, there is an attempt to teach young people about the terror strategies of the Nazi-period by sending them to so-called 'youth work camps' at German or Polish memorials, some of them lasting for several weeks. The organizers think that working with young people directly in the former concentration camps might have a stronger effect on them than a simple lecture or a guided tour through the area (Hirte 2002). The 'work camps' also have to be understood as a response to the constantly decreasing number of survivors who could report about camp life and the terror. Previously, survivors used to come to schools or the memorials to talk about their experiences and memories. As this possibility is vanishing, the active engagement of pupils with material culture from the camps is meant to support their understanding of structures and living conditions in the camps.

So to come to a final conclusion, it has to be noted that archaeological heritage intensively incorporates not only prehistoric or medieval sites but also contemporary historical archaeology, involving research in the monuments and memorial sites of the Nazi period. In Germany and Austria the offices of preservation of monuments recognize the importance of those places and treat them with equal attention to sites from older periods when archaeological investigations are required. At the memorials, interdisciplinary research with other historical and museum disciplines takes place. Many valuable insights into the structure of the camps, the crimes and everyday life there are obtained through archaeology and these can reveal many new facets of the crime scenes (Theune 2011b). Along with neighbouring disciplines, these studies help to analyse the conception of the history of the camps and to present the results in the memorials (Dejnega and Theune in press). Of particular importance is the impact archaeology has through providing objects

for political education. With the help of archaeology the memorials are places where National Socialism can be learned about.

Also interesting is the interplay between archaeological heritage offices and remembrance. Traditionally heritage sites are places where national heritage, individual and collective tradition, a glorious history and identity become manifest. Such 'realms of memory' generally have a positive connotation and meaning in collective memory. Battlefields, where victories have been won or defeats suffered, may also acquire this status. Cultural property and places become places of collective memory as soon as they are ascribed with the symbolic power of events that have taken place in the recent or distant past. They are the preferred places for the erection of monuments with the intention of passing on the memory and the remembrance of people or events and thus become 'realms of memory'.

Former concentration camps or other places of Nazi terror on German territory do not fulfil this positive connotation. They are rather seen as 'evil places' or memorials 'against will'. However, in Germany these places are today memorials and monuments. They shall serve for the commemoration of the victims and as places where young people, tourists and interested people can inform themselves about National Socialism. But it also has to be stressed that these places play a different role in the memory of the survivors and their relatives than in the memory of young people or tourists with no personal connection.

Differences in perception and meaning also occur with regard to different nationalities. For non-German groups—be they Polish or the Jewish community living today—these places do not only reflect terror and violence. Also the ultimate defeat of the Nazi dictatorship and thus survival becomes manifest in them. However, it is questionable if such places may serve for the establishment of a nation's identity. It is rather places associated with positive events in our cultural and collective memory that are identity-establishing—places that arouse positive memories and that were crucial for the development of a nation in a

historical perspective. Yet, it is mostly insignificant whether such events and places are directly related to the current situation or if a connection is artificially constructed through the media or politics.

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