

## **Peace and participating tourism following the pattern of small museums in Europe: A reflection on the recent past**

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**Objectives** | Aspects of cultural tourism have been explored by a growing number of museums dedicated to the themes of war in European countries in recent times. The aim of the paper is how museums influence the collective imagination and contribute to be bearers of political détente and piece. In the last decades, the concept of the museum has been changing in term of 'flipped roles' (visitor-cultural entity), which leads to a different perspective. Within this different development to renovating or conceiving a museum the visitor becomes or could become a leading character influencing with his opinions and contributing with specific material and other important objects related to the topic. It means indeed to tell other stories, which have less to do with collections of paramount importance but refer to cultural or historical findings originated from real life, popular events, or minor stories. This kind of Museum enhances these 'minor stories' and focuses on the participation in terms of emotional experience linked to a specific narrative. This narrative leads to an awareness that instead of going through the big story it is based on the story of the people, perhaps because of this it can often be more direct and effective. Having studied especially the development of tourism in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and observed the developments brought about by tourism in reunified Germany, I have conducted an in-depth study on the creation of museums dedicated to the elaboration of historical memory. It is a result of a growing interest due to the increase in cultural tourism and the greater attention paid to understanding the more recent past. The keystone of success, such as it happens to the Museum of the GDR-History in Berlin, seems to be this important exchange between creator and visitors, the surprising attraction could come from a 'familiar place' where objectives are showed like in a big mall. Even though it is far away from high culture, the objective is achieved, and people go out with more understanding and awareness, these kinds of museums offering informal and non-formal education can contribute to generate a positive elaboration of the past educating for a sense of peace. The utilisation of museums, a new frontier for the elaboration of the past and historical memory, thus becomes highly topical and of interest to new generations that in this way approach the history even of the recent past, especially with reference to World War II and the transformations following the fall of the Berlin Wall. A past that is perhaps still possible to trace through oral

history, but which due to the many testimonies that are being lost (even the protagonists of the years of the world beyond the Iron Curtain are dwindling), is recounted by single-issue museums, and often developed with very innovative concepts.

**Methodology** | The research builds upon a qualitative analysis for which approximately 5 qualitative interviews will be conducted with directors of different historical museums in Germany and with about 5 participants (in most cases they are relatives of the victims, or the people involved in the storytelling of the museum), who have contributed to the creation of the museum giving objects and ideas. Through the interviews, which will be subjected to a qualitative content analysis, the aim is to grasp how the idea of creating a museum on history, dedicated to the victims of the history was born and how a sense of direct participation developed. The key questions are: Is the direct participation a way to overcome distress and pain? Does this kind of Museums succeed in creating historical awareness and elaboration of historical memory so that the visitor can think in terms of new peace horizons?

**Main results and contributions** | It is hard to predict the results of the interviews that still having to be conducted. But having studied for some years the naissance of the small "Vite di IMI"-Museum in Rom, it is possible to subsume some aspects from this interesting case study, especially when highlighting the preparatory and organisational work done by this museum's administration. It results to be a constantly developing reality, because it is participatory from the bottom up, and hence progresses thanks to the contribution of many donors interested in highlighting their stories narrated in the museum, as well as to the help of volunteers who do guided tours, reception of visitors and donors, catalogue work on donated objects and in the research library which is part of the IMI Museum. This dynamic relationship is reflected in the visitor and makes the museum a living reality open to various stakeholders, including schools for which meetings and debates are regularly organised inside the museum. The intent of these showcases dedicated to history, readapted in didactic form and thanks to interactivity and digitisation made available especially for a younger public, provide many elements for the elaboration of memory. They not only contribute to the cultural growth of the place itself, but above all open those "archives" that are sources of information which would otherwise remain a circumscribed heritage for experts or insiders, to an uninitiated public. Therefore, my research is to analyse the contribution of these museums to what is defined as United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals at number 16: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development".

**Limitations** | The research is in a preliminary stage, as the interviews are being prepared and planned. One aspect that could potentially limit the conclusions of the research is the fact that the

interviews will focus mainly on the Cold War and post-communism museums in Berlin, although it will expand to additional cities in Germany. Moreover, it is my intention to compare the creation of those German museums with some similar museums in Italy. A limitation will be considering the differing cultural and historical contexts of the two countries and the differing museum's culture. In Italy, at least now, do exist only a very few contemporary history museums, but some new ones have been recently announced.

**Conclusions** | To be able to formulate comprehensive conclusions, the results of the interviews deriving from a detailed qualitative content analysis are required. But it is expected that this new museum's culture is not only a commercial affair but succeeds in creating historical awareness and elaboration of historical memory so that the visitor can think in terms of new peace horizons.

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