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## MUSEUMS *IN SITU* AS PLACES OF RECONCILIATION

### YOUTH MEETINGS AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AT FORMER CONCENTRATION AND DEATH CAMPS

**ABSTRACT** Museums at former concentration and death camps pose great challenges for their curators. The Holocaust – as a symbol of the collapse of European values – is interpreted differently by certain nations and states. These approaches are connected both with the past and with current historical policy, as well as with collective memory. This article focuses on the moment of the physical encounter between different national groups during educational activities at museums *in situ* such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the State Museum at Majdanek, and the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka. Such meetings may (or should) be an opportunity to learn about and understand (sometimes very) different national perspectives. Participation in educational projects may also become a catalyst to understand and promote reconciliation with the Other. The analysis is based on the philosophy of dialogue of Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas and Józef Tischner.

**Key words:** Holocaust, education, philosophy of dialogue, youth international encounters, reconciliation

The International Council of Museums (ICOM), during its the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly in Vienna on 24 August 2007, adopted the definition of a museum as *a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoy-*

*ment*.<sup>1</sup> Such an approach presents museums as places which have various functions, as they promote different types of education and entertainment and seek to serve society. One type of museum includes institutions located at the sites of former Nazi German concentration and death camps. In her work on history in museums<sup>2</sup> Anna Ziębińska-Witek, a historian and researcher from the Marie Curie University in Lublin, enumerated the former Nazi German concentration camps as primary examples of Holocaust exhibitions. She emphasized that on those exact sites of genocide, the first Holocaust museums were created.<sup>3</sup> The Holocaust, as a symbol of the collapse of basic European values including human dignity, human rights, and the value of life itself, has been deeply problematic for individuals and societies. Among those deeply troubled by the Holocaust, to say the least, have been museums and their curators, because of the many interpretations and perspectives the Holocaust seems to invite. This was especially true as the Holocaust systematically became the subject of historical policies, and their (ab) usage, in many countries.

The aim of this article is to investigate the possibilities of understanding and reconciliation between two or more national youth groups during educational programs taking place in museums located *in situ*, where genocide actually occurred. This work attempts to answer the following questions: what are the educational offers at the museums, who participates in such programs, and do those initiatives strengthen feelings of tolerance and European unity? Are former Nazi German concentration and death camps considered by young Europeans to be European heritage? And if so, what value do these sites have for them? Does visiting authentic historical sites bring young Europeans closer to an understanding of representatives of other nations, and does it help in combating prejudice?

This analysis was based on the sources provided by the museum institutions themselves: encounter programs, summaries, yearly reports, and statistical data, as well as on reflections provided by participants of the programs. The materials were provided by museums either upon request or were taken from their official websites. Usually, programs were presented in the form of short notes with very basic data, i.e. about its character, the target group, time and place and the results of the encounter. Sometimes, however, the notes were very comprehensive and included evaluations from the participants, their opinions and reflections. Considering that all of the analyzed programs were already finished, observatory study trips or extended interviews were impossible. Thus, the most valuable materials are evaluations and reflections of participants. In order to present the encounter in a proper way, a variety of citations was included.

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<sup>1</sup> Official website of the International Council of Museums, at <<http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>>, 16 August 2017. See: *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*, at <[http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/Codes/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf](http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf)>, 16 August 2017.

<sup>2</sup> A. Ziębińska-Witek, *Historia w muzeach. Studium ekspozycji Holokaustu*, Lublin 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135. The State Museum at Majdanek was opened in 1944, and Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in 1947.

## DIALOGUE – WHO IS MEETING WHOM

The philosophy of dialogue, based on existentialism and phenomenology, has its beginnings in the 1920s and focuses on contesting Western idealism and searching for inspiration in religious sources (*Bible*). Nevertheless, the question of the epistemology of another human being is at the core of this trend and is much older, dating back to the time of Descartes.<sup>4</sup> The basic rule of dialogue states that an individual exists only in relation to another individual. The conditions for an encounter, and its meaning, have been described and analyzed in various ways by representatives of the philosophy of dialogue.<sup>5</sup>

Martin Buber is one such representative. Buber was born in 1878, in Vienna, to a family of Galician Jews, and died in Jerusalem in 1965. Throughout his life he was fascinated by Chasidism and considered it a source of creative religious experience. He was also fond of the idea, which Chasidic Jews promoted, that everything in life contains the experience of sanctity. Although he lived in Jerusalem from the time that he was deported from Germany through the rest of his life, he rejected the idea of Zionism, because of which he was shunned by some Jewish circles. In 1923 he published the book *Ich und Du* (translated into English as *I and Thou*), where he explained his philosophy of an individual's existence in depth.<sup>6</sup>

Martin Buber claimed that reality presents itself to in two different ways, depending on the attitude which an individual takes towards reality. Those two attitudes are strictly connected with two pairs of word-rules (Pl. *słowa-zasady*): I-It (which he further described as an experience) and I-Thou (which he defined as a relation).<sup>7</sup> In an I-It situation, we treat the other (whether a thing or a person) as an object of our experience, as when we experience something or somebody. In this case an individual, as a subject, is the center of the situation and the one on which everything depends.<sup>8</sup> The I-It pair is very much an imbalance.

The second example, I-Thou, is diametrically different. First, it is a relation to somebody, and not an experience of somebody.<sup>9</sup> As Martin Buber wrote, *we experience the things and with people we are creating relations*.<sup>10</sup> This second pair lays the foundation for the situation of authentic dialogue. Such an encounter must meet certain conditions: it is direct, and occurs in the presence of others. The fact that a dialogue can neither be predicted, nor repeated in the same form or shape, shows the fundamental

<sup>4</sup> T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii XX wieku. Nurty*, vol. 2, Kraków 2009, p. 503.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 507.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 553.

<sup>7</sup> M. Buber, *Ja i Ty. Wybór pism filozoficznych*, transl. by J. Doktor, Warszawa 1992, p. 39. See original and English versions: idem, *Ich und Du*, Heidelberg 1983; idem, *I and Thou*, transl. by R.G. Smith, New York 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. See: T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii...*, p. 569.

uniqueness of each dialogue situation. Furthermore, this relation is exclusive, and consists only of two elements, the subjects I and Thou. Buber emphasized that the precondition for this type of meeting is to remove everything which might stand between two people or two subjects of relation, such as past memory or future projections.<sup>11</sup> This is crucial because the core of the relation is a bond, a certain kind of community, which might be created between I and Thou. In this bond the I and the Thou do not lose their individual characters in order to create an impersonal We.<sup>12</sup> The ideal dialogue situation creates this bond, but it is not always created. The I-Thou relationship is a choice, and one must both choose and be chosen, as it contains active and passive presence at once. Buber explained that the value of the relation is not in admitting that another's right is more important than one's own, but rather in accepting that another person is different.

The characteristics of the I-Thou relation were criticized by Emmanuel Levinas, another Jewish philosopher. Levinas was born in Kaunas, in 1906, and studied biblical studies first in Lithuania and later in France. Almost his entire family was murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust. His philosophy *has deep roots in experiences of terror, sufferings and death caused by totalitarian regimes*, but also has a significant religious dimension.<sup>13</sup>

Levinas introduced new categories into the philosophy of dialogue such as loneliness, separation, the face of the Other, and responsibility. He claimed that *real loneliness is ontological*, and has its roots in the form of existence of an individual who is radically different from an Other.<sup>14</sup> This separation is egoism, as a person may feel good with oneself, but might also be a refusal of subordination to any types of order or totalities.<sup>15</sup> The Other is the one who could extract us from our separation. A person experiences the Other by seeing his face, which calls us to an ethical challenge.<sup>16</sup> The face provides a person with the possibility to start discourse, and this discourse is itself the authentic relation.<sup>17</sup> Levinas also mentioned responsibility as the primary bond which exists even before any personal or intimate relation occurs. *We are responsible for Others even before we start a relationship with them.*<sup>18</sup> Only the individual who is responsible for the Other could be in relation to him.<sup>19</sup> In this discourse, we cease to care for our own self-interest,

<sup>11</sup> M. Buber, *Ja i Ty...*, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii...*, pp. 577, 590.

<sup>14</sup> See: E. Levinas, *Czas i to co inne*, transl. by J. Migasiński, Kraków 1999. In French and English: idem, *Le temps et l'autre*, Montpellier 1979; idem, *Time and the Other*, transl. by R.A. Cohen, Pittsburg 1987.

<sup>15</sup> T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii...*, p. 592. See: E. Levinas, *Całość i nieskończoność. Esej o zewnętrzności*, transl. by M. Kowalska, Warszawa 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 593. See: idem, *Etyka i Nieskończony. Rozmowy z Philippem Nemo*, transl. by B. Opolska-Kokoszka, Kraków 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii...*, p. 594.

<sup>19</sup> E. Levinas, *Imiona własne*, transl. by J. Margański, Warszawa 2000, p. 29.

and we avoid separation.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to Buber's I-Thou, Levinas presented the I-Other relationship as imbalanced: the Other always has a higher position than the I.<sup>21</sup>

The third philosopher, Józef Tischner, was a Polish priest born in 1931, in Stary Sącz, and who studied theology in Kraków before joining the Solidarity movement.<sup>22</sup> He was fond of Levinas' work, and developed his idea that the Good is the foundation of metaphysics.<sup>23</sup> He agreed with Buber on the equal status of I and Thou, and prioritized freedom over Levinas' idea of responsibility. Tischner understood freedom as a way of the existence of the Good,<sup>24</sup> and he introduced the categories of values and drama to the philosophy of dialogue. He claimed that the individual serves values by fulfilling them, and that values serve the individual by saving them. Values such as truth, beauty, and good, however, are in constant conflict with each other. The world is a scene, and the human being takes part in its drama. The individual is the subject of a meeting, which is an event but is also a voluntary gift.<sup>25</sup> For Tischner, each individual drama as part of a bigger one, which is the relation between a human and God.<sup>26</sup>

In summary of this rich field of philosophy of dialogue, several points are particularly important for this analysis. First, the situation of encounter is a very particular type of meeting. The individual cannot treat the Other (Thou) as an object of experience, but must rather treat the Other as an equal, or even a superior, partner. The result of an encounter is the bond created between people who take part in such an event. The crucial element, which must not be forgotten, is responsibility for the Other. In other words, dialogue in a true encounter requires an individual to focus on the presence and emotions of other participant(s), and to foster the relationship between himself and others. It also demands an attempt to understand the Other's point of view, and the ability to discuss as well as to express consoling and empathetic gestures.

In practice, situations of dialogue appear when a few circumstances are fulfilled. Firstly, participants must value the encounter itself as an important and perhaps even life changing experience for them. Secondly, they should be focused on the other participants and, while noticing the difference, they must accept this fact. Furthermore, they ought to consider the other participants to be equal project partners or be even more considerate about their emotions and viewpoints than their own. Another factor to check in order to assess if a dialogue situation occurred would be the aspect of responsibility. The participants should feel responsible for each other and their common project performed during the encounter. Such responsibility might either be verbalized by words or gestures of sympathy and support, by touch, smiles or hugs. The last fac-

<sup>20</sup> T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii...*, p. 595. See: E. Levinas, *Inaczej niż być lub ponad istotą*, transl. by P. Mrówczyński, Warszawa 2000.

<sup>21</sup> E. Levinas, *Imiona własne*, pp. 21-39.

<sup>22</sup> W. Bonowicz, *Tischner*, Warszawa 2003.

<sup>23</sup> T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii...*, p. 631.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 632.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 636. See: J. Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu*, Kraków 1998.

<sup>26</sup> See: J. Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, Kraków 1998.

tor would be a specific bond between the participants as a result of an encounter. This might be confirmed by the assurance of keeping the contact in the future, after the encounter is finished.

At this point it is worth while recalling the findings of Nina Simon, a museum director and author of *The Participatory Museum*,<sup>27</sup> which is a practical guide for collaboration between community members and museum visitors in order to create a more dynamic and relevant institution. In her work, she describes four models for participation in a museum: contributory, collaborative, co-creative, and hosted. The main differences lie in the aim of the project which takes place, the amount of visitor participation needed, and the amount of power that museum staff and curators are able to surrender. For example, in the contributory model there is content which the museum requests and which visitors provide, while in the collaborative model both sides, museum staff and visitors, work together on the project much closely. In the co-creative model museum staff and visitors are equal partners in a project, and in the hosted model the museum only provides the basic guidelines, and the creation and implementation of the project is almost entirely the visitors' responsibility.<sup>28</sup>

Simon emphasizes that none of the models are better than others, and that they depend on the museums' decision regarding which might best meet their needs. She furthermore presents three values which accompany the implementation of the participatory model: the learning value, according to which visitors can develop new skills or understandings; the social value, according to which visitors develop a greater connection to the hosting institution, and can gain confidence in the worth of their contributions; and the work value, according to which participating visitors do concrete work for the institution.<sup>29</sup> These models of participation and values will be useful in further analysis of the youth encounter case studies.

## MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE – WHERE ENCOUNTERS TAKE PLACE AND WHAT THEY ENTAIL<sup>30</sup>

The youth encounters which will be analyzed further occur in specific spaces: on the sites of former Nazi German concentration and death camps. The museums located in places of World War II genocide belong to the category of museums *in situ*. Ziębińska-Witek stresses that the creation of Holocaust exhibitions in such locations might be difficult for various reasons and primarily because they present traumatic phe-

<sup>27</sup> N. Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Eadem, at <[http://www.museumtwo.com/publications/Participatory\\_Museum\\_chart.pdf](http://www.museumtwo.com/publications/Participatory_Museum_chart.pdf)>, 16 August 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Eadem, "Chapter 5: Defining Participation at Your Institution", in eadem, *The Participatory Museum*, at <<http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter5/>>, 16 August 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Small parts of this subchapter which deals with the visits in museums *in situ* were based on the PhD thesis of the author: K. Suszkiewicz, *The Matter of the Holocaust in Political History of Israel 1948-2012*, defended at the Jagiellonian University in 2017.

nomena. Visitors confronted with specific and peculiar matter might feel disoriented, scared, and anxious, and exhibitions can also stir intense emotions of anger, sadness, and shame.<sup>31</sup>

For an exhibit curator it is crucial to expose the value of the authentic place, not to overshadow or dominate it with the collection itself. The inclusion of new elements, including those needed for the preservation of historical objects, must not be taken lightly.<sup>32</sup> Authenticity is the principal factor which differentiates a youth meeting in a classroom from a true encounter at a museum *in situ*, and is the factor which allows for it to be a unique educational opportunity.

Methodological materials which educators use to help prepare young people for study visits present three aspects of these programs. The first aspect is to disseminate appropriate and rich factual content about World War II, the Holocaust, and a particular memorial site. The second aspect is to evoke an emotional response in students, and to make them more aware of the problems of modern racism, prejudice, and stereotypes. The last aspect of the visit is to foster empathy towards victims of the Holocaust through commemoration, which could take place in the form of a prayer.<sup>33</sup>

A study visit to a museum *in situ* presents not just an unusual way of experiencing history, but also a powerful opportunity to reflect on one's own attitudes towards others and moral choices.<sup>34</sup> Thomas Lutz, director of Topography of Terror in Berlin, discussed it when he stated that an *authentic memorial site brings the motivation to confront history*,<sup>35</sup> and that a visit in such a museum differs from other educational trips by *evoking more questions on one's own behavior and contemporary social conditions*.<sup>36</sup>

Wiesław Wysok, a vice-director of the State Museum at Majdanek and an expert on teaching techniques, agreed with this opinion and claimed that today, when students have easy access to facts and information (e.g. through the internet), it is all the more important to create an educational situation. More emphasis must be placed on the attempt to change the attitudes of visitors towards other people than on providing them with factual knowledge.<sup>37</sup> To summarize Lutz's and Wysok's perspectives, a major shift is needed away from teaching facts, dates and events, in order to shape the attitudes of students towards others and to influence behavior in museums *in situ* by affecting stu-

<sup>31</sup> A. Ziębińska-Witek, *Historia w muzeach...*, p. 159.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> R. Szuchta, P. Trojański, *Jak uczyć o Holokauście. Poradnik metodyczny do nauczania o Holokauście w ramach przedmiotów humanistycznych w zreformowanej szkole*, Warszawa 2012, p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> T. Kranz, *Edukacja historyczna w miejscach pamięci. Zarys problematyki*, Lublin 2009, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> T. Lutz, "Muzea upamiętniające ofiary nazizmu. Rozważania o rozwoju i aktualnych zagrożeniach w Polsce i Niemczech", in T. Kranz (ed.), *Zbrodnie nazizmu w świadomości i edukacji historycznej w Polsce i Niemczech*, Lublin 1998, p. 155.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>37</sup> W. Wysok, *International Conference entitled "Education in Memorial Sites in Poland and Hungary"*, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 9 June 2014, at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2N0XW5KRpIw&feature=youtu.be&noredirect=1>>, 16 August 2017.

dents emotions. This is possible, for example, by presenting the Holocaust through particular biographies of survivors with whom students could identify.

Considering this background, an encounter between two separate national groups is especially difficult to prepare. Each group of students, due to different processes and inheritances of collective memory, perceives memorial sites at museum *in situ* differently. The understanding of the Holocaust and its meaning varies among perpetrators and their descendants, just as it does among victims or bystanders and their descendants. A further issue is the expectations of the encounter's organizers, the particular results they are working towards, and their definitions of reconciliation both in theory and, more importantly, in practice.

## ENCOUNTERS – WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE

Two factors were crucial in choosing which examples of encounters to discuss in this article. The first factor was that only encounters between two or more national groups would be considered. The analysis omits all cases in which non-Poles came to former Nazi German concentration and death camps located in Poland, took part in an educational activity (such as a study trip, a seminar etc.), but did not meet with another national group. The second factor was that the encounter had to include a visit at a museum *in situ*. Because of this, gatherings which occurred between two national groups, but without a common visit, were excluded from the analysis. Those excluded encounters included annual Polish-Israeli youth meetings, which take place during Israeli high school trips to Poland.

The author divided the included youth encounters into two categories, depending on the type of organizer. The first category of encounters are those initiated and organized by the museum *in situ* itself, and created at the location of former concentration or death camps. These programs are organized by museum staff, often by both academic and educational departments of museums, and offered to groups. The second category consists of programs designed by institutions which are not museums, but which use a museum *in situ* visit as a small or dominant part of the encounter. In such programs the museum is limited in their ability to shape the encounter. The museums are simply the providers of an authentic site, and the preparers of the historical and factual content which the encounter organizers use. The latter category includes, for example, programs created by the International Youth Meeting Centre in Oświęcim, the Zamość Volunteering Centre, and the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. The analysis encompasses nine educational projects, out of which five were organized by the museums *in situ* themselves, and four by NGOs.

Although the museum at the former Nazi German concentration camp Bełżec offers various educational activities, including museum classes, study visits, historical workshops, and teachers' seminars, their programme has a lack of international youth

meetings.<sup>38</sup> The situation is similar at the museums in Sobibór and Chełmno. It seems odd that even the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, internationally recognized as the major symbol of the Holocaust, has organized activities for politicians, educators, and students for years, but does not offer special programs for intercultural encounters.<sup>39</sup> At the State Museum at Majdanek and at the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, however, international work camps and international meetings connected to the German Association Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (Germ. Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste) have been held for over 15 years. As this brief survey shows, offers of intercultural and international meetings at museums *in situ* located at former Nazi German concentration and death camps are occasional and inconsistent.

Several such meetings have taken place, however. A program called “Young People Shape the Future” was launched in May 2012, at the State Museum at Majdanek. Katholische Jugendsozialarbeit from North Rhine-Westphalia, and the Provincial Headquarters of the Voluntary Labour Corps in Lublin, co-organized this project along with the museum itself. Young people from Poland and Germany visited the site and then joined together for conservation work. For some of them, this program was a first visit to a concentration camp.<sup>40</sup> Later that summer, in August 2012, another work camp was organized in cooperation with the ‘One World’ Association from Poznań, which is the Polish branch of Civil Service International and which specializes in European volunteering for the promotion of peace and intercultural understanding.<sup>41</sup> It was the tenth year of these institutions’ cooperation. Participants from Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic devoted their time to conserving the shoes of the victims of the Majdanek camp. The programs also included lectures, workshops, and tours of the museum, as well as discussions and participation in cultural events in Lublin. Jakub Kruzik, one of the participants in the encounter, summarized it as follows: *It has been very nice to discover a bit of Polish culture and history. I think our work has been beneficial and useful for other people. We should work together for a better future.*<sup>42</sup> This statement clearly shows focusing on the Other’s world (in this case Polish culture and history) and the aspect of responsibility for others, for future underlined by Levinas.

The State Museum at Majdanek also hosts international historical and educational projects, which take place either as historical workshop or study tours. In addition, the

<sup>38</sup> “Educational Offerings”, Museum – Memorial Site in Bełżec, at <[http://www.belzec.eu/en/education/oferta\\_educacyjna/6](http://www.belzec.eu/en/education/oferta_educacyjna/6)>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>39</sup> “Educational Projects”, Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, at <<http://auschwitz.org/en/education/educational-projects/>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>40</sup> “‘Young Workers for Future’ – Polish-German Workcamp”, Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibór, 29 May 2012, at <[http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/mlodziej\\_kszaltuje\\_przyszlosc\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_polsko-niemiecki\\_workcamp/310](http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/mlodziej_kszaltuje_przyszlosc_____polsko-niemiecki_workcamp/310)>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Official website of ‘One World’ Association: Stowarzyszenie ‘Jeden Świat’, at <<http://jedenswiat.org.pl>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>42</sup> “Workcamp at the Memorial Site. Volunteers from Poland, Czech Republic and Germany at Majdanek”, Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibór, 3 July 2012, at <[http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/workcamp\\_w\\_miejscu\\_pamieci\\_\\_wolontariusze\\_z\\_polski\\_\\_czech\\_i\\_niemiec\\_na\\_majdanku/320](http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/workcamp_w_miejscu_pamieci__wolontariusze_z_polski__czech_i_niemiec_na_majdanku/320)>, 30 April 2017.

museum hosts projects to maintain its physical site, which are implemented by German youth. The museum also facilitates, in smaller numbers, cross-cultural exchanges such as Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Ukrainian-Belarusian meetings.<sup>43</sup> According to the State Museum at Majdanek educational department, more than 3,774 people from abroad participated in 131 organized intercultural encounters from 2009 to 2017, and these numbers are steadily growing.<sup>44</sup>

It is worth mentioning that since 2012 there has been continuous cooperation between Lower Secondary School no. 24 in Lublin and Georg Büchner Gymnasium in Darmstadt. This partnership began as an international project called “Discover History Together”, devoted to the history of the German occupation in the Lublin district. Participants had the opportunity to visit the museum, work in groups, meet a local survivor, and commemorate the victims of the Holocaust.<sup>45</sup> In the next few years students continued to learn about the history of Majdanek and its prisoners, and through this learning to work for dialogue and reconciliation. A distinct advantage of this project has been the approach used: student participants work in groups and learn from each other using a peer-to-peer method.<sup>46</sup>

The museums at Majdanek and Treblinka both take part in the initiative of the German Association Action Reconciliation Service for Peace. This movement began in 1960 as the result of an appeal by the Evangelical Church in Germany, and its acknowledgment of German guilt for Nazi crimes. The initiators of the Action Reconciliation were convinced that the first moves towards reconciliation should be done by perpetrators and their descendants.<sup>47</sup> The aims of the Association are the reconstruction of material losses, and mutual work for peace and understanding with the countries which suffered under the Nazi regime. In 2012, at the State Museum at Majdanek, participants from Germany, Ukraine, Great Britain and Poland reflected on the genocide which took place there.<sup>48</sup> In 2013 they focused on the Holocaust in the Zamość region and met with Stanisława Kruszewska, a former Majdanek prisoner. The next year the program implemented a new form of education, the peer-to-peer method. The partici-

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<sup>43</sup> “Educational Offerings”, Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, at <[http://www.majdanek.eu/en/education/oferta\\_educacyjna/2](http://www.majdanek.eu/en/education/oferta_educacyjna/2)>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Data from the Educational Department at the State Museum at Majdanek.

<sup>45</sup> “Discover History Together”, Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibór, 3 July 2013, at <[http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/wspolne\\_poznanie\\_historii/405](http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/wspolne_poznanie_historii/405)>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>46</sup> “Remembrance for Reconciliation – Intercultural Workshops”, Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibór, 26 June 2014, at <[http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/pamiec\\_na\\_rzecz\\_pojednania\\_warsztaty\\_miedzykulturowe/517](http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/pamiec_na_rzecz_pojednania_warsztaty_miedzykulturowe/517)>, 30 April 2017; “Międzykulturowe warsztaty. Pamięć na rzecz Dialogu”, Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibór, 18 June 2015, at <[http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/pl/news/miedzykulturowe\\_warsztaty\\_pamiec\\_na\\_rzecz\\_dialogu/616](http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/pl/news/miedzykulturowe_warsztaty_pamiec_na_rzecz_dialogu/616)>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>47</sup> “History of ARSP in Germany”, Action Reconciliation Service for Peace, at <<https://www.actionreconciliation.org/about-us/history/germany/>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>48</sup> “Young Volunteers Preserve Memory and Peace”, Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibór, 19 July 2012, at <[http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/mlodzi\\_wolontariusze\\_pielegnuja\\_pamiec\\_i\\_pokoj/327](http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/mlodzi_wolontariusze_pielegnuja_pamiec_i_pokoj/327)>, 30 April 2017.

pants divided into groups to study particular aspects of history and to share what they learned.<sup>49</sup> At the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, this program lasted from 1999 to 2009. Imke Hansen, the coordinator of the group in Treblinka, explained her motivation for participating in this encounter: *Those are neither my sins nor the sins of my generation. But we as a German nation want to show that we are closer to friendship between the nations, especially with those who suffered during World War II. We don't want another war to break out in the future, whether in Europe or in the whole world. By cleaning the territory of the camps we realized much more the vastness of the tragedy which occurred here.*<sup>50</sup> Here, she refers to the responsibility for world peace and friendship between nations, not focusing on her own nation, but looking towards others. A participant named Peter, from another year of this same program, expressed similar hopes: *We don't feel guilty because of the Holocaust, but we want to take responsibility for today and for tomorrow. The fascism, genocide, and millions of victims of World War II – this is the legacy and the burden given to us by our grandparents. We cannot refuse it, or say that this is not our problem. By doing so we will not build peace.*<sup>51</sup>

The Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom at Treblinka also offers a program called “We Are Together” (Pl. “Jesteśmy razem”) which consists of workshops with young people from Poland and Israel, as well as meetings with representatives of local authorities. In 2014, the program was based on Jan Karski (2014 was officially announced as the Year of Jan Karski), on Janusz Korczak, a Jewish educator from Warsaw who died in Treblinka along with the orphans under his care, and on Righteous Among the Nations. The integration activities were provided by the Forum of Dialogue among the Nations. Unfortunately there are very few sources about this program, so it is difficult to draw conclusions about its impact. From the small number of opinions expressed by Polish participants, however, it can be clear that participants evaluated the meeting positively, and did not expect the Israeli youth to be so ‘nice and tolerant’. They also valued the meeting itself, regardless of its content, because they normally have no contact with Jewish minorities. In these reflections there is no indication that participants wanted or saw a need for continued intercultural contact, but it is not clear whether this question was asked.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> “Workshop for the Volunteers from the Association Action Reconciliation/Service for Peace”, Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibór, 15 July 2014, at <[http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/zajecia\\_dla\\_wolontariuszy\\_stowarzyszenia\\_akcja\\_znak\\_pokuty\\_sluzba\\_dla\\_pokoju/523](http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/zajecia_dla_wolontariuszy_stowarzyszenia_akcja_znak_pokuty_sluzba_dla_pokoju/523)>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>50</sup> R. Domański, “Posprzątać Obóz”, *Gazeta Powiatowa*, 22 August 1999, Muzeum Walki i Męczeństwa Treblinka, 13 December 2013, at <<http://www.treblinka-muzeum.eu/index.php/akcja-znaku-pokuty/1999-rok>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>51</sup> B. Luczewska-Matejak, “Nigdy więcej...”, Muzeum Walki i Męczeństwa Treblinka, 13 December 2013, at <<http://www.treblinka-muzeum.eu/index.php/akcja-znaku-pokuty/2001-rok>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>52</sup> “Projekt ‘Jesteśmy razem’ w Treblince”, Muzeum Walki i Męczeństwa Treblinka, 29 October 2014, at <<http://www.treblinka-muzeum.eu/index.php/8-aktualnosci/172-projekt-jestesmy-razem-w-treblince>>, 30 April 2017.

Several instances of the second type of encounter, which is created by organizations other than the hosting museum, take place as well. The creation of the International Youth Meeting Centre in Oświęcim by Volker von Törne (1934-1980), a poet and former director of the German Association Action Reconciliation Service for Peace, had many political, educational and symbolic consequences. The idea for this Meeting Centre entered public discourse in the 1970s, after the signing of agreements between Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany. The centre, after many debates and obstacles but with the overwhelming support of former victims of Nazi German camps, opened in 1986. The mission of the centre is disseminating knowledge of national socialism, presenting the consequences of his ideology, and promoting mutual partnership by undoing stereotypes and combating prejudice.

One of the programs offered by the centre, a collaboration between the Bergen-Belsen Memorial and the Foundations for Freedom, and Ukrainian Action: Healing the Past, is called "History Begins in the Family". From 2015-2016, youth groups from Germany, Poland and Ukraine met in each of these two countries in order to study history through the stories of local families.<sup>53</sup> During their stay in Germany, students visited the Bergen-Belsen Memorial and studied the stories of Bergen-Belsen survivors. The second encounter occurred in Poland, and the extensive evaluation created there by the Ukrainian group illustrates this program's impact. The participants emphasized the value of encounter itself. Serhiy Zalevskyi wrote: *The "History Begins in the Family" project changes perspectives, breaks stereotypes, and serves as a great push for self-improvement and self-development. The second part of the project showed how important family for all of us. It was a great pleasure to observe the care with which project participants opened their hearts and shared things that private and vulnerable. Our week was really fascinating. Every day was bright and unique. We prepared our own projects, expressed our thoughts regarding problematic events in history, and did different interesting tasks, which helped us to learn gripping and astounding facts. The process of integration was so easy that I now have many friends from Germany and Poland who constantly message me and support me.*<sup>54</sup> Thus, he underlined the bond which was created between participants of the encounter, which confirms that the dialogue situation took place. He also talked about other participants who supported him, so were focused on him as the Other according to Buber's philosophy.

Roman Zvarych wrote in a similar tone: *Dialogues, numerous discussions, trainings, and interview presentations – all of this made my week in Oświęcim. I don't know when I'm going to come there again, but I'll keep it in my mind forever. Now I have 29 new friends on Facebook, a lot of new pictures, and positive emotions. I am very grateful to the organizers of the project for that.* This citation proves the importance of new bonds created during the encounter. The value of encounter, and meeting other young people,

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<sup>53</sup> "Historia zaczyna się w rodzinie...", Międzynarodowy Dom Spotkań Młodzieży w Oświęcimiu, at <<http://www.mdsm.pl/pl/edukacja/inne-programy-menu/976-historia-zaczyna-sie-w-rodzinie>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

was a tremendous relief while visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau former Nazi German concentration and death camp. Yulija Levytska has written about this in precise words: *Your own helplessness is murderous. You can't save the starving children, whose eyes are begging you for help from the museum wall picture. You are just passing by and reaching another circle of hell. Suddenly, somebody from your group gently fixes your hood. And you start believing again that a better world exists, because it is a place of care.* The consolation and gentle gestures shown to each other during difficult and traumatic moments, as reported here, are an example for Levinas' concept of responsibility.

Lilia Trubka, in a very emotional post, explained the value of experiencing the program together with her Polish and German peers: *But after all these things, we always came back to the youth center and felt completely safe. It was the place where we were told that we had to remember the past in order not to allow its repeating. The place where one could keep silence for an hour or so or say just one word and everyone would easily understand you. The people are what I'll remember after this trip. Although we argued sometimes, we always came to understanding. We talked a lot, we laughed out loud, and sang songs in different languages. And we did it with all our hearts. We saw and heard dreadful things in Auschwitz-Birkenau, but we went through all of this together, and this is the point.* Lilia presented both value of the bond which was created between the participants as well as process of understanding the differences between them. The last part of the project involved a trip to Lviv and reflections on local Soviet heritage. This program included crucial sessions, such as: 'Dialogue and non-violent communication', 'Trust: to foster understanding and reconciliation', and 'Solving problems which were not created by us'.<sup>55</sup>

Another project which uses local heritage of the Holocaust and focuses on personal stories was organized by the Zamość Volunteering Centre in March 2015.<sup>56</sup> In the framework of the European Union Erasmus+ program, the project "Let Me Tell You a Story" was created. Representatives of NGOs from Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Romania, Turkey, Hungary and Poland gathered in Zamość in order to learn about the children who lived in this region during World War II and were displaced by the Nazis. All participants took part in workshops on journalism techniques and intercultural dialogue in order to prepare themselves to perform interviews with survivors.<sup>57</sup> The project included a study visit to the Museum – Memorial Site in Bełżec.<sup>58</sup> The project resulted in an English publication of five interviews created by the participants,

<sup>55</sup> "History begins in the family..." Polish-German-Ukrainian project for the Youth. Programme of third encounter in Lviv, Międzynarodowy Dom Spotkań Młodzieży w Oświęcimiu, at <[http://www.mdsm.pl/images/download/historia\\_geshichte\\_programme\\_ukraine.pdf](http://www.mdsm.pl/images/download/historia_geshichte_programme_ukraine.pdf)>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Stowarzyszenie Zamojskie Centrum Wolontariatu, at <<http://wolontariatzamosc.pl/>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>57</sup> "Międzynarodowi 'zbieracze wspomnień' spotykają się w Zamościu", *Lajf. Magazyn Lubelski*, 2 March 2015, at <<http://lajf.info/?p=8375>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>58</sup> "The Youth from Seven Countries Met in Bełżec", Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibór, 11 March 2015, at <[http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/mlodziez\\_z\\_siedmiu\\_krajow\\_spotkala\\_sie\\_w\\_belzcu/579](http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/mlodziez_z_siedmiu_krajow_spotkala_sie_w_belzcu/579)>, 30 April 2017.

and was considered highly successful by its sponsors. Because of this, the project continued in 2016 under the title “Let Me Tell You a Story II. A Tale from the Forest”.<sup>59</sup> In the second year, young people from all over Europe focused on the topic of resistance during the war, and especially on the Zamość uprising.<sup>60</sup>

Almost a decade before the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, built its magnificent facility in the Muranów district of Warsaw, it led a wide range of educational activities. The first of which was the program called Polish-Israeli Youth Encounters (PIYE), launched in 2006.<sup>61</sup> This program is a joint educational initiative of POLIN and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland (Pl. Stowarzyszenie Żydowski Instytut Historyczny), the organization responsible for the creation of the POLIN Museum’s core exhibition. The goal of the program was to support university students in learning about Polish-Jewish relations, both in historical and current aspects, and to bring students together to create artistic projects. Through this combination of knowledge and practice, students would overcome preexisting stereotypes and prejudices. Since its inception in 2006, almost 200 young people have taken part in the exchange.<sup>62</sup>

The framework of the program is twofold. In the beginning of the program the Israeli group comes to Poland, and for two weeks of summer break they experience the country where most of their ancestors lived. The Polish students are mentors and guides in this voyage. The participants take part in a series of lectures, workshops, and cultural and artistic activities. The second part of the PIYE program is the visit of Polish participants to Israel, which takes up to three months. During this time the Polish students have an opportunity to study at the Tel Aviv University School for Overseas Students. They learn about Polish-Jewish relations but also about modern Jewish history, the Holocaust, and Israel. They also have a chance to participate in Hebrew classes. During this part of the program the Israelis assist their Polish colleagues.<sup>63</sup> Over the years, the formula for this program has changed significantly. In 2009, Polish participants were required to interview Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors who had emigrated to Israel. This was a quite a powerful experience for Polish students who were able to

<sup>59</sup> See: “Let Me Tell You a Story II. A Tale from the Forest”, Stowarzyszenie Zamojskie Centrum Wolontariatu, 16 April 2016, at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTtoA2sA0lg>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>60</sup> “Międzynarodowi miłośnicy naszej ziemi – znów w Zamościu”, Zamość. Oficjalna strona miasta, 6 April 2016, at <<http://www.zamosc.pl/news/3239/1/miedzynarodowi-miloscnicy-naszej-historii-ndash-znow-w.html>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>61</sup> “Polish-Israeli Youth Exchange (PIYE)”, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, at <<http://www.polin.pl/en/education-culture-education/polish-israeli-students-exchange-program>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>62</sup> “Reunion i podsumowanie 2. części programu PIYE 2016”, Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN, 17 January 2017, at <<http://www.polin.pl/pl/aktualnosci/2017/01/17/reunion-i-podsumowanie-2-czesci-programu-piye-2016>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>63</sup> *Regulamin rekrutacji i uczestnictwa w Programie Polish-Israeli Youth Exchange – PIYE dla uczestników z Polski*, Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN, at <[http://www.polin.pl/pl/system/files/attachments/regulamin\\_wymiany\\_studenckiej\\_piye\\_2017.pdf](http://www.polin.pl/pl/system/files/attachments/regulamin_wymiany_studenckiej_piye_2017.pdf)>, 30 April 2017.

meet someone who could still testify to the events of World War II and the Shoah. It was also a useful experience, as participants gained skills in oral history.

Since the opening of the core exhibition of the POLIN Museum in 2014, the museum itself has become the main focus for presenting the multicultural face of Poland and the long history of mutual Polish-Jewish relations. The museum itself offers various ways to involve students while they are in Poland. During the first two weeks of the program, participants in Polish-Israeli pairs participate in activities organized by different POLIN Museum departments.<sup>64</sup> In 2016, one such activity was an inventory of the Kielce<sup>65</sup> Jewish cemetery, in service of Virtual Shtetl, the division of the POLIN Museum which is responsible for collecting materials on the Jewish past in Poland and disseminating them through an online database. It was a major challenge for the participants, because Kielce is well known from the infamous 1946 Jewish pogrom which took place there. During this activity Israeli students translated inscriptions and documented the site together with their Polish colleagues. In the last few years, participants have also been encouraged to express their involvement in the program in a more artistic way. In 2015, they created short movies and, in 2016, in Poland they prepared a city game in Warsaw.<sup>66</sup>

In the past, one mandatory part of the PIYE program was a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.<sup>67</sup> This visit was jointly prepared by both groups of students. The participants chose literary texts, like testimonies and poems, as well as selections from modern culture, in order to create a ceremony at the Auschwitz site. This ceremony was a climax after the group visits to Auschwitz, which were moving for both sides. The students' emotional reactions were particularly intense because the visits and ceremonies were jointly organized. Most participants, both Israelis and Poles, already knew Auschwitz, through field trips and international study tours. Those tours, however, are mainly used to promote a particular national point of view, while during the PIYE program participants were forced to experience this overwhelming site of genocide together, and to see it in a broader context. The joint study visit and the final ceremony were moments where both sides attempted to understand the Other's point of view, and gave comfort to new friends in a shared project.

The author of this article remembers that in 2008, during one such visit, an Israeli girl pointed to a barracks, and indicated that her grandmother may have lived there.

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<sup>64</sup> "Last Day of the Internship for PIYE Participants", POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 3 September 2013, at <<http://www.polin.pl/en/news/2013/09/03/last-day-internship-piye-participants>>, 30 April 2017; "PIYE Participants Becomes Museum's Reporters", POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 29 August 2013, at <<http://www.polin.pl/en/news/2013/08/29/piye-participants-became-museums-reporters>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>65</sup> "Na cmentarzu żydowskim w Kielcach policzyli i uporządkowali nagrobki", *Echo Dnia*, 26 August 2013, at <<http://www.echodnia.eu/swietokrzyskie/wiadomosci/kielce/art/8694935,na-cmentarzu-zydowskim-w-kielcach-policzyli-i-udokumentowali-nagrobki-zdjecia,id,t.html>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>66</sup> "Israel under Your Nose", POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 30 August 2013, at <<http://www.polin.pl/en/event/israel-under-your-nose>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Now it is not obligatory as the coordinator of the program in 2016 told the author over the phone call.

Her Polish colleague replied that his own grandmother may have been in the same barracks, as she too was incarcerated in Auschwitz. This situation both exposed and remedied the ignorance of some Israeli participants, who did not know that Poles were also prisoners in this former Nazi German concentration camp. But much more important was the moment which allowed Polish and Jewish students to understand how similar their pain and suffering really were.

Since 2012, the dominant element of PIYE has been the artistic project which is created by the participants, including short movies which both deal with the past<sup>68</sup> and touch upon very current Polish-Israeli issues, such as Israeli delegations to Poland, and perceptions of Poland as a Jewish cemetery.<sup>69</sup> Through daily collaboration in small teams of Poles and Israelis – generally pairs – students have a chance to get to know each other better, in a much more natural setting than lectures or formal programs.

The aim of the whole program, as mentioned above, is to create a new platform for Polish-Israeli dialogue by showing young people both the richness of the common Polish-Jewish past, and the vibrancy of the present, and in so doing counteract negative stereotypes and prejudices which might have been created either by prior education or by knowledge transferred from previous generations. The great advantage to this work today is that young people did not have a personal experience of World War II. This relieves them from personal memory and traumas, so that while their knowledge is rooted in post-memory,<sup>70</sup> their experience is somehow indirect and inherited, and therefore less resistant to change.

Another advantage is the duration of the program, as PIYE offers an uncommonly long encounter. It seems obvious that exposure to longer meetings with the Other can help a person to change one's mind on issues of relationship. Franciszek Bojańczyk, from the PIYE 2012 program, wrote: *The experience of staying, the advantages of being in Israel [...] are not only support in studies, but also the stories we share with our friends, the image of Israel which we felt and saw. It is a great advantage of the program, the one we see only now, weeks after our return. PIYE is a type of testimony. We have stopped looking at the Middle East through the lens of the conflict. Israelis started to see a living Poland, green, so different from the stereotypical country-cemetery. Maybe it sounds pathetic but PIYE is one of the best months I have ever spent. Months of struggle with Hebrew grammar, but also the company of Shira, Yaara, Maayan, Shirlee, Barak, Omri and Guy.*

<sup>68</sup> *Searching No Remains, PIYE 2015*, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 17 September 2015, at <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAHBNKS5Zdw&list=PLeMNRKVk1rbQ7ATgtZni0\\_CLdw9DEey6N&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAHBNKS5Zdw&list=PLeMNRKVk1rbQ7ATgtZni0_CLdw9DEey6N&index=4)>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>69</sup> *Security Reasons – film studentów z Polski i Izraela (PIYE 2014)*, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 16 September 2014, at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-yt-cl=84503534&x-yt-ts=1421914688&v=uDinmCERMsQ>>, 30 April 2017; *Welcome to Warsaw, PIYE 2015*, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 17 September 2015, at <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gYlX8qG\\_QM&index=2&list=PLeMNRKVk1rbQ7ATgtZni0\\_CLdw9DEey6N](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gYlX8qG_QM&index=2&list=PLeMNRKVk1rbQ7ATgtZni0_CLdw9DEey6N)>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>70</sup> M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, New York 2012.

*Months which are physically over, but still exist somehow within us. And so it will stay this way.*<sup>71</sup>

All members of the PIYE 2016 edition evaluated the program positively and were willing to recommend it to others. The vast majority described the program's participants, and casual conversations, as its most valuable element. One of the members, Weronika, said: *I liked the evenings at the hostel, and all the quiet times around Warsaw we had to sit and talk with everyone.* Her Israeli colleague Maayan agreed: *The best part of our program were definitely the people. I enjoyed most hanging out with them in the hostel and other places in Warsaw, especially talking, playing silly games, and playing guitar.* Another emotional reflection expressed by Yaara shows that those talks were connected with the mutual relations and world view of Poles and Israelis: *I loved sitting with the Poles the most, to hear their point of view about things and to learn a little bit of their language. They are really warm and interesting people and thanks to them I really felt at home in Warsaw.*<sup>72</sup> In those two opinions it can be clearly seen that the girls were focused on the other participants and valued the relations which were created during the encounter.

The results of the program, the friendships created during PIYE, continue in the form of both personal one-on-one contacts and involvement of previous PIYE members in the current activities of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, as well as in yearly reunions.<sup>73</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to analyze museums *in situ* as places of reconciliation for various national groups. The hypothesis was that the inter-group meetings which take place at museums *in situ* located at former Nazi German concentration or death camps might cause or initiate a reconciliation process among young people from different backgrounds.

The obstacles in this process of analysis are worth mentioning. The author's expectation that museums first of all provide such programs and, more importantly, collect evaluations, was false. To the author's surprise, international encounter programs were not a major interest for most museums, aside from those at Majdanek and Treblinka. If they did take place, encounters were generally organized by third parties such as NGOs, foundations, and other cultural institutions. Sometimes the museums did not keep a re-

<sup>71</sup> "Relacje z PIYE 2013", Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN, at <<http://www.polin.pl/pl/edukacja-kultura-dzialalnosc-edukacyjna-wymiany-studentow-z/relacje-z-wymiany-2012>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>72</sup> "PIYE Participants about the Program", POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 5 September 2013, at <<http://www.polin.pl/en/node/1249>>, 30 April 2017.

<sup>73</sup> "Film Screening of PIYE of 2012 and Reunion", POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 30 August 2013, at <<http://www.polin.pl/en/news/2013/08/30/film-screening-piye-2012-and-reunion>>, 30 April 2017; "Reunion i podsumowanie...".

cord of such meetings, and sometimes they kept only statistical data. Furthermore, the institutions which kept records were not necessarily willing to share their information. This is a serious flaw for forming a conclusive statement regarding any type of research.

In many cases, as explained by museum employees, the programs were evaluated orally, in a summary session which was not recorded, obviously preventing further analysis. In cases where the analysis of the documents was possible, especially for those documents discussed in this article, it must be remembered that all the answers present only the declarative level of response. In no cases was a deeper interview performed by the encounter's organizing institution. This was another limit to this research, but it is still worth searching for deeper answers and meanings in the summaries prepared by participants, and in evaluations of their creative projects (e.g. short movies made by PIYE fellows).

The way encounters were performed fits the framework developed by dialogue philosophers. The encounters were direct, and the groups emphasized the value of their encounters as special events or as life-changing moments, which follows Buber's understanding of dialogue. Furthermore, participants valued the aspect of responsibility for the other, discussed by Levinas, and responsibility for future relationships, which was explicit in the reflections given by fellows of Action Reconciliation. It was evident that encounters pulled students out of their comfort zones (Levinas' separation stage), and through joint activities the borders of communities of memory cracked. Visits to memorial sites, especially, were moments in which group members assisted others, consoling them and sharing emotions.

During most of the programs, various elements were mixed. Participants received formal, factual knowledge through lectures and workshops, but also worked collaboratively. Most of the programs which were analyzed offered either a contributory model of participation (e.g. work at the conservation department of a concentration or death camp) or a co-creative model (e.g. work creating short movies), according to Simon's classifications. Museums invited participants to contribute to institutional work, but also gave the members of the projects relative freedom in performing their tasks. In addition, most of the projects concentrated on local history, and tried to present the Holocaust through the biographies of individuals.

The summary which might be considered a legitimate finding is that, while conducting programs that included a study trip at a museum *in situ*, the reconciliation which took place was closely connected to the intercultural character of the dialogue. The representatives of the two or more national groups became open for each other, but not as representatives of certain nationalities. Mostly, they simply opened up to each other as fellow human beings, as was evident in their evaluations. In other words, their painful heritage became, as an object, a reason for interpersonal encounters, instead of as an object for critical interpretation. Only later, after initiating relationships and creating the beginning of friendships, did historical reflection occur.

It must be said that all of the programs discussed in this article focused on the authenticity of their places, and used local history as a major element of the intercultural encounter. Those programs which offered common projects (artistic ones, such

as PIYE films, or interviews in Zamość) seemed to effectively create lasting bonds between participants. Some of the programs also included more than one visit, or significantly longer stays, which multiplied the effects of the encounter. Overall, participants supported each other with empathy and with understanding. Instead of historical and factual understanding as members of different nations, they met each other initially simply as youth, without reference to their origins. On the one hand, this seems to be a positive effect. However, if heritage is only an excuse for the encounter, is it possible this meeting to be a strong foundation for the future? The question remains open and demands further and much deeper research.

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