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second report

reflection & evaluation



A view on the entrance of the Church of Reconciliation.

a. Please highlight a situation from your voluntary service

Please, describe a typical situation in your project or something you experienced and that has made an impression on you during the second part of your service.



Ecumenical celebration during the visit of Bartholomew, the Archbishop of Constantinople. Dachau, May 19th, 2014.

It's hard to give one, exceptional highlight from the voluntary year. Every single day somehow opened a new door. Nevertheless, a lot of highlights that I can recall from memory refer to the profound aims of the organization I worked for, that is speaking about the legacy of the national socialism from a religious point of view. One of them would be a visit of Bartholomew, the patriarch of Constantinople, which

broadened the inter-religious dialogue by a confession rather unknown to me, which is the Greek-orthodox Christianity. The Greek choirs and celebrations were something really new to me and I was surprised to hear a call for reconciliation between Christians, Jews and Muslims also from that side. What amazed me even more, shortly after the visit to Dachau the patriarch went to Israel, to mediate during a visit of pope Francis in the Holy Land. I felt as if I had just touched something unexpectedly important, some important history happening right next to me.



Ukrainian and Polish flags waving at the Roll Call Square during the anniversary of the liberation of the Concentration Camp Dachau, May 4th, 2014.

Another moment I would like to mention is the celebration of the anniversary of the liberation of the camp. That was a really good occasion to observe how the commemoration is produced in response to current political demand. I am just referring to the implications of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict on celebrations in Dachau, the speeches and the reactions of the diplomats from the above mentioned countries. Besides, I also participated in the celebrations at Hebertshausen, a former shooting range, where the SS executed approximately 4000 Soviet POW's between September 1941 and July 1942. I gave a speech there and later on I was happy to hear that the text of it ended up as an ASF donation letter. What actually struck me the most at Hebertshausen, was a talk given by a Russian man whose father had been executed there as a Soviet POW. The man spoke about his long lasting research that he did in order to find out what actually happened to his father since for decades after the war the father had been just labeled as a "missing" person. It was really moving to hear the story of that man, to see how emotionally he is bounded to the place which shaped his life from the very childhood, as a kid growing up without the father. That moment also redefined my understanding of the idea of an eyewitness, since this man has not seen Hebertshausen as a SS execution place, but could perfectly show the feelings of the people affected by the events happening at this particular place.

Speaking of the eyewitness talks – I need to admit there was many of them and each made a highlight itself. What definitely rooted in my memory from the eyewitness meetings in the second half of the voluntary service is an event organized by Anna Andlauer, a teacher from the vicinity of Dachau dedicated to cultivating the memory of the Shoah. The meeting took place at Markt Indersdorf on July 23rd, 2014. The participants had an opportunity to attend the talks in small groups of 6-8 people, each of them listening to the story of a Nazi-persecution survival who after the war found themselves in an orphanage at Markt

Indersdorf. This manner of leading eyewitness talks provided way more space for developing personal relations with the survivors, sharing their stories and emotions. Personally, I listened to Abraham Majzner, who as a boy escaped from the ghetto of Warsaw and survived a number of concentration camps later on. A lot of things I heard from him are going to stay with me for a really long time.



Eyewitness talk with Ruth Meros, July 28th, 2014.

chosen performances of a choir, altering the heartbreaking conversation into something closer to ancient Greek scene tragedy.

Essentially speaking – each of those highlights showed me how diverse history embodied in human life is, each time being spoken about from a different angle, expressed through a different form, seen from a different standpoint. Each of those moments made a significant change in my life or rather perception.

- **b. Expectations and goals – results**
What have you realized - in terms of your expectations?

My main expectation was to learn more about the representations of history. Also, partially I was interested in Germany, its culture and language, but first of all I was (and still am) dedicated to history. I have to admit that the Church of Reconciliation was an excellent spot to develop such an area of interest. By this I mean a couple of things.



Procession on June 27th, 2014.

First of all, each of us in the team of the Church comes from a different background, reflects different experiences of the families. I found it truly fascinating to discuss some important historical issues and get a totally different feedback, comparing to what I had expected. That was a kind of refreshing and

broadening experience. Furthermore, accompanying the events provided by the Church also gave me a fresh point of view. As an example I would use an ecumenical procession, which was organized to commemorate the 50 years of three churches of Dachau, consecrated in 1964. One of those being the Convent of the Carmelite nuns, adhering to the area of the former concentration camp. For me it was a great chance to observe how one is able to speak of sanctity in relation to a piece of land which was essentially deprived of that.

Actually, the place where the volunteers would spend the majority of the working hours was the office at an organization called “Dachauer Forum”, where the project called “The Book of Remembrance” is placed. It has its webpage, even a blog dedicated to it.

<http://www.gedaechtnisbuch.de/>

<http://www.gedaechtnisbuch.blogspot.de/>

There were two main tasks for the volunteers at the “Book of Remembrance” project. The first was to find further exhibitors for the exhibition “Names instead of Numbers”, which presents life stories of prisoners of the concentration camp Dachau, in order to restore their human dignity. Myself, I managed to organize one exhibitor in Canada, due to the contacts I have made at a conference in Toronto in October 2013. What is more, I managed to throw the Polish exhibition into motion, after it had been stored for two years at the last place of display. With some help from my family I organized a transport of the banners to Szczecin, where it was displayed from the beginning of June until the end of August 2014. Moreover, I attempted to organize further exhibitors, which was not an easy task, though I went pretty far in the negotiations with a few of places. Hopefully, the contracts could be signed this year, with my slight support in the background.

The second thing was to assist other volunteers who decided to write short biographies of the former prisoners. Personally, I have helped a couple of them who were writing biographies of Polish prisoners. I also work on a biography of a former inmate. You can read more about this in the end of the report. I need to mention that each day at Dachauer Forum consisted of plenty of office work, immediate tasks of copying or scanning materials, going through the banners of the exhibition, maintaining them, etc. That was also a significant part of the job by “the Remembrance Book”.

Not all of my expectations came true in the exact shape as I had imagined them. That does not make me disappointed anyway. For instance, I had an idea of making a documentary film to sort of link the stories of the KZ Dachau survivors with the personal narratives of the victims of further persecutions, to underline the urgency that in fact any groups of people at any time may be labeled as public enemies by certain ideologies and as such be persecuted or even exterminated - just to briefly introduce the topic of the movie. I was not really successful in making that movie, but nevertheless I gained much more

knowledge and experience on what to do to make it, what kinds of preparations are necessary and, what is also important, I made a couple of meaningful contacts for the movie. So, in fact I made some steps forward with that project.

What worked well in your project? What should be changed?



Me (in the middle of the group) giving a tour to a parish church community from Domat (Ems) in Switzerland. August 17th, 2014.

What remains as one of the most important parts of the project and is also strongly connected to representing the past, in other words to translating the history so that it would be understandable to others, is the issue of the tours. I gave my first tour on March 15th, the last one on August 17th. I did 21 of them all together. 2 in English, 19 in German. The overwhelming majority (18) were given to German schoolchildren, which was a bit challenging in terms of getting their attention and keeping them interested in the topic. Also developing their interest in NS history at best. The challenge that I mean was to tell that story in a way that would be adjusted to their state of knowledge and also meaningful to them – not too difficult and containing a somehow hopeful message in the end, not to leave too depressed afterward.

Each group was a bit different, which was also a great chance for me to exercise my flexibility as a guide. Three of the tours I found especially sticking out from the others – a tour given to a group of girl scouts from USA, one to the group from the International Youth Meeting (more about the IYM below) and one to a parish church community from Switzerland. They offered not just a bit but really altered dynamics, other focuses, which also made me reshape a couple of components of my tour routine. I really wish I had had more of

such groups but on the other hand that almost all of the groups booked at the Church of Reconciliation are high school groups, so it could not have been really different.

Tours are the only topic that could be (possibly) changed in my opinion or at least I would have enjoyed some change. All the other areas of work were more than satisfactory.

What worked well with ASF? What should be changed?

The only little change I would suggest in ASF as an organization is to open all the countries involved to all the participants. That is, people from all the ASF-connected countries would be able to do projects in all the countries where ASF is active. I understand that the main idea of ASF is to carry an action of reconciliation between Germany and the countries that were damaged by the Third Reich, but also the relations between other peoples and countries got deteriorated during the second world war. It is more of a business directly between those countries, rather than between Germany and the other states individually. This way, I think it would be appropriate to allow working more on the remembrance, understanding and the rapprochement in the areas where mutual problems aroused due to WW2, not necessarily with Germany's direct involvement. Let me give Polish-Dutch, Polish-Norwegian or Polish-Jewish relations as a couple of examples seen from my perspective.

Besides, I don't think if anything should be changed. It is already really good this way.

What would you like to change about yourself?

If I had gone back in time and started the voluntary service again, I would have put much more effort in learning German before going to Dachau. It is not only about the efficiency of work (it is essentially helpful, though) but first of all it allows to gain much more from the activities offered while in Dachau. Right from the beginning the volunteers are offered a number of lectures, eyewitness talks and other events – that is all incredibly interesting, but in German! Hence, it is strongly recommended to improve the language skills as much as possible before starting the project. Myself, I kind of regret that I had not ameliorated my knowledge of German way more before I went to my project. Had I done that, I would have benefited much more!

On the other hand, it is also very much important to have a clear mind while opening a voluntary year – not to take any additional work or obligations along. Myself, I had taken some academical works with me to Dachau. Later on it was constantly on my mind and hindered enjoying the time in Bavaria. And unexpectedly there is a lot to enjoy in the vicinity of Dachau. There is beautiful nature along the river Amper with really great paths for running, there is a number of lakes and other destinations which are amazing for bike trips - the volunteers are provided with bikes by the Church, as well as with a yearly ticket for the

public transportation in the entire municipality of Munich, which gives opportunities for astonishing excursions and explorations. I would really love to take more of those chances, instead of spending whole days reading books. Especially concerning that jogging along the river bank or bike trips really helped me distance myself a bit from the thoughts on the concentration camp and get some fresh air – not only physically, but also mentally. The other thing I would recommend for further volunteers to maintain emotional balance and not get depressed while in Dachau is to develop social contacts – also the ones not connected to the memorial site! The contacts I personally developed made my stay in Dachau much more colorful.

Does it make sense for an ASF volunteer to work in your project? Why?

Surely it does. The staff of the Church have a lot of experience in working with the volunteers, provide a lot of facilities, treat them really kindly and friendly. No need to mention that the activity of the Church is also strongly connected with the main theme of ASF.

c. Cross-cultural interfaces

Working in an international German-American-Polish team was a intercultural experience itself. As well as living in the same flat with an American person for a year. In that case I was really lucky to have helpful, understanding and easy-going both co-workers and a flatmate. Apart from that, the whole year was filled with intercultural encounters.

Have your perspectives on Germany changed?

First of all, it was a time of discovering Germany, especially Bavaria. Thanks to the team and to my friends, I've visited a lot of attractive sites in the vicinity of Dachau and such places as lake Chiemsee, with its oneiric palace on the island Herrenchiemsee and even more fairy tale-alike castle of Neuschwannstein. Due to EVS seminars I had a chance to see a tiny township of Benediktbeuern with its impressive monastery and the enjoyable city of



Two members of the Church's team, Pastor Björn Mensing (left) and Pater Klaus Spiegel OSB (right), at the team excursion to Chiemsee, June 23rd, 2014.

Würzburg. At the IYM we also visited the splendid city of Regensburg. Those were all new sights of Germany to me, which also broadened my view of the country. I learned and saw much more about its culture, history and heritage.

I need to mention that the main goal for me was to observe the culture of remembrance in Germany and its

problematic. Throughout the year I had a number of occasions to discover a wide spectrum of approaches – from decent reactions of grief and condemnation, through all the shades of indifference, down to disrespect and attempts to negate. What is more, while giving tours to German students quite often I faced a problem of addressing the history of the Dachau Concentration Camp to the Germans of non-German and often non-European origin. In other words, how to present that story in a way they could refer to.

This way I can say that my perspective in that area got much more nuanced.

Have your perspectives on your home country and your origin changed?

I had been many times abroad before I went to Germany, I had also lived in a foreign country (5 months in Norway during a student exchange). That means I have had a lot points of comparison for my own country. I was also rather conscious about my origin.

Still, that was my longest time abroad (so far). One year in a foreign country and I was home just twice. After I had come back, I started to notice some little things in Polish reality and everyday habits which I used to be rather unaware of before. So, there has been some shift in my perspective. Anyway, the biggest change in my perspective on the country was that I started to value it much more, appreciate the time spent there. Sometimes you need to be bereft of some things you take for granted to discover how much they mean to you.

Where / How did history became relevant and alive for you this year?

I would say that the greatest intercultural encounter occurred to me during the International Youth Meeting in Dachau, which took place in the days between July 25th and August 9th for the teamers. The participants arrived one day later and left one day earlier. There was about 100 people all together, from all around the world, among them 80 partakers in the age of 16 up to 26. Additionally, the team of organizers consisted of 20 people (the above given numbers are approximate). Basically, there was a wide variety of the represented countries – from Mexico, USA, Great Britain, France, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, Ukraine, Russia to South Korea and Taiwan – just to mention a few! For more details, visit: <http://www.jugendbegegnung-dachau.de/>



Pictures of the teamers displayed at the International Youth Meeting in Dachau, August 2014.

So, one dimension of the meeting was getting the youth from all those places at one spot and making them spend some interesting time together. The other dimension (in my view, more significant) of the meeting was the inter-generational interaction between the youth and the

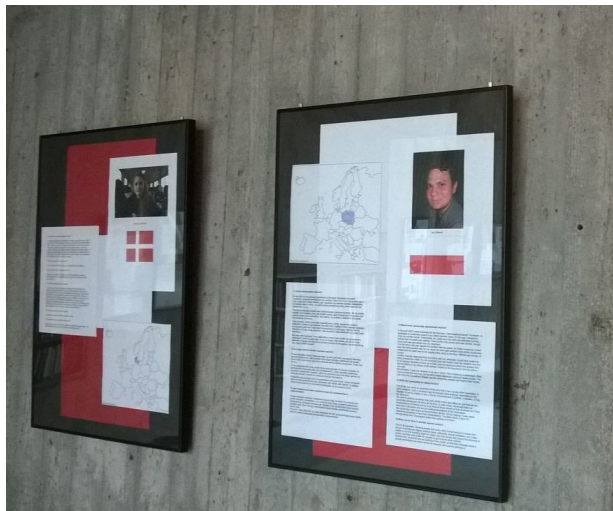
survivors that came to share their dramatic life stories with young people from all around the world. In total there were 7 survivors which visited the meeting. As I remind myself, sitting in a group of youth, casually, with some coffee and cakes, listening to the story of Mirjam Ohringer, a Dutch Jewish resistance fighter, I am more than sure that the history became alive those moments.

d. Prospects on the future

Which experiences and questions will you take with you?

The whole year offered so many unforgettable experiences thus it is hard to say in particular but I will try to give a couple of examples.

As written above, each of the eye witness talks made an everlasting impression on me.



On the left a banner by Christine Dahm from Denmark, on the right - one by the author of the report. Exhibition "Against Racism - Voices from Around the World" prepared by the ASF volunteers at the Church of Reconciliation, August 2014.

Beside that, to tell the truth, all of the events organized by the church were also truly meaningful to me and opened fresh questions on how to deal with that history. There is a number of questions connected to the history of the Nazism and its implications that I will take with me.

It would be really unfair to skip the things connected to social life. Basically, one year of living in the same flat with another ASF volunteer was a great school of understanding, sharing duties and finding a common language. Furthermore, the time of the volunteer service offered a plethora of chances to develop a number of friendships - in terms of Dachau itself, ASF seminars as well as EVS seminars and the Youth Meeting. I have a feeling that many of those contacts will last for rather a long time.

How did your voluntary service change you personally?

Some time needs to pass for me to tell how exactly I changed during the volunteer service. At the moment I feel that it has been one of the most meaningful years in my life. It definitely helped me see myself in a new light. Surely I know much more about myself afterward, became way more self-conscious, self-confident. So to say, independent. Throughout the whole service I had to find myself in a new language, in a new environment, cope with problems I had not dealt with before. And after all, I did it. It was an outstanding training in trusting my abilities.

What are your plans for the future?

ASF is definitely included in my future plans. I want to write a biography of a former Dachau prisoner, whom I personally met in Poznań, and present it at the ceremony on 22nd of March next year. I also want to finalize some arrangements with the exhibition on the Dachau prisoners. Furthermore, I would still love to make the above mentioned and postponed (not abandoned!) film project come true.

Other future plans also remain in the circle of ASF interest. For the further years, I dream of working as a historian and to sign up for a PhD study, researching Shoah as the main object. Everything I have learned thanks to ASF, all the experience I gained and all the reflections I made, will be really supportive in that matter. And if you stay persistent, dreams tend to come true.



The Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial seen from the exit of the Church of Reconciliation.

Let me share an anecdote for the very end. One year ago, on the way to the opening seminar in Wünsdorf, I was changing from a bus to a train at Berlin-Schönefeld. Struggling with the heavy luggage I almost could not bear, I finally reached the platform. And then came the second challenge. The ticket. I approached a ticket machine, unfortunately it was operating only in German. I could understand pretty much nothing, had no idea which ticket to buy and how to do it. After all, with some help from the others in the line, I managed to buy a proper ticket.

I went back to the platform and felt terrified. The first encounter with the German reality had been already tough, how would be the rest of the time? Drowned in thoughts, I glanced to the left. There was an Asian girl, waiting for the train. A linen shoulder bag hanging on her right side had a couple of words written on with a funny font. “Don't worry, everything is going to be amazing”.

And you know what, it was.