

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Bert Pampel**, *“Mit eigenen Augen sehen, wozu der Mensch fähig ist”*: Zur Wirkung von Gedenkstätten auf ihre Besucher. [“To See with One’s Own Eyes what People are Capable of Doing”]: On the Effects of Memorial Sites on Visitors]. Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2007, 424 pp. €45.00 paper (978-3-593-38384-2)

Scholars of collective memory point to a rich and variegated memory culture in Germany’s dealings with its Nazi past and, to a lesser extent, the former Communist dictatorship in its eastern federal states. Much of the scholarship has focused on the supply side of this phenomenon, addressing political frameworks, cultural parameters, and institutional and pedagogical conditions and constraints of Germany’s memory culture. In the vast literature on the topic, attempts to come to grips with the demand side remain largely missing. What motives and expectations do visitors bring to memorials? How do visitors experience their visits to memorial sites, and what effects do the sites have on them?

Bert Pampel, a research associate at the Saxon Memorials Foundation, sheds light on these issues in this excellent and carefully argued study, which is based on his dissertation. In the first chapter, he describes the current state of scholarship on memorial sites as places of both commemoration and historical-political education. He depicts the tasks, goals, and functions of memorial sites in Germany, places them in social-cultural and political contexts, and discusses the pedagogical concerns and expectations operant at such sites. He also reflects on past and current discussions concerning the institutional identity and self-understanding of places dedicated to commemoration and learning, and the fuzzy boundaries between them and museums, historical places, archives, cemeteries, educational facilities and related sites, and organizations. Overall, he argues in a lucid explication that the (German) memorial sites are *sui generis*, sharing characteristics with related institutional types but neither identical nor reducible to them.

Chapter 2 turns to current knowledge (which is remarkably sketchy) about visitors to such sites. First, the author addresses findings of scholars of pedagogy and research on experiences of personnel with visitors. While Pampel confirms the majority opinion on the subject, namely, that opportunities to affect visitors in a desired and lasting way through tour

narratives, text materials, and objects are sharply circumscribed at sites that emplace historical trauma, he does point to circumstances under which affective engagement can afford possibilities for this to happen. Existing research on and at memorial sites, for which Pampel provides detailed visitor statistics in a unique overview, leads him to a similar conclusion, as does his discussion of research on historical exhibits and museums. His overall perspective corresponds to that of the renowned German sociologist Heiner Treinen, whose research shows that what, if anything, visitors learn at museums, memorial sites, and similar institutions depends to a large measure on prior knowledge and experience as well as on what happens after a visit in the immediate communicative field of visitors. Difficult to do justice in the space of this review, Pampel's nuanced analysis constitutes a remarkable scholarly achievement.

In the rest of the book, Pampel describes the findings of his own study. At three major memorial sites in the state of Saxony, he first asked 39 adult visitors at the time of their visit about their motivations, expectations, and place of residence. Several weeks later he carried out 22 personal interviews with these individuals and couples and for up to 5 years later, inquired about the long-term effects of the visit through a questionnaire, of which 11 were completed and returned. The three sites are the memorials Pirna-Sonnenstein, which was a Nazi gas murder facility for the disabled and the sick; the Münchner Platz in Dresden, where Nazi officials guillotined 1,400 opponents and prisoners, and Soviets and East Germans dealt with political opponents; and Bautzen, perhaps former East Germany's most notorious prison complex. Pampel describes and analyzes in great detail and with considerable nuance the (pre)conceptions of the visitors, their expectations about and motivations for the visit, its meaning for them, their experiences while visiting, and the ways in which they appropriate, reflect upon, and use these experiences later on. Ultimately, the small number of cases and the heterogeneity of the visitors included in his study limit Pampel to what Charles Tilly once called individualizing comparisons, by means of which the author highlights the particularities of each case. Pampel's research design does not lend itself to producing easily generalizable results. They are consistent with previous research and also transcend them. Pampel is able to document the importance of noncognitive experiences, be they emotional, empathic, imaginative, or aesthetic, in giving the visit an extra-mundane character. This can be fostered by the auratic qualities of core memorial objects and facilities if appropriately (re)presented, illustrated, explained, and contextualized on site, and can lead to a more enduring engagement with the subject matter in light of personal experiences. In such cases

learning during and from visits and the integration with broader systems of meaning and plausibility structures *can* occur.

If there is anything missing from Pampel's book, it is recognition of the field of tourism studies, which despite some theoretical deficiencies has supplied relevant quantitative information for similar sites. The same and more can be said about the burgeoning domain of dark tourism studies, which supplied the classic studies of trauma and disaster sites by Kenneth Foote (*Shadowed Ground: America's Landscape of Violence and Tragedy*, 2003) and by John Lennon and Malcolm Folley (*Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, 2000), as well as more recent works (Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*). In spite of this shortcoming, Pampel's book is highly recommended to any scholar in this field.

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An Associate Professor of Sociology, Lutz Kaelber studies the current commemoration of National-Socialist "Euthanasia" crimes in Germany and Austria. He reviewed recent analyses of sites in Germany in "New Analyses of Trauma, Memory, and Place in Berlin and Beyond" (*CJS Online* May-June 2007 [www.cjsonline.ca/reviews/traumamemory.html](http://www.cjsonline.ca/reviews/traumamemory.html)). [lkaelber@uvm.edu](mailto:lkaelber@uvm.edu)