

Dealing with the Past in Spaces, Places, Actions, and Institutions of Memory:

A Comparative Reflection on European Experiences

Panel II: Institutional Expressions of Dealing with the Past

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How do civil society organizations such as Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ARSP) confront history in their daily work? What are the ingredients of societal leadership that make commitment to memorialization, remembrance, and commemoration possible and effective?

- Action Reconciliation was founded in 1958 by members of the Protestant Church with the aim to reach out to people that had suffered under the Nazi regime. The outreach was to be achieved by sending out Germans to do a year or more of national service in the countries and with the people that had been affected by the horrors of Nazi crimes. The founders called upon young Germans to do this service as a sign of atonement. They believed that there can be no true reconciliation without atonement, without acknowledging German responsibility for Nazi crimes. Confronting the history heads on is focus of the work of the organization.

- ARSP was not welcome by the East German authorities. East German regime tried to suppress its activities. The East German government did not want to take any responsibility for Germany's Nazi past. So during the Cold War, Action Reconciliation in the East was very limited in its activities. They developed a short term program, the so called summer camps, where they brought people together to clear churches, Jewish cemeteries which had been destroyed during the war.

- ARSP did not receive wide-spread support initially in the (West) German public either. Majority of people wanted to put the past behind. Thanks to the tenacity of the founders of Action Reconciliation and their supporters and other groups, many of them run by survivors of Nazi persecution and thanks to the support from partners in Netherlands, Israel, Poland, Norway etc., Action Reconciliation's mission to confront the past gained wider acceptance.

- from the beginning, partnership with individuals, non-governmental and governmental actors crucial in making it possible to start the program in the countries affected by World War 2 and start this process of reconciliation and confronting the history

- With end of the Cold War, it became possible to establish programs in Eastern Europe and Russia. Over the past 50+ years, more than 10,000 people have participated in programs of ARSP. Today ARSP sends about 180 volunteers each year on a one-year program to 13 countries in Eastern and Western Europe, the United States and Israel.

- Volunteers serve with Holocaust survivors, Jewish Communities, at Holocaust educational centers. We have volunteers who work with disabled people, homeless individuals and other socially disadvantaged and engage in Holocaust and Tolerance

education and activities of Human rights organization. This as a way to try to apply lessons from the past to the present and encouraging young people to take responsibility also today in helping to create a more inclusive society and a peaceful world.

- The organization started off as a German organization sending out Germans to confront the history. But through its work in the partner countries it evolved more and more into a multilateral program confronting the issues of the past
- Build an international network of people and organizations that is dedicated to these issues

How can non-governmental actors engage young people and local communities in memory projects?

- from the beginning, a major target group for ASRP was young people and the aim was to find a way to engage them in the acts of remembrance and the outreach efforts. And they are confronting the history not only through working at Holocaust memorial sites or survivors but they are also encouraged to directly confront history of their own families - where they were during Second World War, how involved as bystanders, perpetrators - or if families originate from areas outside German like Turkey or other places, also try to find out how these countries acted during Second World War - asked to find out how history plays out on an individual level, inevitably they will also start to ask themselves - so what would they have done in this situation
- what attracts young people to the program is the combination of confronting the past, but not only by studying it, but really hands-on engaging with people who have either been directly or as 2nd or 3rd generation indirectly affected by it
- [Germany Close Up](#), program that brings about 250 young Jewish Americans to Germany every year shows need and desire of the young generations on both sides to engage in a dialogue about this difficult past and together find a way to remember and learn from it.

5) What are the most effective ways of disseminating project results beyond the localities in which they are completed?

- Engage alumni in sharing about their experiences. Former volunteers are today serving as politicians in the German government, in the European parliament, work as educators, lawyers, nonprofit workers, journalists, bankers and others.
- collaborate with other societal actors, government, corporations in increasing the impact even further
- Media outreach, Social Media