

Crowdsourced Memory

The paper deals with quintessential online offerings concerning National Socialism, Holocaust and Second World War as a historical context that grows out of the communicative memory of contemporary witnesses. It focuses aspects that are associated with the term “Web 2.0”: primarily in the foreground of the subject area thus described are variously configured platforms of user-generated content that centre around the *normal* user as a potential producer of media content. Empirical surveys of user behaviour prove the popularity of these, and relevant examples of these are platforms for publishing audio recordings (e.g. *Soundcloud*), photos (e.g. *Flickr*) or videos (e.g. *YouTube*).

In the “Mitmach-Netz” (join-in network) of Web 2.0 the term “crowd” no longer functions as a culturally-critical label for the allegedly passive mass-media audience but, rather, the “wisdom of crowds” (James Surowieki) is meant here. This is said to manifest itself in the collaborative production of content (e.g. *Wikipedia*). However, the perspective seems plausible primarily with regard to the delegation of activities to amateurs, which is referred to as *crowdsourcing* (cf. most recently the critical analysis in the *Guttenplag Wiki* medium on the disclosure of plagiarism, featuring the dissertation by the German ex-defence minister).

One application prototypical for this, of a commemorative nature, is under the responsibility of the *Yad Vashem* memorial site, whose website provides access to “The Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names.” Here, data and materials sent by users are not automatically added to the stock, but checked for their plausibility prior to integration in the database. A German-language project that proceeds similarly is the *Synagogen-Internet-Archiv*. In this case, though external contributions from users are online straight away, they are identified separately. These offerings do not only expand laypeople’s options for accessing databases, but also involve specific user groups in the process of gathering relevant data. Though the participation of contemporary witnesses in this process is of significance, their contribution acts functionally in line with the providers’ claim to compile intersubjectively comprehensible information and open it up for individual research. Accordingly, description by actual witnesses is not at the focus of interest in this context.

Other projects are not concerned to have users functionally involved for the purpose of systematically gathering historical information, nor do they accentuate the archiving and opening up of contemporary witness reports with the constitution of a corpus for researching and commemorating relevant sources in mind. In these cases, the gathering and publication of contemporary witness reports via *World Wide Web* serves primarily as an incentive for target groups having an affinity with online media to deal with the addressed historical experiences (e.g. *Zeitzeugengeschichte.de*). Content selection, here, is delegated to laypeople, who decide on the attribution of relevance autonomously and in a decentralised way. This development evokes both democratisation of remembrance culture and historiography as well as a tendency towards individualisation of historical images and narratives.

In addition, user-generated content constitutes a central resource in the media economy in Web 2.0. Here, the intention behind integrating user-generated content is primarily to open up private visual sources as well as to publish publically appealing texts with a contemporary history background (e.g. *einestages/Spiegel Online*). The focus on attracting attention results in a content-wise unspecific and radically de-hierarchised understanding of (felt) history and collective memory, which is of only limited suitability for dealing with National Socialism and the Holocaust.

While conventional forms of collective commemoration address abstract victim groups or remember individuals as examples, database-supported applications in particular open up the potential for personalised description by all concerned. In respect of the content of relevant offerings, this trend can also be characterised as subjectivisation: not least due to the integration of user-generated content, autobiographical testimonies constitute the corpus of historical sources collected in generally accessible archives to a hitherto unknown degree. Increasingly, the contemporary witness is writing himself or herself into history and thereby dynamising the differentiation of communicative and cultural commemoration. From that point of view, civic education must not adjust itself to the end of the contemporary testimony, but also to this end being put into perspective through communication technology innovations.