

EXPLORING A
(DE)CENTRALIZED
SPATIAL CONCEPT

Workshop by
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At the beginning of the *Memory in Motion* workshop, there was a short introductory round where everyone had the opportunity to introduce themselves and share perspective and expertise they wanted to contribute to the discussion based on the guiding question: What are the expectations for a site of learning and remembrance for German colonialism?

Here, expertise did not refer to a purely specialist perspective. There is a great deal of existing knowledge—embodied, activist, practical, theoretical etc.—within all of us, which we can draw on and which is worth sharing in order to begin a dialogue.

At times, the *Memory in Motion* curators had very concrete ideas of how such a site of learning and remembrance might be spatially conceived, addressing questions such as: What atmosphere should the site have? What materials will be used in the construction of the building? Who will serve as the architect?

However, the orientation of the workshop is to take a step back and approach the site—or rather, sites (plural!?)—in terms of their functions/uses/practices, particularly regarding the civil-society actors who should have a place within them according to the trusted rule: form follows function.

Discussion

What kind of character should this site have?

On the one hand, there was agreement that it should be a transformative place that remains fluid and open—‘precarious’—as well as participative and adaptable, and that mobile formats can find a place within it. It was also clear that not just ONE site can or should fulfill this role. At the same time, a certain degree of centrality and monumentality also appears important.

Quote: ‘The site must be so large that it is too expensive to simply take down again.’

Critique: In recent years, cultural policy has made use of precisely this ‘fluid language’, also in order to dissolve and hollow out such sites—in short, to avoid maintaining them. Despite the validity of this programmatically ‘fluid’ approach, it is essential to not lose sight of this. A fixed location is therefore extremely important. This is about the recognition of one’s own responsibility. Thesis: There can be no adequate reparations as long as there is (still) no genuine recognition!

Working Groups on Clusters of Functions: Where can such sites/examples already be found (in Germany/elsewhere)?

1. Working Group Cluster:

Learning and Documentation/Archive

A collection of examples of existing sites focused on archives and knowledge:

African Futures Institute (Accra), Anti-Apartheid Museum (Johannesburg), museums in Georgia and Smithsonian NMHAAC (Washington, DC), the Black Archives (Amsterdam), private archives, Black Institutes, civil-society libraries such as EOTO and Fasiathek, the Talking Objects Archive, and archives divided across different federal institutions where anti-colonial resistance is also documented but might not be read as such, for example, the Paul Robeson Archive at the Academy of Arts in Berlin.

2. Working Group Cluster:

Networking, Encounter, Exchange

There is a need for small and large rooms—spaces in which initiatives can meet as well as larger rooms for different kinds of events—that are as open as possible in terms of spatial structure and do not prescribe specific forms of gathering or hierarchy, for example through directed lighting or sound equipment. Spaces are needed that facilitate a redefinition of coming together.

Examples: In Berlin, Savvy Contemporary, Each One Teach One, HKW; in Hamburg, Fasiathek and Afrotopia; and Rote Fabrik Zurich.

3. Working Group Cluster:

Practices—Reflecting and Feeling

It is not possible to create politically correct sites without working with the old symbols.

However, there is an opportunity to deconstruct these symbols participatively, for example in collaboration with school classes or artists from former German colonies. Working in pairs and as a team (across continents) plays an important role here, and the German majority society should not be absolved of its responsibility. The project should focus on creating other prisms of perception rather than reproducing traditional forms of remembrance. This includes incorporating other formats such as

art, literature, and dialogue, and coming together by researching different forms of trauma. Another approach discussed was facilitating remembrance through an archive of eyewitness interviews in order to create new (counter)narratives.

Report by Melissa Makele

Translated from German by Colin Shepherd