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PRESS RELEASE

Survey on the culture of remembrance: Germans want to remember but are increasingly losing the link to their history

“MEMO Germany” study conducted by the EVZ Foundation and Bielefeld University on parallels between the National Socialist era and today

Berlin, 11 April 2019 – We see established points of access for dealing with National Socialism, such as visits to memorial sites, remaining relevant. To remember the time of National Socialism in a manner that is historically correct and that shows civic courage, however, it will be necessary to create new approaches and redevelop existing methods. This is the result of the representative study “MEMO Germany – Multidimensional Memory Monitor”, conducted by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG) at Bielefeld University. The telephone survey of 1,000 people was funded a second time by the Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” (EVZ Foundation).

Remembering the time of National Socialism: the basis for a society that shows civic courage

More than a third of the respondents (35.9%) see parallels between current political developments in Germany and the period of National Socialism. At the same time, it is evident the respondents are personally taking the initiative – far beyond the school context – to deal with recent German history in various ways and this correlates with the respondents’ self-reported civic courage.

“A civil society that actively remembers and does not twist history is better able to deal with threats to democracy,” says Professor Dr Andreas Zick, Director of the IKG and one of the directors of the study. “A critical examination of the period of National Socialism is an important source for civic courage. The data shows that those who deal more intensively with this subject are also more strongly engaged in countering the exclusion and discrimination of people and groups in Germany.”

Visits to memorial sites encourage critical reflection

About half of the respondents (47.4%) report having visited a memorial site at least once, the majority even several times. These visits to memorial sites, according to another study result, motivate the respondents to deal more intensively with history, but also with current social issues. However, the study also clearly underlines the importance of new, media-based approaches: over 90% of those surveyed use documentaries and feature films to access the subject, and over half (59.6%) report that they use the Internet to obtain information.

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“Memorial sites as authentic places for remembering the era of National Socialism have a crucial role to play. They need special attention, also for the sake of historical-political education”, says Dr Andreas Eberhardt, Chief Executive Officer of the EVZ Foundation. “At the same time, modern digital forms of conveying information are tremendously important particularly for young people. The EVZ Foundation is exploring this path towards a future-oriented culture of remembrance in its project funding and with the federal programme ‘Young people remember’ (*Jugend erinnert*).”

Family histories susceptible to reinterpretation and repression

With regard to the role of the respondents' own ancestors during the time of National Socialism, the study shows that families living in Germany predominantly pass on stories of victims (35.9%) and helpers (28.7%) while the families' knowledge of perpetrators among their direct ancestors is comparatively low (19.6%). Half (50.0%) of the respondents also assume that their family members were not among the “sympathisers” (*Mitläufer*) of the National Socialist regime. While two-thirds (65.9%) find it appropriate to deal with their own family's National Socialist past, half of German families (50.1%) never or only rarely talk about it (50.1%).

Dr Jonas Rees, project manager for the study at the IKG: “We also see the susceptibility of family narratives to tendencies of reinterpretation and repression in the context of National Socialism. We find clear discrepancies between the respondents' perception of the German population during the time of National Socialism and their knowledge of their own family history. At the same time, we find a stronger socio-critical perspective on the period of National Socialism especially among younger respondents. This coincides with the opportunity and desire to reflect on the perpetration of the crimes by the respondents' own ancestors and by the Germans as a whole.”

About the Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” (EVZ):

The EVZ Foundation was founded in 2000 to compensate former forced labourers in the time of National Socialism. Since 2001 the Foundation has also been providing humanitarian aid for survivors, promoting the critical examination of the past and strengthening civic involvement in Central and Eastern Europe.

For more detailed information about the Foundation's fields of activity and background information about the survey results, photos and infographics, visit www.stiftung-evz.de/presse.

Source: “MEMO Germany – Multidimensional Remembrance Monitor” – a representative survey of 1,000 people between ages 17 and 93. Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence of Bielefeld University and the Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future”, April 2019.