

From the memorial to remembering

“vom Denkmal zum denk mal “ - Awakening awareness for Meran’s Jewish past

In the year 2010, sixty-five years after 50 Jews were slaughtered in Meran, its citizens are still kept in the dark about this cruel event or avoid remembering it. The only object hinting at the crime – a modest stone statue – is hidden away in a backyard, so no one is forced to remember unpleasant past happenings.

The monument reminding us of Meran’s Jewish victims of the Nazi regime is a modest stone statue located in the backyard of a housing block in central Otto-Huber-Street. Our investigations showed up that neither tourists nor local citizens are well informed about Meran’s local events in the past and that knowledge about this monument is limited to a few inhabitants, most of them older than sixty.

We carried out two different public-opinion polls. One centred on the tourists’ opinion about the monument and aspects of their personal holiday planning as well as cultural interests. Since tourism is one of the main economic factors in South Tyrol, especially in the area around Meran, we think that it is of particular importance to know about the tourists’ destinations and the main characteristics of their stay. The other poll aimed at getting a general idea of the opinion of Meran’s citizens with regard to the monument. But beside information about their knowledge of the monument itself and the Israeli community in Meran, we collected information about their social and political background, thus gaining useful data for further analysis. As we used established scientific methods for statistical research and handled the responses at the interviews in a discrete way, we were able to minimise errors that might occur because of dishonest or biased answers.

The analysis of the data prepared us for our following task, which comprised working through literature in the town archive and the municipal library. We also contacted town councillors and members of the Israeli community to gain access to further information not accessible to the general public. Even though one member of the town council showed interest in our project and offered to provide us with the little material left, such as pictures of the ‘Balilla-house’ (a fascist charge for a local authority) and some data regarding the monument’s founders, in the end we were not able to obtain the material, due it’s untracableness. As our research shows up, there is little useful material of the ‘Balilla-house’ and almost nothing about the monument itself apart a newspaper article published in the seventies, where the monument was mentioned.

We soon recognized that to spread information about the town’s past among its citizens modern multimedia devices and technology are essential, especially if you intend to reach the attention of the younger generations. Thus our main task was to develop a full-screen web-based interactive application software running on a web-server PC accessible via touch-screen-display. The application would be proposed to the town council, and hopefully it even

could be used by the town authorities for other monuments. The population would in this way be informed about the history regarding Meran's Jews before and after the fascist era in South Tyrol, the most significant events during the German occupation and, of course, all the details of the monument itself.

At the same time we aim at persuading the town council to publish the features of the monument in at least three languages on the town's official homepage, where there is already a list of Meran's monuments. But that list is incomplete as long as the monument in honour of the Jewish victory is missing.

We would like to point out that our project should be seen as a journalistic work, giving the citizens a good insight into one significant detail of Meran's past, which far too often is forgotten about. Our aim is to achieve our task using scientific methods and accurate planning, even though the topics themselves are related more to IT, sociology and journalism. In this way we want to invert the tendency to work in a subjective and imprecise way.

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Meran, 29-01-2010