

FIRST DRAFT

Cultures, memory and urban planning - one place different memories.

The Lessons from Auschwitz-Birkenau

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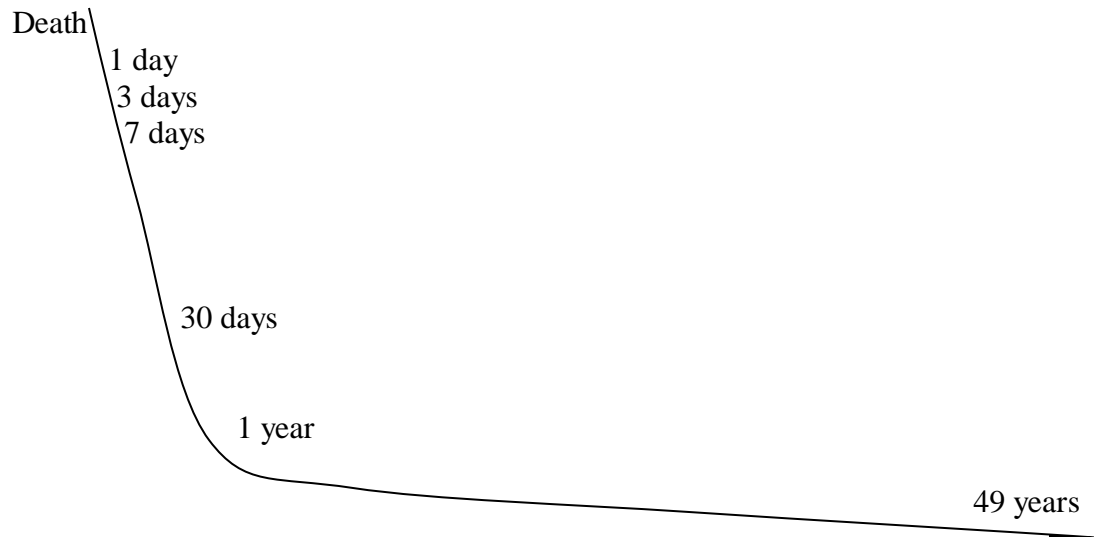
This paper focuses on a minute component concerning the issues relating to the re-evaluation of the boundaries of the site and bufferzones of the inscribed World Heritage site, the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, in the light of the request by the Government of Poland to change the name of the site¹ and the need for a comprehensive management plan for the area which encompasses four geographic administrations.

The inscription of a World Heritage sites is based on a statement of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) which summarises the significance of the site in relationship to its authenticity and integrity. It also responds to a comparative analysis reflecting the universality of the statement and the cultural significance of the site.

Does the statement reflect the profundity of Jewish Culture that was layered over the centuries in Eastern Europe and that was cut short? We now learn how the Greeks lived, how the Romans lived and how the Jews died. The depth of the current perspective should allow us the wider polemics and determine the meaning of the place in the historiography of Europe.

Values change over time due to the historical and geographic perspectives through the addition of knowledge, events and culture. The discussion on the memory of WWII and the concentration camps is also tied up in the understanding of the memory of loss. Let us take a possible Judaic approach; the 49 year cycle in Judaism as a release of the soul, when the personal memory transposes itself into the collective memory – it is the representation of the generation change and a time for “release” from the bonds of memory.

¹ proposed name change of the inscribed World Heritage Site by the Polish Government from *Auschwitz Concentration Camp* to the *Former Nazi German Concentration and Extermination Camp Auschwitz-Birkenau*



Whose memory are we considering and how do we evaluate the facts and interpretation?
 Are we preserving the facts – if so, what are they? Then it is a description.

כל אחד צריך לראות את עצמו כאילו קיבל את התורה הר סיני

Is this the historic-empiric or the existentialistic attitude to the facts of the past?

Are we proposing an interpretation – if so, whose interpretation? Then it becomes a narrative.

דור דור ודורשיו דור דור וחכמיו - Sanhedrin 38:

A short possible list of the stakeholders of the memory of this event and the meaning of the site will help understand the likely scenarios:

- The inmates who died
- The survivors
- The relatives of the survivors
- The Association of Friends of the Inmates
- World Jewish Congress
- Yad veShem and other Holocaust institutions
- Israeli Government
- Minority groups including gypsies
- Local Polish communities
- Polish Government
- German Government
- UNESCO
- Visitors
- Future generations

This would provide a matrix between stakeholders and their attitudes to the description and interpretation.

What interpretations are currently being raised in support of the meanings of its Outstanding Universal Value - OUV?

- Tolerance
- Holocaust
- Genocide
- Anti-semitism
- Democracy and public rights
- Silence
- War and Peace

Once again, each of the possible stakeholders might have a different attitude to the OUV. Can a common denominator be prepared which allows for the many varied opinions? Can the physical plan provide the non-changeable parts to the site and its boundaries? The interpretation can be understood within the proposals for the town planning schemes of the site the around the area. The functional rationale for the management of over a million visitors a year needs to be evaluated through the complex consequences on the urban planning including issues of site management, visitor routes and other economic components for the site and buffer zone. Each component has its sphere of influence, its core and bufferzone.

The urban planning issues that relate to the site might include

- Attitudes to conservation
- Context of the camp
- Management plan and its integration in the urban planning
- Buffer Zones
- Local needs through the City Plan for Oswiecim
- Local needs through the Village Plan for Brzezinka
- Regional plans.

Special emphasis needs to given to the concept of the buffer zone that was defined as a 'silence zone' in the original documentation.

..... a buffer zone is an area surrounding the nominated property which should include the immediate setting of the nominated property, important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection... (paragraph 104 Operational Guidelines)

In this paper, let us look at two possible scenarios. One from the descriptive palette, which deems the site as a museum locked in the time frame somewhere between the years 1940-1945. The second, being a narrative, which interprets the site for a possible meaning of OUV.

Which point of the war years the description will represent is essentially based on whose memory; is it the initial concentration camp, the interim forced labour camps, the extermination period or the final liberation? Perhaps this should be a combination of all the memories? The management plan will have to relate, amongst other things, to how we

walk through the site; where do we enter and where do we exit? The discussion on the buffer zone here relates to the issue of A-B as a cocoon in time and space, locked in the back of the minds of humanity.

Looking at the possible interpretations, we have to consider the WW II Holocaust as a Jewish story, as a European story and/or as a Universal story. Is the newly proposed issue of 'tolerance' as manifested in the plan to dedicate some of the buildings for a centre to study and research tolerance acceptable? How are we to evaluate these proposals? Under what criteria are they to be examined? But there could be another scenario 'that evil can evolve and be nurtured within the environment of the community without us seeing, hearing or talking'. In this narrative the day-to-day activities of the community and the buildings in the buffer zone are part of the site and memory while the local population becomes a bystander to this narrative.

Currently the implication of Polish nationals in the concentration camps has initiated a proposal for a name-change. The site, the management plan and buffer zones are being discussed 'professionally, rationally and objectively' while the moral issues of the camp are still being contested. We are at this point in time between the personal and collective memories and their release emphasizing the critical responsibility to ensure that irreversible urban decisions should not be taken. Under this scenario, it would allow each generation to reinterpret the site and associate relevance that will add meaning and value for residents and visitors alike.

30 December 2006

Appendix 1

Auschwitz Concentration Camp

Poland

Oswiecim County, Lesser Poland (Malopolska)
Voivodship (formerly Bielsko-Biala)
N50 4 E19 21
ref: **31**

Description [multiple locations](#)




Date of Inscription: 1979

Criteria: C (vi)

Brief Description

The fortified walls, barbed wire, platforms, barracks, gallows, gas chambers and cremation ovens show the conditions within which the Nazi genocide took place in the former concentration and extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest in the Third Reich. According to historical investigations, 1.5 million people, among them a great number of Jews, were systematically starved, tortured and murdered in this camp, the symbol of humanity's cruelty to its fellow human beings in the 20th century.

 [Advisory Body Evaluation](#)

VI. Auschwitz-Birkenau, monument to the martyrdom and resistance of millions of men, women and children, is not a historical museum in the usual sense of the word; it bears irrefutable and concrete witness to one of the greatest crimes which has been perpetrated against humanity; the example, by excellence, which undeniably elucidated an essential aspect of that historical phenomenon which is Hitlerism. The Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, through its numerous activities (films, lectures, publications, expositions, etc...) has brought to the public the political, historical and psychological processes which led to the establishment and utilisation of the extermination camps of the Third Reich. Moreover, its organizers are in hope that this project, supported by such terrible proof, will contribute to the maintenance of world peace.

Report of the 3th Session of the Committee

31 Auschwitz concentration camp

Poland

The Committee decided to enter Auschwitz concentration camp on the List as a unique site and to restrict the inscription of other sites of a similar nature.

Appendix 2 - Change of name

Auschwitz Concentration Camp

Former German Nazi Concentration Camp Auschwitz- Birkenau

**Former German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp
Auschwitz- Birkenau**