

# Editorial

This volume is a novelty for the journal of the Hannah Arendt Institute. Those contributing to the topic are not only scientists but also activists who, for a variety of reasons, are engaged with initiatives and associations dedicated to remembrance work on National Socialism in Saxony and who are involved in local or regional ‘grass roots work’. Accordingly, this volume does not only include scientific contributions but also essays, transcriptions of interviews and texts presenting very personal impressions.

As made obvious by the authors of this special issue, in Saxony over the past three years there has been much research and remembrance work when it comes to National Socialism (NS). This includes investigations on victims, followers, and perpetrators as well as the memory of groups of victims. The latter are explicitly commemorated e.g. at the memorial sites run by Stiftung Sächsischer Gedenkstätten (Saxony Memorial Sites Foundation). Among them there count, among others, the memorial sites of Pirna-Sonnenstein, Ehrenhain Zeithain, the documentation and information centre of Torgau, the Dresden Documentation Centre as well as, not least, the memorial sites of Bautzen and Münchner Platz, Dresden. They are not only meant for commemoration, but their staff members are as committed to the reappraisal of local and regional events, to educational work and to cooperation with the relatives of the victims. Apart from an outstanding exhibition, for example Gedenkstätte Münchner Platz organises events and guided tours which are worth experiencing. Every now and then the staff members of the foundation publish studies on the topic.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore there is the intention to include Gedenkstätte Großschweidnitz e.V. (Association Großschweidnitz Memorial) into those institutions as being funded by the foundation. This was decided by the foundation council in December 2020. The contribution by *Maria Fiebrandt* in this volume is on the activities at this place which is dedicated to the memory of the victims of NS ‘Euthanasia’ and whose beginnings go back to civic engagement.

Also chairs of Historisches Seminar of the University of Leipzig have been working and publishing on a number of research topics on NS history.<sup>2</sup> At the Hannah Arendt Institute, in 2009 under Günther Heydemann the focus of research and projects shifted towards the ‘history of National Socialism’. In this

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- 1 See Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten (Ed.), *Lager sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener in Belarus 1941–1944*, Dresden 2004. For reasons of space, this editorial does not claim completeness.
  - 2 See e.g. Detlev Brunner/Alfons Kenkmann (Eds.), *Leipzig im Nationalsozialismus. Beiträge zu Zwangsarbeit, Verfolgung und Widerstand*, Leipzig 2016; Martin Clemens Winter, *Gewalt und Erinnerung im ländlichen Raum. Die deutsche Bevölkerung und die Todesmärsche*, Berlin 2018.

context, the focus was most of all on research and investigations on NS in Saxony. Despite criticism of this reorientation by some politicians in Saxony,<sup>3</sup> the HAIT stuck to this change of course. Finally in 2014 the research field of ‘National Socialism’ was established, which existed as a field of its own until 2021.<sup>4</sup> Since then there has been a wide range of publications on the topic.<sup>5</sup> In cooperation with the Sächsische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (Saxon Agency for Civic Education) it was furthermore possible to regionally distribute copies of selected publications on NS in Saxony in larger numbers. In this context, sometimes also popular-scientific books on the NS period in Saxony, written by staff members of the Institute, have been published.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, together with Stiftung Sächsischer Gedenkstätten (Foundation Memorial Sites in Saxony) the HAIT also published the popular series “Lebenszeugnisse – Leidenswege (Life Testimonies – Lives of Suffering)”, where victims of the NS regime have their say, among others. Just the same, joint compilations on local and regional topics have been and are still worked out. Among them there counts a book on the former concentration camp of Sachsenburg, published in the context of the intended memorial site at Frankenberg in Saxony.<sup>7</sup> As shown in detail by *Anna Schüller’s* contribution in this volume, on the creation of a memorial site at Sachsenburg, the municipality there turned out to be a problem,<sup>8</sup> but at least there were some rapprochements,<sup>9</sup> although not always those one had hoped for.<sup>10</sup> This does not hold for all of Saxony. Compared to other

3 Thilo Alexe, „Es geht um sehr viel mehr als um Stasi“. In: Sächsische Zeitung, 1.6.2011, p. 8 (in this context, CDU politician Arnold Vaatz said that there was need for further research on the GDR and that he opposed the Hannah-Arendt-Institute’s change of course); Jürgen Kochinke, Direktor Heydemann will Schwerpunkt am Hannah-Arendt-Institut verlagern – Kritik aus der CDU. In: Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten, 8.6.2011, p. 4.

4 In 2021, by recommendation by the Wissenschaftsrat (German Council of Science and Humanities), the NS research projects were integrated into the newly established research field “Dictatorships and Autocracies in the 20th Century and their Reappraisal”.

5 See, among others, Günther Heydemann/Jan Erik Schulte/Francesca Weil (Eds.), *Sachsen und der Nationalsozialismus*, Göttingen 2014; Mike Schmeitzner/Clemens Vollnhals/Francesca Weil (Eds.), *Von Stalingrad zur SBZ. Sachsen 1943–1949*, Göttingen 2016; Mike Schmeitzner/Gerhard Lindemann (Eds.), „... da schlagen wir zu“. Politische Gewalt in Sachsen 1930–1935, Göttingen 2020; Francesca Weil, „Uns geht es scheinbar wie dem Führer ...“. Zur späten sächsischen Kriegsgesellschaft (1943–1945), Göttingen 2020.

6 See Mike Schmeitzner/Francesca Weil, *Der historische Reiseführer, Sachsen 1933–1945*, 2nd, revised, edition, Berlin 2018. The Agency distributed ca. 5,000 copies.

7 See Mike Schmeitzner/Bert Pampel (Eds.), *Das Konzentrationslager Sachsenburg (1933–1937)*, Dresden 2018.

8 See Carolina Neubert, *Promis fordern Erhalt der Nazi-Villa in Frankenberg*. In: Tag24, 22.10.2019.

9 See Jan Leißner, *Stadtrat gibt Weg frei für KZ-Gedenkstätte Sachsenburg*. In: Freie Presse, 22.6.2018.

10 See Michael Kraske, *Was Sachsens NS-Geschichte für ganz Deutschland bedeutet*. In: t-online.de, 13.6.2021 ([https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/wissen/geschichte/id\\_90151176/zweiter-weltkrieg-was-sachsens-ns-geschichte-fuer-ganz-deutschland-bedeutet.html](https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/wissen/geschichte/id_90151176/zweiter-weltkrieg-was-sachsens-ns-geschichte-fuer-ganz-deutschland-bedeutet.html); 16.6.2021).

federal states, in the Free State there are less municipality-based NS research, memorials sites or museums, for example.

However, the history of research and commemoration work on NS in Saxony is by far not simply a success story. Remembrance culture in Saxony is still dominated by the memory of the illegitimacy of the GDR. Authentic sites of the Peaceful Revolution, such as Nikolaikirche, make thousands of tourists come to Leipzig,<sup>11</sup> which explains this predominance from a market-economy and advertisement point of view, among others. But there is also another cause of this imbalance. For example, there is the argument that after all the Peaceful Revolution was started in Saxony, which is why there it must be commemorated in a particularly dignified way. This is undisputed. But such a reference is no reason for a clearly less distinguished NS remembrance culture in Saxony. Also, the argument that during the “Third Reich” there was no central main concentration camp in Saxony<sup>12</sup> is not substantial, for it ignores that there existed an extended system of concentration camps since the 1930s. This includes a number of early concentration camps,<sup>13</sup> POW camps,<sup>14</sup> and many forced labour camps almost all over the region.<sup>15</sup> Between the summer of 1944 and the spring of 1945 another 54 sub-camps were added in towns and villages in Saxony, which were supervised by the main concentration camps of Flossenbürg (Bavaria), Buchenwald (Thuringia) and Groß-Rosen (Lower Silesia).<sup>16</sup>

“Saxony is definitely aware of its history – if it is about August the Strong, the SED regime and 1989. On the other hand, associations of victims and other initiatives lament a neglect of the memory of the NS dictatorship. [...] [Furthermore], critical observers from the sciences and politics have since long been demanding a more sensitive way of dealing with the NS history in Saxony”,<sup>17</sup> says journalist and author Michael Kraske. By the SOZ/GDR past, more than 30 years ago another important topic had been added to the commemoration-political agenda in all of the new federal states. Both pasts were referred to each other, however unfortunately they were frequently dealt with as competing

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11 See *ibid.*

12 NN, *Ausgewogene Verwendung von Stiftungsgeldern*. In: *stsg.de*, 12.2.2016 (<https://www.stsg.de/cms/stsg/aktuelles/ausgewogene-verwendung-von-stiftungsgeldern>; 7.12.2021).

13 See Carina Baganz, *Erziehung zur „Volksgemeinschaft“? Die frühen Konzentrationslager in Sachsen 1933–34/37*, Berlin 2005. The most long-standing concentration camp in Saxony was the early camp of Sachsenburg. For details see Pampel/Schmeitzner (Eds.), *Konzentrationslager Sachsenburg*.

14 See Jörg Osterloh, *Ein ganz normales Lager. Das Kriegsgefangenen-Mannschaftslager 304 (IV H) Zeithain bei Riesa/Sa. 1941 bis 1945*, Leipzig 1997.

15 See Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Leipzig (Ed.), *Fremd- und Zwangsarbeit in Sachsen 1939–1945*, Dresden 2002.

16 See Ulrich Fritz, *Verwischte Spuren. Die ehemaligen Außenlager des KZ Flossenbürg in Sachsen*. In: *Dachauer Hefte*, 24 (2008), pp. 46–62.

17 Kraske, *Sachsens NS-Geschichte*.

with each other, as is the insight of historian and publicist Cornelia Siebeck<sup>18</sup> whose scientific work is dedicated to the historical construction of meaning, to commemoration policy and historical culture. Her judgement is also valid for remembrance culture in Saxony.

Furthermore, another estimation by Siebeck concerning the way Saxony deals with the (National Socialist) past is confirmed: “Then, strictly said, there is no commemoration for the purpose of critically reflecting on an each respective presence against the horizon of a negative past but for making sure that the presence has been historically purified.”<sup>19</sup> The above mentioned predominance of the Peaceful Revolution over the remembrance culture in Saxony is well suited for such a short-sighted point of view. However, against the background of an awareness of the past the presence should be even more critically reflected on.<sup>20</sup>

The contribution by *Daniela Schmohl* and *Jonas Kühne*, taking stock of the past 30 years, deals with these general shortcomings and conflicts of remembrance policy and remembrance work as well as with their causes. By their text, the authors want to stimulate a critical debate on the overall topic. Furthermore, they discuss the founding history of “sächsische Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Auseinandersetzung mit dem Nationalsozialismus” (Association for Dealing with National Socialism in Saxony) (sLAG). The sLAG was founded in 2018, due to the above-mentioned problems and the years-long dissatisfaction with the leadership of Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten. Already less than one year later, 30 projects, initiatives, and associations as well as 25 individuals had been networked. Publicly represented by a council of speakers, most actors were committed to the reappraisal of local history and to historical-civic education. Furthermore, they repeatedly drew the public attention to the still existing shortcomings of NS research and commemoration work in Saxony and to how they could be overcome.

For a long time, the government of Saxony underestimated the significance of civic commitment in the context of NS commemoration work.<sup>21</sup> The potential of independent initiatives was overlooked. But it was particularly them who were trying to compensate for these shortcomings – and this although support by the Federal State was and still is rather limited. Among them there count e.g. the *gedenkplatz.info* project by Alternatives Kultur- und Bildungszentrum e.V. in Pirna and the “Bürger\_inneninitiative Gesicht zeigen – Netzwerk für demokratisches Handeln” (Showing Our Colours) citizens’ initiative. Some initiatives, such

18 See Cornelia Siebeck, „Und das Geheimnis der Erlösung heißt Erinnerung ...“. Postnationalsozialistische Identitäts- und Gedenkstätdendiskurse in der Bunderepublik vor und nach 1990. In: Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland, 16 (2015), Gedenkstätten- und Geschichtspolitik, pp. 29–41, here 35.

19 Cornelia Siebeck, Dies- und jenseits des Erinnerungskonsenses. Kritik der postnationalsozialistischen Selbstvergewisserung. In: APuZ, (2017) 42–43, pp. 23–28, here 26.

20 See *ibid.*, p. 28.

21 See Michael Kraske, *Der Riss. Wie die Radikalisierung im Osten unser Zusammenleben zerstört*, Berlin 2020, p. 35.

as that at Frankenberg, have been and still are sometimes under considerable social pressure, most of all by the AfD.

This volume is most of all dedicated to these civic initiatives in Saxony. For example, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Geschichte im Treibhaus e. V. in Döbeln attempts to influence society in the city and its environments. In how far social work plays a role for this goal is demonstrated by the contribution by *Sophie Spitzner* and *Stephan Conrad*. The article by *Uwe Hirschfeld* connects to this and, at a superior level, deals with the topic of social work in the context of remembrance culture. In another text he reflects on generally disconnecting commemoration from the state. Furthermore, the contribution by *Tobias Kley* deals in more detail with the challenges for civic education concerning NS crimes. By their two contributions, *Anne Kleinschmidt* and *Felix Pakonin* of “Hillersche Villa” in Zittau as well as *Wolfgang Howald* of Deutsch-Polnische Gesellschaft Sachsen e. V. make commemorative cooperation with Polish and Czech colleagues in the so-called tri-state area the focus of their considerations.

Meanwhile the Gedenkstätte für Zwangsarbeit Leipzig e. V. (Memorial for Forced Labour), which also originates from civic commitment and is run by young, outspokenly committed scientists and students, has been very successful. This memorial site, which is located at the historical location – the location of former HASAG in Leipzig, the biggest armament and exploitation enterprise in Saxony – is meant to commemorate most of all the victims but also the exploitation of forced labourers in Leipzig and its consequences. Apart from an exhibition at the historical location, the staff members of the memorial site dedicate themselves to inquiries by former forced labourers and their relatives. The particular significance of their work, however, is in making the mass crime of forced labour spatially visible. Among others, they succeed with this by way of guided tours through neighbourhoods as well as by a digital map which provides a condensed depiction of how the city’s society was involved in forced labour. Furthermore, the staff members have published new research results,<sup>22</sup> sometimes and ever more frequently as digital files<sup>23</sup> which may thus be made freely accessible to many more interested parties. What is still keeping them from intensifying their topical work – just like many other initiatives – is the laborious and lengthy acquisition of funding.

This proves to be a problem also for a more recent civic project to which, among others, Gedenkstätte für Zwangsarbeit Leipzig contributes substantially. For almost three years there has been the “Riebeckstraße 63” initiative in Leipzig. However, the achievements so far make also obvious how successful this group has been despite the above described circumstances: there have

22 See Josephine Ulbricht, KZ-Außenlager „HASAG Leipzig“ – Größtes Frauenaußenlager des KZ Buchenwald, Leipzig 2021.

23 On this see, among others, <https://www.zwangsarbeit-in-leipzig.de/karte/>; 17.8.2021; <https://www.zwangsarbeit-in-leipzig.de/zwangsarbeit-in-leipzig/veranstaltungen/podcast-gedenkstaette-trifft-wissenschaft/>; 17.8.2021.

been several events on the history of the place, public tours through the area have been organised, there have been scientific, artistic and belletristic publications.<sup>24</sup> In a welcome address on the occasion of the compilation on the history of Riebeckstraße 63, published in 2020, Burkhard Jung, the Mayor of Leipzig, wrote: “There is no other place in Leipzig where there suffered so many different groups of NS victims and which is thus a focal point of crucial crime complexes, however also of memories.”<sup>25</sup> Based on such an insight, it would be desirable to continue the historical dealing with this place also in the future, supported by municipality and Federal State. At least the city council has decided to establish a memorial site. The contribution by *Rosi* and *Hedi Haase* in this volume deals with the intended memorial site in more detail. There, a review of the above mentioned non-fictional book is presented in this issue.

Not least, the here presented volume raises the question of how NS remembrance work may be organised in an immigration country and how, if necessary, it could be changed or completed by new aspects and methods. Research has shown that this topic is as yet not sufficiently focused on when it comes to coping with the NS in Saxony. *Kathleen Hahnemann* and *Cordula Borbe* by their contribution shed light on this outspokenly important topic which will become even more significant in the future.

The contributions to this volume make one thing obvious: the Saxony Free State and its municipalities should increase their support of research and remembrance work on NS in Saxony. Apart from historical work and memorials sites, this also concerns the exchange on subject-related and educational topics as well as their networking. This includes everybody, both state institutions, universities and institutes, and institutions of civic commitment.

*Francesca Weil, Uwe Hirschfeld, Jonas Kühne, Fruzsina Müller*

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- 24 See Ann Katrin Düben/Gedenkstätte Zwangsarbeit Leipzig (Eds.), *Die ehemalige Leipziger Arbeitsanstalt Riebeckstraße 63. Verwahrung, Ausgrenzung, Verfolgung*, Leipzig 2020; Cornelia Lotter, *Schweigeort, Norderstedt 2020*; <https://www.valentinaseidel.de/pages/books/>; 18.8.2021. The Hentrich & Hentrich publishing house from Leipzig is involved into the work of the initiative. Among others, it published the compilation. This publishing house has already been publishing many books on National Socialism, however most of all on Jewish history. One more example concerning Saxony: Daniel Ristau, *Bruchstücke. Die Novemberpogrome in Sachsen 1938*, Leipzig 2018.
- 25 Ann Katrin Düben/Gedenkstätte Zwangsarbeit Leipzig (Hg.), *Die ehemalige Leipziger Arbeitsanstalt Riebeckstraße 63*, p. 8.