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Holocaust Emotion Cards: Project Presentation

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The purpose of this article is to present the project *Holocaust Emotion Cards*, which was created as part of the course *Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Holocaust Memory*, run by Western Galilee College. In the first part of the presentation, we will present the assumptions and concepts of the project, as well as the process of creating the cards. In the second part, we will discuss the cards themselves and the way to use them in educational work.

KEYWORDS: Holocaust; memory; didactic materials; art; COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

Questions about the artist's identity, intended impact and chosen forms of expression have long been a subject of interest for researchers and recipients of art. Art may also be analysed from the contemporary point of view, in terms of the way and whether it responds to the contemporary problems. Who needs art inspired by, to put it in general terms, a genocide? Such questions represent some of the fundamental issues of post-Holocaust humanistic reflection. For us, the authors of this article, they were the starting point for discussion during the course *Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Holocaust Memory* run by Western Galilee College. The first edition of the online course was offered in the academic year 2020/2021. The purpose of this article is to present *Holocaust Emotion Cards* (HECs), the project we completed in May 2022, as the final outcome of the course. In the first part of this article, we will present the project's assumptions and concepts, as well as the process by which the cards are created. In the second part, we will discuss the cards themselves and the way they may be used in educational projects.

2. *Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Holocaust Memory*

The course *Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Holocaust Memory* was organised by Dr Boaz Cohen (PhD), a historian, and Dr Edna Pasher (PhD), the co-founder of the Israel Smart Cities Institute. The course was conducted in English via Zoom and offered to anyone interested in the issue of commemorating the Holocaust. The participants were chosen on the basis of admission interviews. Our group consisted of people from all over the world, including Germany, India, Israel, Poland and the US, at different stages of their professional careers (students, doctoral students, researchers and activists). We applied independently of each other and first met during the course. As educators and researchers whose professional work concerns the Holocaust, we were both at the time looking for new opportunities to continue our work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The course description was interesting: "The course consists of an interactive innovative process, accompanied by

professional and contextual workshops. [The][s]tudents will be divided into work groups, facing the challenges of designing, promoting, and managing innovative Holocaust commemoration projects.”¹ The outcome of the course was to be a group project embodying the postulates contained in the title of the course, i.e. innovation, entrepreneurship and commemoration of the Holocaust. From the very beginning we considered the idea of coming up with a project that would meet these goals to be a great challenge, one that would be most likely impossible to achieve during a one-semester course, especially since the group consisted of people who hardly knew each other.

From the beginning, however, the organisers placed great emphasis on giving us a chance to get to know each other better as a group. In addition to regular classes, where we learned “what the Holocaust was all about”, how to be an entrepreneur and build an action plan, we also had meetings in smaller groups, where we performed our tasks together, which gave us a chance to learn something about each other. Undoubtedly, however, the conditions of the classes and the limited time available were uncondusive to building deep relationships, and time passed inexorably. We were unused to interacting in the environment of a large-scale online course. We did not know how to negotiate our way, speak up and express our opinions around the online platform. As educators who also teach others online, we were able to experience what our students usually experience: being offered a screen and a webcam as tools to be used to formulate our thoughts. It was difficult for us. Still, this uncomfortable situation motivated us to produce an idea we ultimately decided to implement. Unlike other groups, we wanted to create a physical product that might one day be held and used in workshop environments. It turned out that we missed working face-to-face. We were uninterested in creating an online platform or virtual alternative realities; we needed a tangible outcome. This is the way the idea of creating HECs for working with emotions was born. Despite living in two different countries, Poland and Germany, we were

¹ The quote comes from the syllabus of the course *Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Holocaust Memory*.

brought together by our shared passion for art, which became the basis of this project.² We believe that art appeals to sensitive audiences the world over.

3. The assumptions and concept of the project

The Holocaust, i.e., a crime committed against the Jews, is one of the most distressing episodes in human history. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the unique character of the Holocaust. We agree, however, that recognising the uniqueness of the Holocaust, without discussing its cause or motivation, may trivialise this experience, intellectualise, metaphysicalise or simply distort it (for more, see: Bartov, 2016). In our opinion, the Holocaust should continue to be the subject of discussion and reflection because acts of humiliation, degradation and extermination recur despite changing social and political circumstances.

The HEC project is devoted to the memory of the Holocaust. We believe that it is our duty and responsibility to keep the memory of the people who lost their lives during World War II and those whose fates were irretrievably changed by it. Our project focuses on memory, but it also shows that there is a direct connection between the past and the present, a link formed by emotions. We decided to use emotions as the connecting element because they are a source of problems for people today plagued as they are by pandemics and ecological catastrophes in which life has largely migrated into virtual spaces. The framework in which we placed our idea was also supposed to help us to direct further action and move into the area where the memory of the Holocaust may sometimes be associated with “torture and the remembrance imperative”

² Aside from her other roles, Katarzyna Taczyńska was the scientific coordinator of the project *Unfinished Lives*, a multimedia project run by the Bente Kahan Foundation, presenting artists from different countries who were imprisoned and murdered because of their Jewish origins. To learn more about the project, see: <https://unfinishedlives.eu/>. Kamila Pałubicka has qualifications in working as a secondary school teacher, including in preparation for A-levels in fine arts. She is also a co-founder and the chairman of an NGO Kulturerben e.V. (www.kulturerben.com).

(Szwajca, 2008), but may also become subject to abuse, commercialisation or simply become kitschy (Leociak, Tomczok, 2021).

In our work on the project, taking into account such aspects of its implementation as time management, task division and decision-making, we divided the activities and work between the two of us and into two main parts: research work and the artistic preparation of the materials. We also often checked in on each other's progress during regular meetings. This meant we were able to focus on the areas that are familiar to us in our daily work and carry out the next steps. Emotions were one aspect that required our special attention. In order to gain more insight into this we held a series of consultations with psychologists to choose the right model.³ For our project, we decided to use Robert Plutchik's psycho-evolutionary theory of emotions, represented with colours arranged in a circle. Plutchik's wheel of emotions depicts basic emotions that mix with each other to create more complex emotional states. The diagram shows clearly that when we talk about the dynamics of a person's emotional life, we deal with a set of many different emotions of varying intensity (Strelau and Doliński, 2016, 550–553). The assumptions of the pedagogy of care were also an important point of reference in the project (Kolarić and Taczyńska, 2022).

Kulturerben e.V. assumed the patronage of the project. With the help of the course organisers, Dr. Boaz Cohen and Dr. Edna Pasher, we gained access to works created by Jewish artists held in the Ghetto Fighters' House collection. Thanks to the funds obtained from the EWE Foundation in Oldenburg and the Brandenburg Ministry of Science, Research and Culture, we were also able to use graphics held by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. This allowed us to build a database of artworks (drawings, graphics) created before, during, and after the Second World War. We wanted to demonstrate that, despite the war's terrible, unimaginable conditions, artists continued to experience a whole range of emotions at various stages of their lives, even in relation to the dramatic experiences of the Holocaust. The HEC set we created therefore

³ We would like to thank the following people for their expert advice in the field of psychology and emotions: Dr Marek Jawor, Adrianna Jołkiewicz, and Anna Zabraniak.

includes cards with artworks, descriptions of the images and the names of their creators,⁴ and also cards representing emotions; with one emotion per card (see Figs 1, 2 and 3). Looking at these emotionally-charged images from the today's point of view, we may try to get closer to their creators, find a connection with them and maybe also learn something about ourselves in the process. These emotions form a thread that connects us with history, allowing us not only better to understand the past, but also talk about what we are currently experiencing and feeling.

Our cards are didactic materials that may be used as tools for working on and with emotions. As our emotions tend to be constantly stimulated and intensified by a variety of media today, we want to show that our feelings remain legitimate and important, but also worth working through. Through this project we want to evoke the memory of the past (the Holocaust) and propose materials (cards and exercises) for working on and with emotions during a variety of classes and workshops. We believe that we may all find something that speaks to us in these artworks. From this point of view, the project and the artworks seem to be very European in character, even universal. When thinking about Jews, we tend to imagine a specific group and paint the entire Jewish world using just a few clichés. The Jewish world, however, is much more complex and Jewish art is multilingual, multicultural, and extremely diverse, both thematically and formally. We hope that the artworks presented in the project fully reflect complexity and diversity of Jewish art.

4. Educational work with the *Holocaust Emotion Cards*

In the following sections of this article, we will discuss the general usefulness of innovative artistic practices in the context of the culture of remembrance. Specifically, we will describe the application and evaluation of the HECs in educational work. We will also provide a description of three workshops which involved a range of artistic practices and

4 We would like to thank the following people for their assistance on the descriptions in Hebrew: Dr Jagoda Budzik and Dr Wojciech Tworek.



Fig. 1–3 *Holocaust Emotion Cards* (photo: Katarzyna Taczynska)

discuss their influence on the participants.⁵ The HECs were the common element connecting the three workshops described below, but in each case, they were used in a different way. Middle and high school students aged between 13 and 20 took part in the workshops, working in groups of up to 40, which also included teachers, photographers, historians, experts in various fields, translators and co-operation partners. The staff of Kulturerben e.V. co-ordinated and organised the workshops.

**Workshop 1: If places could talk – youth voices
on Hachshara – creating an audio guide in Fürstenwalde,
Germany | 22–23 June and 24–26 August 2022**

Historical background

The former Hachshara camp in Neuendorf im Sande is a place where Jewish children and youngsters prepared for emigration to Palestine before the beginning of the Second World War. They worked on preparing for their new, agricultural life in *kibbutzim*. In 1941 it became a forced labour and concentration camp for Jews and, thus, a stopover for many people who were later deported to concentration and extermination camps. In April 1943 the last transport left for Auschwitz with about 100 people, almost exclusively young.

Outcome of the project: an audio guide

The topic of Hachshara and the related tragic fates of Neuendorf im Sande's former residents remain largely unknown today. The site itself contains only a small plaque and a recently erected sculpture commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. We therefore decided to develop an audio guide created by a group of students that would be available there. The project timeline covered two years, included six workshops, and ended in October 2022. We consider the audio guide to be a chance for students to engage with the history of National Socialism through

⁵ The workshops were conducted by Kamila Pałubicka and Katrin Müller-Westphal. We would like to thank Katrin Müller-Westphal for her contribution to the educational part of this article.

biographical material. Several student groups narrated seven different biographies of Jews who were deported to Auschwitz from Neuendorf. In co-operation with a variety of actors they developed a professional audio tour for a route connecting a series of historical landmarks. The audio tour is promoted through commemorative plaques with QR codes, as well as an artwork in the shape of an oversized ear installed in Neuendorf. 15 students (aged between 15 and 17) were involved in this particular project, representing different schools: the Ulrich-von-Hutten Gymnasium in Berlin, the European School OSZ Oder Spree and the Geschwister Scholl School in Fürstenwalde.

Use of the HECs during the workshop

The goal of the workshop was to create design proposals for the commemorative plaques. Each student group was tasked with creating one design proposal. We used a set of the HECs to increase and focus students' attention during the workshop. The use of images provided the impetus for students to come up with new ideas. The principle was always the same: the students would select an HEC that they associated with something personal or one that drove further work on the design proposals. They would then explain to the whole group the reasons they chose this specific card. The ensuing discussion would expand the students' grasp of artistic expression in a targeted manner and serve as a form of historical immersion. The HECs were thus used as an articulation point between the past and the present. The use of HECs also served as an interim result that facilitated tracking the creative process. As the discussions often became emotional, the HECs also promoted a wide variety of social skills, such as empathy towards others. Finally, the HECs may provide access to inner, unconscious processes and feelings, for which, at first, one might fail to find the words because images, as a universal tool, could replace words. Depending on their content and context, the HECs may be employed in three roles: to emphasise the topic, deepen the knowledge and unlock associations and feelings (see Figs 4 and 5).



Fig. 4 Holocaust Emotion Cards
(source: Kulturerben e.V.)



Fig. 5 The participants choosing
Holocaust Emotion Cards
(source: Kulturerben e.V.)

Workshop 2: Memory culture is active! Promoting democracy through knowledge, art and remembrance at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, Munich, Germany | 7 July 2022

Project background

This workshop is part of an advanced-level training series “Memory culture is active! Promoting democracy through knowledge, art and remembrance”. The focus of the advanced training is to teach and to address difficult historical topics via the use artistic methods. The aim is to train adult participants to become qualified recipients in the context of efficient use of memorial sites as an extracurricular place of learning for students with migration backgrounds. The pilot project was implemented with a group of 35 people from the Toni Pfülf Middle School in Munich: social workers, teachers and two secondary school classes were selected to participate in the workshop.

Outcome of the project

Together with the participants, we explored the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site in a manner which was completely different from a typical guided tour. The activities began at the Max Mannheimer Study Centre with an introduction to the Second World War and the Holocaust. By dint of a variety of methods, including artistic methods, the students were able to learn about the history of National Socialism, as well as the functions and roles of memorial sites. In this case, the challenge consisted in sensitising the students, especially those with migration backgrounds, to the Holocaust and raising their awareness of German history. The students' engagement was maintained with the help of such methods as a Second World War quiz, whole group discussions, word games and collages. Our experience indicates that theoretical and practical sessions should be alternated to keep the students motivated.

Use of the HECs as an introduction to a workshop

The workshop aimed to provide the participants with important historical knowledge, covering the times of National Socialism, from the beginning to the end. The mixed workgroups were invited to talk about their thoughts and feelings. The HECs functioned as an introduction to this historical topic. We used two HEC sets. Each student entering the room received a card and had to find a seat marked with the same card. This HEC-guided seating method also allowed us to introduce an open seating plan and easily rearrange the group at later stages. The task of finding the card and a team partner served as an icebreaker and as an introduction to the topic. The next task for each pair of students was to discuss their expectations concerning the rest of the day and begin analysing the image on the card they had received. In order to initiate this process we suggested such sentences as those denoting that the image conveys an impression, e.g., "this reminded me of..." or "I experienced the emotion conveyed by this image when...". Every team presented the results of their discussions to the whole group and told others about the way they felt. After this initial task the students formed their own reflections about the image on the HEC card, as well as expectations related to the workshop (see Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 The participants presenting Holocaust Emotion Cards
(source: Kulturerben e.V.)

Workshop 3: Experience history together! German and Polish youth actively promote the culture of remembrance in Słोńsk, Poland | 28–30 September 2022

Historical background

A difficult heritage weighs heavily on the town of Słońsk (Sonnenburg). One of the first concentration camps was set up here under NSDAP. A number of German and foreign political figures were imprisoned at Sonnenburg concentration camp during Nazi rule. In the final phase of the war, more than 800 prisoners from this camp were killed in a planned massacre.

Project background

During two workshops, German and Polish students learnt about the history of Słońsk. About 20 young students from the Catholic School Centre Bernhardinum in Fürstenwalde and the Ulrich von Hutten Gymnasium in Berlin, as well as about 20 students from the Słońsk school in Poland, aged between 14 and 18, took part in the project. The aim of the first workshop was to provide the participants from Berlin and Fürstenwalde with

knowledge about the history of the former town of Sonnenburg. They completed a city tour and a visit to the museum's memorial site, while at the same time expanding their knowledge of remembrance work. At the real-life location of the only surviving fragment of the former Sonnenburg prison, the students took time to commemorate the victims of the January 1945 massacre through live performances. These performances are documented by fine-art photography. In German-Polish teams, they worked on maintenance and decoration of the cemetery where the anonymous victims had been buried. Once this task was completed, the workshop participants held a commemoration ceremony which also had an artistic dimension and aimed to express the culture of remembrance. The students' experience was deepened by listening to the eyewitness accounts of the events, from both German and Polish perspectives, which also helped to make history more personal for them.

Outcome of the project

The aim of the workshop was to examine the history of National Socialism and maintain the culture of remembrance. In addition to conveying historical knowledge and familiarising the participants with the place, the focus was on the artistic-practical approach to commemoration and remembrance. Furthermore, the intercultural exchange facilitated a dialogue between the students and helped them acquire social skills and an understanding of each other's cultures.

Use of the HECs for summarising and final conclusions

The workshop used not only such commonly employed formats as mind maps and poster designs, but also short performance art clips. We also used the HECs as tools for summarising and looking back on the whole workshop. The students were able to process their experiences through the artistic and practical work conducted at this historical location. The HECs were employed to elicit feedback from the students by inviting them to pick up one or two cards, either with images or emotions that they associated with the workshop. We noticed that from a large variety of options the participants selected those which were intuitively perceived affirmatively. We were able to distinguish between two different types of responses: one group focused on currently experienced

feelings (“this is how I feel right now, friendship, being together with the group...”); the other group opted for talking about past situations (“I remember, the other day..., I was moved by the eyewitness”). A few students referred the HECs to historical events (“it made me sad to think about the victims. I am ashamed about what happened in January 1945”). We were impressed with the variety of associations evoked by the HECs. Not only were the students able directly to address the historical topics in front of the whole group, but they were also able to enter into a dialogue with each other, by using constructive comments, and acquire social skills. We have learnt that the use of HECs cannot be a closed and fully pre-planned process (see Figs 7 and 8).



Fig. 7 Feedback session: the students reflecting on the workshop (source: Kulturerben e.V.)



Fig. 8 Feedback session: the students choosing the HECs (source: Kulturerben e.V.)

5. Conclusions

The Holocaust Emotion Cards may be used as an associative introduction to the topic of the Second World War, as a source of inspiration for creative work or as a feedback instrument and mood barometer. They represent a suitable introductory tool for inviting students to firstly learn about the history of anti-Semitism and the Shoah. Their use should allow for creating connections with historical events and, thus, developing a different approach to the memory of the Holocaust. The cards may also serve as a supplement to the traditional written sources. The HECs are also an interesting and unusual starting point for discussions about discrimination, democratic values and human rights. When used in the early stages of a workshop, they may serve as an ice-breaker or as an introduction to the topic, for example, when the participants are asked to choose a card that they associate with the topic or a certain aspect thereof. The picture cards are also helpful in gauging the mood of participants, when they are used to ask about the content or to elicit feedback.

Innovative techniques and exercises, emotionally resonant images and instructions for self-reflection offer an experience-oriented approach to the topic. The cards are suitable for different age groups and may be used in intercultural exchanges and group settings. As the images are processed much faster and more strongly than words, they may contribute to a deeper understanding. This intensifies experiences and promotes a sensitive, conscious approach to memorial sites and historically significant events. The HECs allow us directly to demonstrate the relationship between the perception of a past event and the social context. Participants are able to learn about their expectations and concerns. Even more information may be gained by sharing opinions about the HECs' content with the whole group. A more detailed analysis of the information is possible and may be provided by other participants. We recommend that facilitators of workshops work with participants' comments during the process. The following questions and doubts are examples of what might arise during the process: What issue, event, topic, are we talking about? Who is affected by the problem? How do I feel about this? What do I think? What experiences do

I / we have with this? What do we already know? What are the different opinions and views on this? What questions arise for us? We also observed that specific questions are needed to elicit productive answers. This dialectic method is of particular importance, as it may reveal contradictions arising during the shaping of the culture of remembrance for the participants. Using the HECs in different ways and settings, as suggested above, we came to the conclusion that the cards have a good many potential applications yet to explore.

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