

WHEN MEMORY BECOMES HISTORY

THE PRESENTATION OF BARRACKS IN
FORMER STALAG X B SANDBOSTEL

A case study requested by Memorial centre Camp Westerbork



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Caption to the picture on the front page: Barracks on the site of Documentation and remembrance centre Stalag X B Sandbostel. Taken by the Liselotte Neervoort, January 2009.

INDEX

When memory becomes history... an introduction	4
When history becomes memory... in Stalag X B Sandbostel	7
When memory becomes history... theoretical dilemmas.....	12
Recommendations	15
Literature	17
Appendix 1: photographs of the Sandbostel site	18

WHEN MEMORY BECOMES HISTORY... AN INTRODUCTION

When memory becomes history and the living witnesses of past events slowly pass away, objects and places become the only mediators between current (and future) generations and their pasts. These mediators, however, offer no objective or direct view into the past, but are instead interpreted and moulded by the people presenting and perceiving the objects.¹ Their value and meaning are imbedded in the ideas and truths of their current society and their link with the past is only maintained through a deliberate act of memory.² With the end of the grand narratives in the 1970's these statements have become an important guideline for the treatment of historic objects. According to the ICOM (International Committee for Museums) guidelines for museum, all restorations should be reversible and museum theory dictates a certain level of reflection on the institution and the history of the collection visible in exhibitions. The critical attitude towards the presentation and construction of history and culture in museums has not made the presentation of historic objects any easier.³ Many choices have to be made and there are no correct answers.

This is most certainly the case with the presentation of the former campsites of the Second World War, due to the sensitive nature of the subject and the active discussions about its memories. The slow transition from living memory to history is an ongoing process at the time of this paper. New forms of presentation have to be found in order to encounter the new developments in theories about identity, memory and heritage, and to appease the ever critical public debate, especially so in Germany.

The conscious treatment of historic objects is one of the main goals of the Stiftung Lager Sandbostel, in control of a part of the former Prisoner-of-War camp Stalag X B Sandbostel, 50km from Bremerhaven. The site stands out from many other former Second World War campsites due to the fact that a number of the original barracks are still standing in their original place, even though some in a deteriorating state. In other aspects the camp is representative of the general situation on former campsites; the barracks show signs of their many functions and the way history was remembered (or forgotten) throughout the 20th century. The many stories of the site are all part of its history, but presenting them to the public while maintaining a balance between a historic site and a memorial is a complex job.

Since the 1980's attempts were made to turn the campsite into a documentation and memorial site, which were unsuccessful for a long time. The current activity at site is still very recent, as the Stiftung was founded in 2004 and has been located on the site itself since 2007. It is still very much a work in progress. This however makes the site interesting because the newest ideas on the treatment and presentation of historic objects still influence the process. This paper will show some of the dilemmas of the former campsite, combining theory on heritage and museum presentations with the practice and choices of the Stiftung Lager Sandbostel. The focus will be on the presentation of the barracks, with special attention for the authenticity of objects, the many stories that can be told and the use of presentation techniques in order to convey the story of the camp to the audience.

The former camp of Sandbostel is of course not the only camp struggling with the problems of showing original historic material, although it is one of the few camps where some barracks are still standing on their original place. Even so, the dilemmas and choices described in this case study will hopefully provide more insights into the presentation of barracks in general, so that other former campsites can profit from this research. Specifically, the memorial centre Camp Westerbork, near Hooghalen in the Netherlands, comes to mind,

¹ O. Mussmann, "Die Gestaltung von Gedenkstätten im Historischen Wandel", in: H. Dierdus, e.a. (ed), *Museale und mediale Präsentationen in KZ-Gedenkstätten*, (Bremen, 2001), 14-33, 22

² J. E. Young, *The texture of memory; Holocaust memorials and meaning* (New Haven, 1993) 119

³ Mussmann, "Die Gestaltung von Gedenkstätten im Historischen Wandel", 28

as they have requested this study. While looking for new forms of presentation in order to connect with newer generations, the idea of restoring one of the original barracks that once stood on the camp ground came along. These barracks can, although sparsely, still be found in the Dutch landscape, for example in use by farmers. In order to make sound choices to bring one of those barracks back onto campgrounds, several studies were made and requested, looking to other camps and their presentations. This current study is one of those.

In order to make the case of Sandbostel more useful, it will be put in a broad context of developments in heritage and museum studies. Also in the final chapter the choices of Siftings Lager Sandbostel shall be compared to the situation in Westerbork. First however the case study itself will be put forward, providing information about its history, its current state and the future plans, as it is still very much a work in progress. Conversations with the project leader, Andreas Ehresmann, architect and historian, and the projects head of education, Burkhard Rexin, teacher, have been held and proven a valuable source of information on the final presentation of the site. This goes as well for an article by the former, written in 2008 at the start of the project.⁴ The site has been visited by the author of this study on the 21st of January 2009. The information from that visit will be used as an update on the fore mentioned article. The pictures included are either taken by the author at that date or courtesy of the very complete Stiftung Lager Sandbostel website.⁵

Before moving on the case study however, some more information about the complex and ongoing debate on the memory of the Second World War in Germany has to be provided. An understanding of the unique position of the country, often viewed as the only perpetrator nation of the war, and its changing attitude towards its own past are necessary in order to be able to understand some of the complexities in the current debate about the former campsites.

After the war, many of the former camps were re-used, e.g. as an internment camp for members of the Nazi party or like Dachau as housing for people unable to return to their homes. Other camps were (partly) burned down after liberation to prevent the spread of diseases, or they were neglected and used as building material by locals. In the Soviet districts, camps were used in the early 1950's for political prisoners of the new rulers. The remembrance of the war in these after war years focused mostly on the mourning of the victims.⁶ In Eastern Germany this meant the murdered communists, heroes and defenders of the true state. The German soldiers, victims of the bombed German cities and the resistance were mostly remembered in Western Germany, even though the Allies and survivors outside Germany already focused on the victims of the concentration camps. The mourning of the victims was also the central theme in memorials resurrected at the former campsites, often resembling graveyards. Other elements that were early on recognised as important symbols for remembrance were the gatehouses, crematoriums and the square where prisoners had to stand for hours in order to be counted and often bullied.⁷ The sites however were isolated, as places of evil, which had no connection with the rest of society.

In 1950's and 1960's more voices were heard for memorials on the actual campsites. In the GDR the former camps became part of the legacy of the eternal battle against Fascism (of which both Nazism as Capitalism were part). Large monuments were erected, celebrating the socialist resistance. In Dachau, the major campsite in the FRG, the mourning was incorporated in signs of Christian religion, as several churches were built on the site. The

⁴ Andreas Ehresmann, "Die Neugestaltung der Dokumentations- und Gedenkstätte Lager Sandbostel, ein sachstand- und werkbericht", *Gedenkstätte Rundbrief*, 143 (June 2008), 14-24

⁵ <http://www.stiftung-lager-sandbostel.de>

⁶ P. Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung; Gedächtnisorte im streit um de nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 83

⁷ Mussmann, "Die Gestaltung von Gedenkstätten im Historischen Wandel, 23

former campsites were turned into memorials and often included a historical museum, which put the site in the perspective of the Cold War. Most of the presentations set up in this period lasted with minor revisions till the end of the Cold War.⁸

In the memory culture however some changes could be noticed. In the 1970's slowly more attention was given to the idea of the "perpetratorship" of the German nation, the crimes instead of the victims were remembered.⁹ In the 1980's the suffering of the Jewish people became one of the main themes of the remembrance of the war. In the GDR the one-dimensional remembrance was criticized as well and slowly the suffering of the Jews and other groups like the Roma and the Sinti were incorporated into the national discourse.¹⁰ Also new techniques used in museums found their way onto the campsites. The sites became places of education and multimedia became part of the presentation.¹¹ With the disappearance of the grand narrative of the Cold War at the end of the 1980's everyday life became the focus of the exhibitions and most former campsites needed to revise their museums. The German reunification made the need for new forms of presentation even felt more, as neither the former Eastern nor former Western discourse seemed valid in the new era. This led to new insights about the presentation of heritage and also towards a reassessment of both the World War and the GDR. Some historians even suggest that only after the reunification the real process of coping with memory of the war had begun.¹² For example, at the site of former KZ Buchenwald this led to the creation of three memorial sites: the camp buildings for the remembrance of the Nazi-era, the graveyard for the commemoration of the Soviet camp located in the same buildings after the war and the GDR memorial, as a historic site of how the war was remembered in East-Germany. This more differentiated and complex approach is also visible in this study's case: Siftings Lager Sandbostel, as will be shown in the next chapter.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 25

⁹ B. Niven, "Introduction: Germans as victims", in: Idem, (ed) *Germans as victims, remembering the past in contemporary Germany* (Basingstoke, 2006), 22

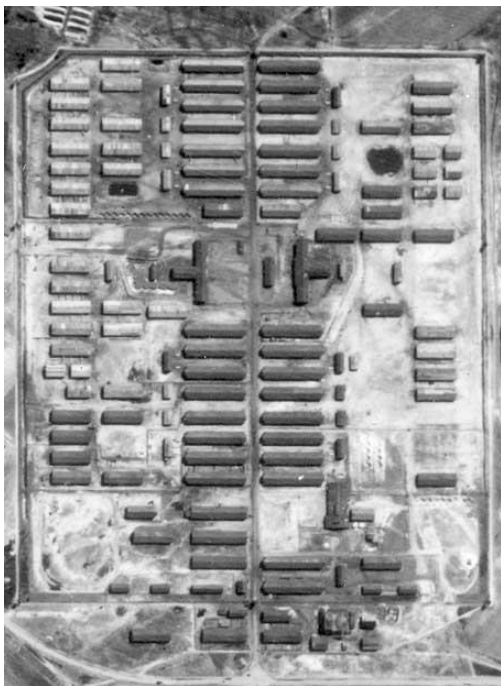
¹⁰ Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, 91

¹¹ Mussmann, "Die Gestaltung von Gedenkstätten im Historischen Wandel, 27

¹² B. Niven, *Facing the Nazi past; united Germany and the legacy of the third reich* (Londen & New York, 2002), 2

WHEN HISTORY BECOMES MEMORY... IN STALAG X B SANDBOSTEL

The site of the Sifting Lager Sandbostel hardly remembers of the prisoners-of-war camp Stalag X B Sandbostel. The camp contained over 140 buildings, while the current site contains eleven, even though it is still surrounded by a handful other original buildings from the camp and the foundations of demolished barracks. It is still a hard to reach place, in the middle of nowhere, just outside the village of Bremervörde, once surrounded by moor and now by agricultural lands, with a local buss line only available during school hours. The camp site was neglected for a long time, its victims remembered at the local graveyard. This changed in 1992, and then again in 2007. Before moving on to its current state and future plans, some attention shall be paid to the history of the camp and its buildings.



An air photograph taken by the Royal Air Force, April 1945.

Courtesy of the Stiftung Lager Sandbostel

The main parts of the camp were built in 1939 by prisoners of war. The first part was built as a standard PoW-camp, but it was later expanded, which made it one of Germany's largest PoW-camps. Prisoners of several nations were kept in the camp, following the nations that were conquered by and fighting against the German army. In the first months mostly French and Belgium soldiers lived in the camp, protected by the Geneva Convention, which secured several rights for prisoners of war as medical services and contact with home. In 1941 prisoners from Serbia and the Soviet Union entered the camp. As the latter had not signed the Geneva Convention, their situation was considerably worse than those of the other inmates. In 1943 the Italians followed, after they had changed alliances in the war. At the end of the war, as the Allied and Soviet troops closed in on the Germans, slowly freeing concentration camps on their way, prisoners from KZ Neuengamme were transported to Sandbostel.

When the camp was liberated in April 1945 by the British Army, the situation was appalling. The situation of the Western PoW, which had been controlled by the Red Cross, had been semi-comfortable. There had been a library, a theatre company, sports and enough to eat. The Russian situation had been worse, but the KZ-prisoners had been treated even worse than that. The death toll under the last two groups was significantly higher than under the others and due to the bad physical condition, this did not stop when the camp was liberated. Locals were forced by the British army to help with the care for the inmates and with cleaning up the camp. Some of the barracks were burned down in order to prevent the spread of a typhus epidemic.

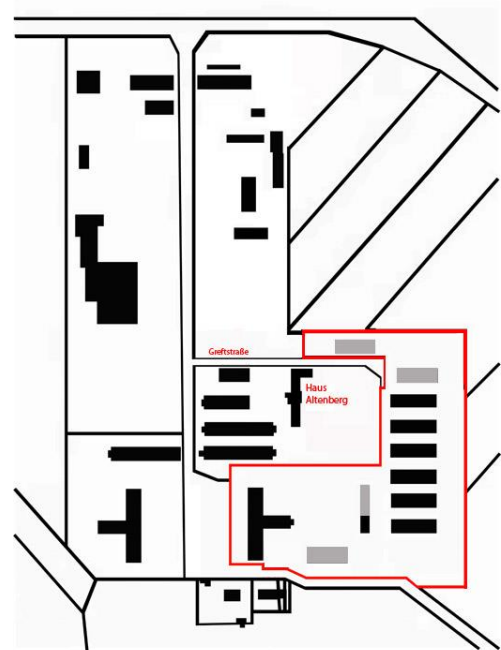
After the war, the barracks still standing were used as an internment camp by the British Army for members of the SS and members of the Nazi-party. From 1948 till 1952 it was part of a nearby prison. Some barracks build in those years are still standing on the campgrounds nowadays. Most barracks of all years were massively renovated in the 1950's, when they were used to shelter refugees from the GDR and the former German territories in the east. This ended in the early 1960's after the Wall was constructed, finalizing the separation of East and West Germany, and East and West Europe. From then till 1970 the former campsite was used as a storage facility by the German Bundeswehr and after several

years of neglect the area became a business area, the buildings used by several companies, the land divided and sold.¹³

From the 1980's on, attempts have been made by local historians to place the barracks under heritage laws and resurrect some kind of memorial on the campsite. However the monument on the local graveyard, erected in the 1950's when the bodies of the dead prisoners, buried in the ground surrounding the campsite in 1945, were exhumed and reburied at the local graveyard, was deemed sufficient. In 1992 the former barracks were placed under the protection of heritage legislation. This means that even the private owners should protect their buildings against further deterioration; unfortunately this is not always the case. The "Dokumentations- und Gedenkstätte Sandbostel" was founded in the same year, focused on the documentation of the history of the site. In 2004 the Stiftung Lager Sandbostel was founded, and in 2005 a piece of the former campgrounds was purchased. In 2008 another piece with two stone barracks from the post PoW-camp-period was acquired. The buildings on the current site used to be part of the Soviet side of the PoW-camp.

Since 2007 the foundation is housed on the former campsite itself and restoration of the barracks and their surroundings have started. Only a small part of the former camp terrain, originally containing over 140 buildings, is now part of the Stiftung Lager Sandbostel. The site nowadays owns a small eleven buildings and twelfth one in which the documentation centre and its offices are housed. It is in the middle of the business area "Immenhaim", where more original barracks are still standing, but these are in use by local business, as living areas and even as a dog-pound. The eleven buildings of the historic site include six wooden barracks build in 1939; latrines and a kitchen building from the same period and two stone buildings from the period 1948-1952. The restoration works are still in full progress, but an idea shall be given of the state the barracks were in at the authors visit at 21st of January 2009 and the intentions and ideas behind it. First however some attention shall be paid to the intentions and ideas behind the project.

Technically the remembrance and documentation centre Sandbostel contains two sites: the earlier mentioned memorial at the local graveyard where the victims of the camp have been reburied and the small part actual campsite itself. According to the plans of project leader Andreas Ehresmann, explained in his article on the former campsite in 2008 the graveyard will maintain its memorial function.¹⁴ The former campsite itself however should become a documentation centre, not only for the war period, but also for the treatment of war heritage in the decades after that. This was the outcome of a two-day conference held in Bremen in 2007, where professionals from all involved disciplines discussed the possible futures of the camp. The important presumption is that the site is on one hand an historic "Ort der Tat", a scene of crime and that on the other hand it contains, due to its post-war history, multiple stories that should be told on the scene as well.¹⁵



The grounds of Stiftung Lager Sandbostel in 2008

Courtesy of the Stiftung Lager Sandbostel

¹³ "Geschichte" <http://www.stiftung-lager-sandbostel.de/geschichte.html>

¹⁴Ehresmann, "Die Neugestaltung der Dokumentations- und Gedenkstätte Lager Sandbostel", 14-15

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 15

Five points have been articulated, which are the ground rules for the restoration of the site. The first states that all signs of the different uses of the campgrounds should be documented and conserved as much as possible. The second recommends the integration of the memorial at the local graveyard into the documentation and memorial site Sandbostel. Thirdly, the presentation of the barracks and historic buildings is the most important element of the site. Therefore nothing should be restored to its previous state, only the current situation should be preserved. And as a last point, this also includes that none of the buildings should be torn down or left to the elements.¹⁶

The historic buildings should be treated as careful as possible, conserving as much of its current state as possible. This however also means that two of the buildings will not be restored, but they will deteriorate in a controlled way, which will pose no threat to visitors. The budget shortage is turned into a positive point, as it shows how many of the campsites were regarded after the war. The fundamentals of buildings that were destroyed over the decades shall not be excavated, but might be marked out in the future. Plans are to outline the different routes used through out the history of the camp. Also all the different time elements and restorations shall be explained on text fields near the buildings.

However this is not yet the case. Since the start of the restorations the trees and plants that had overgrown the site, have been removed and the restoration of the wooden barracks from the original PoW-camp is well under way. As there are six wooden barracks different modes of presentation have been chosen, befitting the state the individual barracks and showing the different uses of the camp throughout the 20th century. A short overview shall be given, after which the context of the presentation shall be described. For some pictures of the barracks described here, see appendix 1.

The first wooden barrack the visitor sees when entering the site, Z2, has deteriorated beyond restoration. So the foundation has been renovated, but the fallen in walls of the building will not be repaired. The barrack is not accessible for visitors and is a symbol of the neglect of war heritage in the decades after the war. The facade of the construction will be preserved, containing also signs of the GDR-refugee camp, when all the barracks were named after the bible (hope, faith, etc.). The next barrack in line, Z3, is in relative good state. The panels in the sidewalls that were too damaged have been replaced with panels of lighter wood, as throughout the whole campsite, to separate the restorations from the original material. The barrack is in use as an exhibition room, where small presentations made by local students and amateur historians are shown. The same goes for barrack Z6, the fifth in the row, containing a storage depot and some rooms for presentations. Barrack Z7 was under construction at the time of the visit, but will end up the same as the previous two, with light wooden panels replacing those that could not be saved and a new roof to preserve the structure.

Barrack Z4 is one of the most interesting ones on the camp terrain. Everything that was too rotten to be used in the new presentation has been removed. This includes parts of the wall and almost half of the floor. The roof construction was feeble at best and had to be replaced in order to preserve the building. However, only those elements necessary to maintain the structure have been replaced, again with a lighter type of wood in order to separate it from the original material. This means that for example large pieces of the floor are still missing and that these will not be restored. The result is an unfinished building, frozen in a state between past and restoration.

The last structure to be described is Z5, also an unusual case. Before the barrack was acquired by the foundation Lager Sandbostel, it was used to house sheep. Several rooms of the building are covered in a thick layer of sheep manure. This has made the floor to collapse

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 18

at several points, but it also works as a conservative. If it would be removed, most likely the floor would give in completely. The solution so far has been to keep the dirt in place, both in order to preserve as much of the original material as possible and as yet another witness of the treatment of war heritage.

As the whole site was renovated in the 1950's, evidence of the PoW-camp and the GDR-refugee-camp are thusly interwoven that it is impossible to present one without the other. All of the barracks contain inner stone walls, build for the refugee camp. They often contain other markings, like wall paintings, of that period as well. The same goes for the two stone buildings on the site, the latrines and the kitchen building. Both have substantively been modified and their current appearance might give a misinformed impression of the PoW-camp, for example the word "speisehalle" on the façade of the former kitchen and the wall paintings in the latrine. As far as restorations go, the roof of both buildings had to be replaced, and in the kitchen building several supporting pillars had to be rebuild. Again everything was done to preserve as much of the original materials and only the most necessary elements were rebuild. The 1950's dining hall build along side the kitchen still has to be renovated and shows several elements of it's later use by the Bundeswehr, for example the boxes holding up the collapsing roof.

As mentioned earlier, the trees and plants, found on the campsite when it was purchased, have for the greater part been removed and will be removed completely. In January 2009 the paths were not yet clearly marked and weeds still surrounded the buildings.

The site tells a complex mixture of stories, and requires an elaborate context in order to be understandable. Text leaflets have been glued onto some of the barracks, but more background information is needed and provided. Even though the site is always accessible, most visitors come in groups, like school and business trips, and make an appointment for a guided tour. For student groups, this usually includes an hour of watching videotapes, some made by the British army at the moment of liberation of the camp in 1945, others containing documentaries about the experiences of local people with the camp, especially those who had to help with the former prisoners after the liberation. As most visitors come for the wartime history of the camp, this is the focus of the context provided.

Besides the guided tours there is also the documentation centre on the campsite, containing a small museum presentation. It consists of two rooms, housed in the same building as the staff offices. Plans are to move to a bigger barrack when it becomes available, so there will be more room for the permanent exhibition and the presentations for school classes, but this was not yet the case in January 2009. In the hallway of the current building information is provided about the former campsite and what is still visible of it nowadays. The first room contains a small-scale model of the original camp and the interior of one of the barracks, made by a local school class. Some objects found on the site are also shown, like a drinking cup. Text panels provide information about the situation in the camp and the liberation by the British in 1945. Texts in the hallway inform the visitor on the labour conditions and possibilities of the prisoners. Information on the post wartime is shown in the next room, together with some artworks made in the PoW-camp and the GDR-refugee camp it became afterwards.

The ambition of the site has two elements, according to the project leader and the head of education: the site has to disrupt the clean and empty images of shovelled gravel and restored buildings most people already have in their mind from places like Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen. It wants to show the neglect and the conscious effort it takes to remember. At the same time the educational programme is focused on nurturing a critical attitude towards government and society by youngsters. These goals can coexist and fulfilled at the

same time, but they might also require different presentations. This will be examined further in the next chapter, where some theoretical approaches shall be discussed in concern with the case of Sandbostel. Also shall be attempted to compare the case of this study with the situation at Memorial Centre Camp Westerbork to see if the latter can learn from the choices and dilemmas of the former.

WHEN MEMORY BECOMES HISTORY... THEORETICAL DILEMMAS

When human witnesses pass away, the material objects remain our only connection to the past, as silent witnesses to previous times. This is the founding notion of most heritage sites, especially of those connecting to less positive events in our history as the Second World War. Sites like the former WW2 camps preserve their history as sad reminders and warnings to current and future generations. Conserving sites of the past has a long tradition, but developments in the last few decades in for example memory, museum and heritage studies have changed the ways we look at the icons of our past. No longer the imperial truth of great nations, heritage sites are nowadays trying to find their way through the minefield left behind by postmodernism and relativism. To describe however all of the changed attitudes towards the past and its material leftovers, not to mention their presentation towards an audience, would be too much for a paper like this one. Therefore only a short overview shall be given of three topics closely related to the case study: material authenticity, presentation and cultural biography.

As stated in the previous chapter the original materials of the Sandbostel camp are the most important elements of the site. Not only because of their uniqueness, as few former camps still possess original wooden barracks, but also because the buildings are the material witnesses of past events. The authenticity of the barracks is an important factor of their presentation, they are used to evoke a historical experience, to make the audience connect to the past. Philosopher Walter Benjamin called it "aura"; the unique element and story an object from the past can possess.¹⁷ Historian Johan Huizinga also explained the need for historic objects in order to relive and understand past experiences. An original and authentic artefact is a direct connection to the past and can as such evoke a historical experience.¹⁸ Authenticity however is a term frequently used, abused and questioned. The "originality" of an object can be found in its function, appearance, concept, surroundings or substance.¹⁹ Also the state in which an object is authentic is examined. Is its original state from when it was just created or is it its current ever-changing state, including the marks history left on it? Or maybe the state people decided to preserve it in? Benjamin always claimed that the history of an object was part of its authenticity, its story contributing to its own uniqueness, but non-historical approaches can be found in heritage studies as well and even more when concerning works of art. An important motive to restore an object to its previous state is that it could be closer to the intentions of the creator/artist and therefore more authentic.

An aspect determining heritage sites in general is the fact that it is meant to be seen by an audience. This means that certain adjustments to a site have to be made in order to present it, for visitors have to know what they are looking at. It has to separate itself from its environment and explain why it is worth looking at, or worth preserving.²⁰ Whereas early heritage theories saw heritage as part of a single identity and therefore exclusive, nowadays contested or even multiple heritage can coexist on the same site. Some of these approaches try to pay attention to the whole "cultural biography", the lives of all groups involved in the site throughout its history, of a site. This is however hard to combine with the clear story needed to preserve the site. Even so, the presentation of multiple stories at one site is becoming more and more acceptable. For example at the site of the former KZ Buchenwald, which now contains three memorials at the same (one for the KZ-period, one for the Soviet

¹⁷ W. Benjamin, "the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction", (1938) in: C. Harrison, P. Woods (ed), *Art in theory 1900-2000, an anthology of changing ideas* (Oxford, 2003) 520-526

¹⁸ Memorial Centre Camp Westerbork, *Tussen Knossos en Disney, het historisch landschap van westerbork als blijvende en sprekende getuige van de oorlog* (Hooghalen 2008), 5-6

¹⁹ See for example N. Ex, *Zo goed als oud, de achterkant van het restaureren* (Amsterdam, 1993)

²⁰ J. Urry, *The tourist gaze* (Londen, 2003, 2^e editie), 11-14

camp it became afterwards and one for the treatment the war history by the GDR) albeit separated from each other.

Another development that does not encourage the presentation of cultural biographies is the focus on experience in newer museum theories. Museologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes about a “performative turn” which museums have made in order to be able to connect with a broader audience.²¹ The presentation is focused more on emotions, experiences and total environments, than on the traditional transfer of knowledge. It is however the latter that is more suited for informing on multiple and sometimes contradicting stories. In the new total environment, media and technology play an important part, and the old authentic historic object is no longer the centre of attention.²² This movement has been criticized severely and slowly the aura of authenticity is becoming more important again.²³ The use of historic objects however is no longer unproblematic, and the importance of extensive yet clear context has been incorporated from the previous trends.

The approach of Stiftung Lager Sandbostel to the restoration of the site contains elements of both the ideas of historic authenticity and the cultural biography. This is partly dictated by the condition of the barracks. Due to the renovations in the 1950's and the deteriorating state the buildings were in at the beginning of the restorations, most of the authentic material can only be preserved with the signs of its use and neglect in later times. The new materials used are differentiated from the original ones, and elements as the sheep manure are kept, partly because they are essential to conserving the original materials, partly because they illustrate the complex post-war history of the site. The site is however not completely preserved as it was found in 2007. The vegetation has been removed, and the old network of roads and paths shall be restored. This is a concession that is made towards the presentation of the site and its meaning. The romantic ruins between trees and other plants are not enough to disrupt the traditional image people have of former war camps, even though it is part of the neglect and the post war history of the camp. But even the fact that it is turned into a heritage site now adds a new layer to the historic authenticity and will tell the story of the treatment of war history to future generations.

Even though attention is paid to the different stories of the camp, the cultural biography is not complete in the presentation. The perspectives of the different groups of victims are made clear enough, the perpetrators however are hardly acknowledged. This might have to do with the fact that the small community of Sandbostel and surroundings has not changed much since pre-war years; the same families often still live in the neighbourhood. It is however one of the most noticeable missing elements in the presentation, especially since the focus is, no matter the attention towards the post-war history, on the war camp. The perspective of the camp guards and leaders, especially if they were recruited locals, could add an extra dimension to the story, that make youngsters become more investigative towards their own society. This would also fit in the transition from memory towards a more history oriented presentation, as although perpetrators as such are usually not part of the traditional remembrance, their roles are critical for a nuanced understanding of history.

The fact that both heritage and education demand a clear story that can be told is also visible in this case. The site is (at the moment) hard to understand without a guide, and some elements of the camp, for example the word “speisehalle” on one of the 1950's buildings, might give a wrong impression of the wartime situation. This is also noticeable in a discussion still being held at the time of this study, about the refurbishment of one of the

²¹ B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “the museum as catalyst”, keynote adress, *Museums 2000: Confirmation or challenge* (Vadstena, 29 september 2000)

²² Urry, *The tourist gaze*, 119

²³ Mussmann, “Die Gestaltung von Gedenkstätten im Historischen Wandel, 27

barracks. According to the chief of education Rixin, this would greatly help for visitors to complete the image of the wartime circumstances, as the thin walls, the cold and draft do now already. This would enhance the educational value of the site, and therefore one of the sites goals, to nurture a critical attitude in youngsters. Project leader Erhesmann however, argues that a refurbishment of the room would be unhistorical and inauthentic, as no original furniture survived the post-war area. It would also mean that a room has to be reconstructed, something that is not in line with the intentions of the foundation. The refurbishment of a barrack would diminish the story of the site throughout the twentieth century and the treatment of war heritage. A solution to this discussion had not yet been found at the time of this paper, but it presents the never-ending confrontation between presentation and (material) authenticity. One would hope however that a correct and detailed historic presentation could complete the transition from memory to history and encourage deeper research, in which there would also (maybe further into the future) be room for perpetrator side of history.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated several times already, the site of former PoW-camp Sandbostel is still a work in progress. Some dilemmas have already been solved, as for example the focus on the historic objects, others, mostly on the exact presentation of those objects, still have to be sought out. This makes it hard to come with a clear recommendation for the situation in Memorial Centre Camp Westerbork. Also the fact that the situation on both site concerning the barracks (in Sandbostel several are still standing, in Westerbork, none of the original barrack are present at the site) is different, makes a one on one comparison impossible. However some elements according to the fundamental choices that have been made in Sandbostel might be interesting for the situation in the Netherlands. First of all the respect paid to the original materials, and the way the materials used in the restoration are set apart from it by using a different colour of wood. This makes it possible to show the visitor a multi-layered story, including both the camp with its Second World War history and the treatment of that history afterwards. A way of presenting that might make people more aware of the conscious effort it takes to remember and the conscious construction of that memory.

Sandbostel is not alone in its history of war camp, prison and refugee camp. The campsite of Westerbork housed refugees from the former colony of Indonesia up till 1971, when the whole camp was demolished. Although the history of the camp might not as indistinguishable interwoven in the barracks it self as is the case in Sandbostel, the multilayered history of the camp does play a role when discussing its presentation. The post war history is mostly restricted to the museum presentation in the memorial centre and not explicitly visible on the camp ground it self. However when placing an original barrack back on campgrounds, signs of its later use as for example a farm building will be visible. The question is whether to explicitly show these marks or to focus on the main theme of the camp, the war history. In Sandbostel the former is chosen, to make the camp both a memorial for the war and for the treatment of war history. This probably diminishes the presentation of the war history it self, as one strong story is easier to present than several stories, but it is more in line with the more historical and nuanced presentation of war heritage mentioned earlier.²⁴ Also would it accentuate the history of the barrack it self, which would make it more true to its own history and less of a reconstruction.

This also goes for a visible restoration instead of a construction. By distinguishing the newer materials from the original ones, the authenticity of the latter will be better visible. It also shows the self-reflection and awareness of the museum as an institution, and again the conscious effort it takes to remember. Even though the ambition to nurture an active and questioning attitude towards society and the government is not one of the main ambitions of Memorial Centre Camp Westerbork, the site is very well suited to show the construction of memory and the treatment of history, and this could be part of it.²⁵ Showing the deterioration of the barracks is another element of showing the conscious construction of memory, but this is probably a luxury only Sandbostel can afford, as they still have several original barracks. Multiple barracks means that multiple forms of presentation can be chosen, even though the unity of the camp on its own should be preserved as well.

The dilemma of a pure historical restoration of the barrack(s) or a presentation focused more on education is also valid for both cases. It is however hard to give a solid analysis here as the presentation in Sandbostel is far from finished. Hence the main recommendation of this study is that a similar visit should be paid to the site of Siftings

²⁴ "...probably diminishes..." as the presentation of the former camp is not yet completed. This is the expectation of the author of this study, based on a previous study on tourism and heritage presentation.

²⁵ Nowhere in either the memo *Tussen Knossos en Disney* or the website this goal is explicitly vocalised, in contrary to it being one of the ground motivations of Siftings Lager Sandbostel.

Lager Sandbostel in a few years from now. The principles of the site are very interesting, with their emphasis on historical authenticity, but the implementation of these into a presentation fit for a broad audience sound like a hard undertaking.

Last but not least, a word of thanks. This study would have never been possible without the help of several persons. I would like to thank Rob van der Laarse and Dirk Mulder for giving me the possibility to do this study, contributing to a useful and interesting case, Guido Abuis for focussing my research, Wessel Krul, my tutor at the University of Groningen for his suggestions and of course Andreas Erhesmann and Burckhard Rexin for their time and kindness during my visit to the Sandbostel site.

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APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SANDBOSTEL SITE

All pictures were taken by Liselotte Neervoort in January 2009. More pictures of the restoration process of the barracks on the Sandbostel site can be found at www.stiftung-lager-sandbostel.de



**The
controlled**

deterioration of barrack Z2



**The finished
interior of
barrack Z4**



**The facades of
barrack Z4, Z5 and
Z6**



**The interior of one of
the barracks not
owned by the Stiftung
Lager Sandbostel. It is
filled with uniforms for
the Bundeswehr,
leftovers from its former
owners. This picture is a
surreal example of the
neglect of the historic
buildings.**