

FALSTAD RESEARCH TRIP

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Participants: post-doc, Zuzanna Dziuban Phd candidate Dana Dolghin

Part of the UvA team travelled to Falstad in order to understand the dynamics of the site from a narrative perspective and the direction it signals in memory debates and remembrances of campsites. The site is particular in the selection of the project due to the relative short period of usage as a concentration and detention facility. Before and after the use of the camp, at the end of war, to detain individuals accused of collaboration, the premises of what today is the Falstad Memorial center were used for educational purposes, first as a school for maladjusted youth and later for children with impairments. Debates concerning memorialization and the narrative presented on site have frequently tackled this particular overlap, which more often than not has been a contentious history to present. The site is central to the victimhood of Norwegian inmates during the war and is equally relevant from the transnational dimension of the repression, due to the number of inmates who were detained here as forced labour within the groups of Organization Todt and the educational history of the facility. This is equally the narrative presented within the memorial, to the concern of critical voices who equally argue to include the history of the educational facility.

Indeed, the memorial dynamic of the site has been shaped by the way the significance of both is to be integrated. The memorial itself was built in the early 2000s and initiated by former Yugoslav inmates transported to Falstad for work. Nevertheless, since then much importance has been placed on the potential of both histories to articulate into a preventive heritage. The center now takes interest in human rights as central perspective, which also shapes the perspective on perpetratorship and its framing in the post-war context: a story of the victims, individualized and focusing on identification. As in the case of Westerbork, the commander's house is also the central space where the memorial dynamics of various phases of the camp converge. In this case, the memorial utilizes it as an entryway into a narrative of power relations and a perspective on human rights. This latter point has been the guiding principle of the memorial, and in fact has been the way the narrative of the permanent exhibition has been told and is also directing the current representation on site, and the new exhibition.

From this perspective, Falstad adds to the discussion about a heritage of perpetratorship due to its educational dimension, underlined as well by the usages of human rights perspectives into a political narrative of consensus. From this perspective, it taps into the usages of memory of political violence reframed as preventive. As several memorials were included in a nation wide program to increase the visibility of this perspective - which

entailed a change in how the accents fall in the history of the site - several survivor organizations contested this direction and questioned whether the victims of the Second World War and not being gradually pushed in the shadow of the history and framing of the school which functioned on the premises. The school itself, before the war lodging youth deemed as difficult to integrate (asocial) was re-opened in the late 1960s and was discussed because of its rather repressive regime. As the memorial aimed to integrate the human rights perspective, practices in the school were integrated in this narrative, and the juxtaposition has caused strong debate in Norwegian public opinion. From this perspective, the site allows us to reflect on the implications of the memorial dynamics forefronted by the human rights discourse and the ways these have intervened in memorial dynamics particularly in the last three decades.

The site is equally relevant to the debates tackled by the project concerning the postwar politics concerning POWs and the attempts to nationalize victims of the war. An integral part of the site is the location of mass graves in the forest surrounding the memorial. Exhumations after the war were subjected to a particular politics concerning the nationalization of the victims post-war, where the attention was focused on the Norwegian resistance above others. The issue of POWs transformed in the late 1950s into a larger debate about the visibility of the history of war itself (POWs grave sites all over Norway were dismantled and moved to one location). The visibility of POWs was equally under the constraints of the Cold War, with the Soviet narrative being overlooked. Both are topics to be considered in the narrative perspective.

The site of Falstad also presents a particularity of purpose, next to the human rights narrative, an interest in the intersection of memorialization and an educational content and ethics, and to this extent its history as educational facility (contested because of its regime, for instance, in Norway) also open up the space for a reflection on the intersection between human rights and memory narratives, which has been increasingly questioned in that it emphasizes victimhood and glosses over historical specificity. It consequently strengthens, rather than minimizes tropes of identity politics or ethnicity.

From a narrative perspective, Falstad also represents an interesting case study for appropriations of memory and for competing perspectives around victimhood, as the old memorial set up by former Yugoslav survivors (a substantial group of Yugoslav POWs were sent to Falstad) came to the center of the strengthening of the human rights discourse in Norway towards the end of the 1990s. The contestations around the hierarchy of victims will be equally discussed in the approach on materiality at the site, as the archaeological findings so far during the project have been attributed to the later phase in the functioning of the camp when collaborators with the SS were interned here. The production in the camp in fact continued an economy in the camp sold to the outside which provided a form of revenue. Analyzing and discussing the place of this issue in the history of the camp provides

an opportunity to contextualize under researched economic usability of camps during the war and the role they played after in the efforts to normalize debates about the role of collaborators and perpetrators in the post-war society.