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Sick of Peace

How Small Museums Can Collaborate
for Impact and Outreach in the Countryside

The following article provides a short account of the programme initiated in fall 2018 by the DBK-Stiftung and its partners on the occasion of the anniversary of end of the First World War in 1918 and the genesis of the first German republic afterwards. To explore the significance of these events two temporary exhibitions, workshops for local schools and a small symposium were organized. The projects took place in a rural region with rather impoverished cultural infrastructure. They were also limited by scarce resources. Thus networking and collaboration were of paramount importance.

Schloss & Gut Liebenberg is a large manor in a village 50 kilometres north of Berlin. The manor, owned by the DBK-Stiftung für gesellschaftliches Engagement, is commemorating 750 years of history and today hosts a hotel, a park, a small museum and some agriculture.

In the historicized courtyard of the castle, two boulders at the foot of the stairs to the church are impossible to ignore. In 2018, this special anniversary year, they became stumbling stones in the truest sense of the words. On one of them the phrase *Am Frieden krank – 1919* is inscribed (fig. 1, p. 136). It translates: “to be sick of peace” or alternatively “sick of the peace”. The aristocrats who commissioned them clearly refused the Treaty of Versailles and the new social and political order that followed.

On the occasion of the end-of-war anniversary the DBK-Stiftung wanted to contextualize the inscriptions and commemorate, inform and enable discussions with the regional population of Oberhavel and Prignitz-Ruppin about the historical events that ensued during the post-war period.

The question was how to offer a programme for the public to engage with in a structurally-impooverished, thinly-populated countryside, when there is



Fig. 1: Boulder at the foot of the stairs to the church at Schloss & Gut Liebenberg.

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no real museum collection and resources are generally scarce. Networking and cooperation were powerful instruments that helped us to fulfil one responsibility of museums in such regions: to provide easy access to various educational and cultural activities, and places where citizens can engage locally with their historical and cultural heritage. For small institutions like Schloss & Gut Liebenberg, with only one staff member for museum work, this is challenging.

Four institutions – the Brandenburg-Preußen Museum in Wustrau, Jagdschloss Schorfheide, Schloss & Gut Liebenberg and Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand in Berlin – formed a partnership in order to create a coherent programme around this Centenary. The programme dealt with topics that were relevant or took place in the counties of Oberhavel and Ost-Prignitz Ruppín. Under the slogan “*Am Frieden krank*” oder *Wege in die Demokratie* (“Sick of Peace” or Paths towards Democracy) the programme spanned the fall of 2018. It was designed with the long-term objective of fostering democracy and peace. The concept bound together two exhibitions and three workshop

days for young adults in Liebenberg and Wustrau, six educational plays on peace at primary schools as well as an afternoon symposium in Liebenberg.

In Wustrau, about half an hour's drive from Liebenberg, an exhibition called *1918 Kriegsende / Koniec Wojny* on the end of the First World War and the homecoming soldiers raised questions of identity, rupture and discontinuation. This exhibition was the result of a German-Polish youth project. Students from both countries researched the end of the war in their home countries and engaged with newly-collected source materials written by veterans. On the basis of their findings the exhibition was curated by Claudia Krahnert of the Brandenburg-Preußen Museum.

The only exhibits in Liebenberg on the topic were the aforementioned memorial boulders. Thus the Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand in Berlin assisted with an easily transportable exhibition *Für Freiheit und Republik! Das Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold 1924 bis 1933*. The Reichsbanner was an association of war veterans that supported the Weimar Republic by direct action, demonstrations, social work and election campaigns. Contrary to that, the aristocratic owners of Liebenberg, the von Eulenburg family, were members of the right-wing veterans' association Stahlhelm. The idea was to contrast the two positions to counter the argument of the "weak republic".

Furthermore an educational programme was developed, with three institutions – the Brandenburg-Preußen Museum in Wustrau, Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand and Schloss & Gut Liebenberg – pooling their staff, expertise and other resources. In day-long workshops pupils visited and engaged with both exhibitions in Wustrau and Liebenberg. The aim was to initiate learning processes around dealing with exhibitions, historical artefacts and sources, and thus to enable the pupils to develop their own positions on the matter of war and peace – and ways to secure peace. The workshops reached 90 pupils from two schools, despite the generally-minimal contact with cultural institutions in this region.

On 11 November, the day of the Armistice in 1918, a public symposium was organized to complement the programme. Three talks covered different aspects of the post-war world. Afterwards questions like "Why should we remember the First World War?", "How did contemporaries deal with the aftermath of the war?" and "How did they support or why did they despise the new political and social order?" were discussed enthusiastically.

Through active networking and the pooling of resources, small institutions in the countryside are able to provide high-quality educational opportunities and can thus strengthen their impact and outreach.