



'Mountain of Memories'

Part of the 'Graz 2003 – European Capital of Culture' programme

<http://bisdato.com/portfolio/der-berg-der-erinnerungen-graz-2003/>

Partner 8: Kunstverein Monochrom, Austria > Günther Friesinger

Team:

Concept: Karl Stocker with Heimo Hofgartner and Katja Schurl Exhibition

design: Erika Thümmel

Architecture: Ewald Onzek

1. Exhibition Concept

The exhibition 'Berg der Erinnerungen' ('Mountain of Memories') was part of the 'Graz 2003 – European Capital of Culture' programme and took place in the city center of Graz, Austria.¹ The fundamental idea of this local and oral history exhibition was to involve a broad population, the townsfolk of Graz, into the 'European Capital of Culture' and to have their personal and individual view of the history of Graz well presented to the public.

An early concept for an exhibition space was to build a pyramid-shaped building in the center of the city housing memories. Later on the decision was made that the existing 'pyramid' of Graz, the 'Schlossberg' a hill in the historic center of Graz which is a landmark and includes a maze-like underground tunnel-system should be the unusual exhibition space and metaphor to shelter the memories.

To gather 'stories' and objects for the exhibition, a team of 'history scouts' and an 'office of memories' were established. This way, not only the historically

¹ http://www.graz03.at/servlet/sls/Tornado/web/2003/content_e/1255ABAA0300D865C1256B84004AD945

relevant facts should be exhibited but the very personal and vivid memories from the townsfolk of Graz, non-experts and non-historians. The townspeople were approached by 'history scouts' or were able to bring objects and 'their stories' to the office where employees made interviews, collected and filed personal items, digitalized and indexed videos and photographs and set up a database which was the basis of the exhibition. 1000 objects and their 'stories' were chosen to build up an exhibition in the tunnel-system of the 'Schlossberg'.

2. Reception

The main focus of the exhibition was to get the townspeople of Graz involved in the big machinery of „Graz 2003 - European Capital of Culture— and let them present their collective memory of the last one hundred years and offer them the appreciation they missed. The exhibition attracted 100.000 visitors, more than a third of the city's population, and the database had 261.888 virtual hits in the time of seven months (source: <http://bisdato.com/portfolio/der-berg-der-erinnerungen-graz-2003/> last visit 20.09.2013).

3. Exhibition Design

The interior of the Schlossberg is a very widespread tunnel-system from time of the war to give people a place of shelter. This tunnel-system was not accessible to the public since that time. The exhibition used this confusing setting as a metaphor for the paths of memory in our brain. From the big collection of stories and objects 1000 were chosen and presented to the public in the exhibition. Every story had one object. The object was inside a hanging transparent glass-polygone like cube, pyramid or triangular pyramid and these polygons were hanging from the rough mountain wall like mountain crystals. The meandering paths through the adit were surrounded by them. There was not just one direction for the visitors so the objects were grouped in different clusters. Every visitor could choose an individual path of consuming the exhibition.

A central piece of the exhibition was a VJ-Installation from the VJ-Collectives Coldcut and Headspace. Videos from different eras were shown as split screens and could be controlled by a user interface that was integrated in the floor-mats. Visitors no matter what kind of age could use the feet and hand to change the video and the connected audio loops to resample the projection.

To get another interaction with the visitors they had the possibility at the exit of the exhibition to throw their handwritten bad memories in a black hole of the tunnel to leave them behind in the mountain. This black hole is still inside and conserved for the future.



4. Visitors Approach-Activation/Participation

From the very first beginning of the project participation of all citizens was always the main idea. The historians, project leaders were dependent on the help and good will of the people. The stories could only be told from them and in a period of five months around 20.000 memorandums were collected. Most of the stories were about the historical events from the 20th century, with all their wanted and unwanted consequences and the everyday stories from the last hundred years like family life, work situation and stories about vacation and trips to the countryside.

Everyone was given the feeling that every story is important, especially the ones not noted in history books. That attracts more and more people that were willing to share their memories. Additionally the marketing instruments of „Graz 2003 - European Capital of Culture— were used to promote the possibility to share and also promoted the exhibition itself.

In the exhibition the objects were not designed to have visitor interaction but the interaction happened between the visitors. People started communicating about the events and objects they saw in the exhibition and shared their personal memories with other visitors. This created a strong identification and word-of-mouth advertising.

5. Conclusion: in respect to the COP1 and COP2

Toolkit 1 – the object immanent, comparative, and thematic and beyond Europe approach: The exhibition objects which had no further relevance in European history were used to display a collective history. The objects and stories could have been from donors from all over the world with a connection to Graz.

Toolkit 2 – integrating cultural Europe (social arena): The exhibition attracts people of all kinds of ages, backgrounds and physical constitution. Everyone was interested in the very personal stories of the people.

Toolkit 3 – activation, participation and & role modification: The activation started in the very beginning with collecting the stories of the people and created a feeling of „this is our exhibition—. The visitors of the 'Berg der Erinnerungen' have not been the typical museum- visitors – people were motivated to get to this exhibition because they were either part of it or very interested in the stories and memories of people like themselves. It created a strong identification with the exhibition.

Toolkit 4 – synaesthetic translation of perspective: The different paths and the load of objects and stories in the exhibition were symbolic for the memories and how different people save and form their personal ones. The 'Schlossberg' a well-known landmark in Graz was used as a symbol for a collective memory. In the exhibition the objects of everyday life were transformed to precious exhibits by putting them in display cases and putting them in spotlight.



Toolkit 5 - Social web and interaction: The database for memories could also be accessed by the public. Memories could be shared with other visitors of the website. It was very important that the collected stories were not just prepared for the exhibition but were accessible from all over the world through a larger amount of time. To keep the exhibits accessible through the internet is a main part for the EMEE toolkit 5.

6. Bibliography:

Catalogue of the exhibition "Berg der Erinnerungen", Hrsg. von Heimo Hofgartner, Katia Schurl, Karl Stocker; Graz 2003, Kulturhauptstadt Europas, 2003

