

# Digitalizing Trauma: Virtual Re/Presentations in Central Europe

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## Abstract

The primary aim of this chapter is to comparatively analyse digital representations of trauma in Central Europe. While trauma has traditionally been understood as a radical form of insecurity describing the emotional impact of a horrendous event, recently it has been defined – instead of naturally existing – as something constructed by society. Using this notion of cultural trauma and “post-memory” as a point of departure, we are interested in how various places of trauma become reconstructed in the digital space. Within this process human agency plays a key role and, as such, we will also reveal what kind of “carrier groups” take the lead during “meaning making” and who becomes the audience of these new “framings”. Thus, our chapter has a double focus: besides elaborating on the dialectics between actual and digital placemaking activities related to certain traumas, we will also lay out the specific sociocultural processes that produce, challenge and adopt these new master narratives. After an introduction that will relate the theory of cultural trauma to the concept of post-memory, as well as to the digital turn in memory studies, our interdisciplinary team of an art historian, a media scholar and a sociologist will discuss three case studies from Koper-Capodistria (Slovenia), Belgrade (Serbia) and Budapest (Hungary). While all the cases reflect the historical event of World War II and its consequences, they represent three different modes of digit(al)ized trauma “making”. The case of Koper-Capodistria studies the formation of

various Facebook groups that mirror the post-World War II event of the “Istrian exodus”, when the Italian population got largely displaced by newcomers from Slovenia and Yugoslavia. The two sides met again only in 2016 when the history of the city got in the spotlight on a social media site, which started to function as a vessel for divergent historic narratives and collective memories between Italians and Slovenes. In contrast to the digital dialogue the social media site generated and presented about the actual urban experiences of two distinct groups in Slovenia, the Serbian and Hungarian cases aimed more at an interaction between the urban and digital sites through various tools. While the case study from Serbia encompasses four projects of digital mapping of the Holocaust (“Semlin Judenlager in Serbian Public Memory”, “Staro Sajmište: The Living Death Camp Project”, “Visit to Staro Sajmište” and “Mapping the Holocaust”), the one from Hungary discusses the USC Shoah Foundation’s mobile app, iWalk, which connects concrete physical locations with testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses. The social media site (set up in 2016), the multimedia maps (created between 2008 and 2013) and the educational app (first launched in 2013) will all be understood as digitexts where histories, digital memories and trauma narratives meet: as digital cultural traumas. We believe that through the “reading” together of these cases from Central Europe, we will not only contribute to the understanding of the potential of digital placemaking and its role in processes of remembering that are often hindered by taboos, but we will also be ourselves able to “make” place for a deeper social solidarity and well-being.

## Keywords

Central Europe – World War II – cultural trauma – digital memory – citizens’ participation

## 1 Introduction

The seminal theory of Jeffrey Alexander (2004) explains that trauma does not exist per se, but that the traumatic quality of the event is revealed and acquired later through narrative returns of the past. The recurring narrative marks the event as so “horrendous [...] that [it] leaves indelible signs” upon the nation, shaping its memories and changing its “future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2004, p. 1). An event of such magnitude can never be assimilated in memory but keeps haunting survivors and post-generations resurging rhythmically in diversely mediated and temporally structured cultural trauma. The three case studies discussed in this chapter are

identified as cultural traumas related to specific sites and events, which are narrativized by collective actors in a way so that they represent “social pain as a fundamental threat to their senses of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go” (Alexander, 2004, p. 10). Events are reconstructed as existential threats to the community – to its identity, to its nation building, to its right to remember, to preserve national history and to construct its own memory.

In this sense, a particular event can be the cause of a variety of injuries. Firstly, it can be an injury around which national history is constructed in the “course of creating national identity”. As Alexander (2004, p. 1) argued, social groups not only can “cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering” but, by recognizing the existence of the trauma of others, they can also take responsibility for it, raising the issue of solidarity to a macro level. However, by refusing to participate in what Alexander calls “the process of trauma creation” (Alexander, 2004, p. 1.), the same event – secondly – can also be an injury that cries out for acknowledgement in a symbolical sense, especially if it has not been recognized in historical or identity narratives (see, e.g., how the Holocaust was pushed to the historical limina in Tito’s Yugoslavia or how the Hungarian government displaced the responsibility for the Holocaust to the Germans through the 2014 erection of the Memorial for the Victims of German Occupation in Budapest) (Alexander, 2004, pp. 5–10).

Cultural trauma as the evocation of the past in the present is intrinsically bi-temporal: it is a narrative of “double occupancy”, set in the time of the original event and evoked in the shifting present-day context. The trauma, thus, can be relived – in the terms of LaCapra (1994) – as “acting out” or it can be “worked through” in a way that brings about a mixture with the ingredients of dream-trauma-memory-fiction: it results in a text that represents a radically disorienting and chaotic experience, as the real event must have been. The traumatic surplus is the very “something” that resists symbolization, something “real” that cannot be fully mastered or conceptualized and that resists full narrative closure. Accordingly, any reconstruction or re-enactment of the trauma prevents the closure of the trauma narrative and its assimilation into memory.

The very impossibility or the lack of closure also perpetuates the everlasting conversation of post-generations. Within this framework, traumatic memory narratives become recognized as post-memories (Hirsch, 2012) that describe the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they “remember” only by means of representations. The transmission of (traumatic) memories to the (post-)generations who have not really experienced them is done

through mediated images, stories, objects, behaviours and affects passed down within the family and the culture at large.

This gap between the event and – narrative, visual, bodily, etc. – representation is precisely what Alexander calls the “trauma process” (2004, p. 11): a process that is the focus of this chapter. Agents of this “meaning making” can be various “carrier groups” who are situated in particular social, political or cultural contexts and whose main aim is to re-signify collective identities: throughout the chapter we will present several groups who took a lead in the course of “meaning making” in Central Europe.

Using the notions of cultural trauma and post-memory as a point of departure, we are interested in their *modus operandi* in the digital field. Following the rapid progress of digital media technologies, academic interest in digital memory culture, including in social networking sites, has radically increased (e.g. Erll & Rigney, 2009; Garde-Hansen et al., 2009; Richardson & Hessey, 2009; Garde-Hansen, 2011; Ernst & Parikka, 2013; Rutten et al., 2013; Kaun & Stierstedt, 2014; Hajek et al., 2016; Hoskins, 2017; Kunt et al., 2017; Merrill et al., 2020; Zucker & Simon, 2020; Walden, 2021). Among these analyses discussing the formation and deformation of memory through digital channels, there are several authors who argue for a paradigm shift in memory studies. After Hoskins’ often cited notion of new memories (Hoskins, 2001) generated by traditional media in the broadcast era, now, in a post-broadcast age, we seem to face yet another “memory boom” (Huysen, 2003), also known as a “connective turn” (Hoskins, 2011). Hoskins argues that in the case of digital memories the moment of connection functions as a moment of memory: “Memory is not in this way a product of individual or collective remembrances but is instead generated through the flux of contacts between people and digital technologies and media” (Hoskins, 2011, p. 272).

Accordingly, our primary goal is to explore: (1) how various places of trauma reconstructed in the digital space function as the channel of memory transmission; (2) how the symbiosis of the construction of cultural trauma and digital placemaking equal practices of “meaning making”; and (3) how digital practices as such play well within contemporary participatory culture.

## 2 Cases

Within the framework of this chapter, we will discuss three case studies from Koper-Capodistria (Slovenia), Belgrade (Serbia) and Budapest (Hungary). While all the cases reflect the historical event of World War II and its consequences, they also represent three different modes of digitized trauma

“making”. The case from Slovenia studies the formation of various Facebook groups that mirror the post-World War II event of the “Istrian exodus”, which resulted in the emergence of divergent historic narratives and collective memories between Italians and Slovenes regarding “place”. At the same time, while the creation of the Facebook group raises questions about the possibility of a dialogue between two distinct groups in Slovenia, the Serbian and Hungarian cases aim for a greater interaction between urban and digital sites through various tools. While the case study from Serbia encompasses four projects of digital mapping of the Holocaust (“Semlin Judenlager in Serbian Public Memory”, “Staro Sajmište: The Living Death Camp Project”, “Visit to Staro Sajmište” and “Mapping the Holocaust”), the case study from Hungary discusses the USC Shoah Foundation’s mobile app IWalk, which connects concrete physical locations with testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses. The social media site (set up in 2016), the multimedia maps (created between 2008 and 2013) and the educational app (first launched in 2013) will be all understood as digi-texts where histories, digital memories, and trauma narratives meet as digital cultural traumas.

## 2.1 *Slovenia: Border Area Traumas Reflected in Social Media Groups*

### 2.1.1 Presentation: Istria – a Border Region with Conflicting Histories

Border regions along the Iron Curtain frequently experienced tensions in the twentieth century, which holds true also for the Istrian peninsula. As borders were redrawn and political systems shifted numerous times, the relations between the local Romance- and Slavic-language-speaking communities were deeply impacted. In 1920 the area became part of Italy, where the fascist regime exercised brutal repressive policies towards the local Slovene and Croat communities. After 1947 the situation shifted: Istria became part of Yugoslavia, with Italians becoming a minority in a socialist Slavic-speaking state. This resulted in a massive emigration wave of Italians from Istria to Italy, also known as the Istrian exodus. The result was a complete shift in the ethno-linguistic composition of the seaside historic towns, where the vacant homes of the fled “*esuli*” (meaning “the exiled”) were soon nationalized and settled with Slovenes and Croatians from near and far. The remaining Italians became a very small ethnic minority.

The exodus especially affected Koper/Capodistria, which was chosen to become Slovenia’s main harbour and regional industrial centre. The result is a disconnection between the meanings imbued in the historic urban fabric and the collective memories of the novel inhabitants, which was sourced from completely different places and social contexts. While the new inhabitants carried the trauma caused by Italian fascist violence, the *esuli* (many of them

settled in nearby Trieste) hold the trauma of the exodus. The Italian minority, confronted with an environment where the official narrative conflicted with their collective memory, turned to silence, often refusing to speak about their memories publicly. The resulting conflicting historical narratives and traumatic collective memories are strongly present in the local communities and afflict the inter-ethnic and cross-border relations until this very day (Hrobat Virloget, 2021; Ballinger, 2002).

2.1.2 Placemaking: Historical Traumas Emerging in Social Media Groups  
Facebook has emerged as one of the most widely used, accessible and versatile digital tools. The social network allows for various types of interactions, where public groups centre around certain topics that have become increasingly popular. In the last few years, the Slovene Facebook community has seen the growing numbers of city-centred history groups, where local communities gather to share historic images of their town with related information. This was also the case with Koper/Capodistria, the main urban centre of Slovene Istria. In 2016 the group “Koper, kot je bil nekoč – Capodistria com’era una volta” (“Koper, as it once was”) was founded by some members of the local Italian minority. The rules of the group emphasize respectful and tolerant dialogue, while the membership is open to everyone free of discrimination. All the rules and texts are bilingual, as is the title. This resulted in an ethnically mixed membership composition, with the Slovene and Italian languages (and their dialects) used interchangeably in posts and comments. The group welcomes members who were former inhabitants of the town (including the *esuli*), as well as current inhabitants, whether they be Slovene, Italian or members of other ethnicities.

Over the years the group formed a thriving community of contributors of pictures and related content, allowing people to collectively recall past events, places and people, to dive into nostalgia and to engage with current issues about cultural heritage. It has thus become a medium of cross-community (re) construction of digital memories about urban space. However, some of the posts also sparked conflicts. One of the most extreme heated debates occurred in January of 2020 and was related to political views about the Istrian exodus. The related post was deleted, and the initial author responded by creating his own history group, called “Koper embot – Koper nekoč” (“Koper back in the days”, expressing the Slovene Istrian dialect and Slovene). The content in this group often reinforces the official Slovene/Yugoslav historic narrative, which considers the Istrian exodus a voluntary choice and portrays Slovenes as victims of fascism while holding no responsibility for the exodus itself. (These views are being challenged by contemporary research [e.g., Hrobat, 2021].) The Italian perspective on the matter is generally overlooked, while their historic narrative is dismissed as questionable and arrogant. The breakaway Facebook

group can be considered as a consequence of Slovene cultural trauma persisting in post-generations.

### 2.1.3 Results and Added Value

City-centred history Facebook groups function as digital platforms where urban knowledge can be created and shared. However, it is important to note, that where separate ethnic communities share or relate the same urban environment, conflicting historical narratives and traumas could manifest. Such Facebook groups can either help ease communication processes between diverse communities or lead to escalation of conflict, thereby further complicating inter-ethnic relations. This ambiguous role suggests that social media might not be the best platform to address historic traumas. Also, as the searching and archiving functions are poor, valuable contents are hard to trace after some time.

## 2.2 *Belgrade (Serbia): Digital Maps of a Lieu de Trauma*

### 2.2.1 Presentation: The Old Fairground as “Lieu de Trauma”

The Old Fairground (Staro sajmište) in Belgrade is one of the most traumatic national *lieu de memoire, de trauma* and *d'histoire* that still has not been officially marked and memorialized. In 1936, the Belgrade city council donated 363,000 m<sup>2</sup> of land on the previously uninhabited left bank of the Sava River to a group of businessmen, entrepreneurs and investors for the construction of a fairground that would become the emblem of the new state turning toward Europeanization, progress and modernization. By the time of the ceremonial opening on September 11, 1937, the central tower, the five “Yugoslav pavilions”, the Italian, Hungarian, Romanian, Czechoslovakian pavilions and Nikola Spasic’s pavilion were finished. Until the beginning of World War II, German and Turkish pavilions were also added to the symbolic landscape of the area. On 23 October 1941 it was decided that the pavilions would become the barracks of the Judenlager Semlin, a Holocaust site and the largest German-run concentration camp in south-eastern Europe (Byford, 2011). After World War II, the damaged and partially devastated complex continued to be used for various purposes. The history or timeline of the site is divided into several nodes that look to the World War II era as the key point in relation to which ethically, memory-wise, narratively, emotionally, all others are identified. Jovan Byford (2011) proposes systematic recognition of several periods: The Old Fairground (1937–1941); Judenlager Semlin (1941–1942); Anhalterlager Semlin (1942–1944); from the HQ of youth brigades to artistic colony (1948–1960); first steps toward memorialization (1957–1974); the Old Fairground as an anti-fascist monument (1984–1990); from a place of mass execution to a symbol of Serbian martyrdom: Serbian Yad Vashem (present).

### 2.2.2 Placemaking: Digit(al)ization of Trauma through Maps

In contrast to the plans for the actual memorialization that exist only on paper and in legal documents, the Old Fairground has already been digitally remade and memorialized several times. The formats of digital memorialization are discernible as simple websites/digitizations and more complex and interactive digital platforms/repositories/digitalizations. Two minimalist websites – “Semlin Judenlager in Serbian Public Memory” (Byford, 2008) linked to a British Academy-funded research project and maintained by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Open University, and “Staro Sajmište: The Living Death Camp Project”, created by the Centre of Archaeology of the Staffordshire University (Centre of Archaeology, n.d.) – are conceptualized as “analogous” books or texts converted to digital ones: as digitized materials (photos, maps, texts) organized under convenient headings without any real freedom for “ergodic reading” or individual moving among the segments. Two others have more complex formats and function as digital platforms or repositories: they are the products of the digitalization conceptualized after the emergence of new media and digital paradigms. “Visit to Staro Sajmište” (2009, produced in the frame of Fond B92 and supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation) welcomes visitors to stroll through a virtual map, both in time and space, and to create stories as well as to discover previously hidden or unaccounted narratives involving Holocaust histories and testimonials, Jewish identity, the past of Belgrade and the Balkans, and other memory narratives (as well as narratives of forgetting and oblivion). It allows the political narrativization of the present and ideological imagining of the future. By offering an extended timeline of the place for the period from 1937 to 2009 and by hinting at the future, the platform flattens the linear historicization by projecting it onto a map of the space. “Living Death Camp: The Archaeology of Staro Sajmište” (Forensic-architecture.org, 2013) is part of the work of the multidisciplinary research group Forensic Architecture based at Goldsmiths (University of London), dedicated to the production and presentation of architectural evidence within legal and political processes. In partnership with institutions across civil society (from grassroots activists to Amnesty International), it investigates human rights violations, including violence committed by states, police forces, armies and corporations. Among the multiple systematized case studies in which Semlin Judenlager is presented through GPR shots, the film documents the research of the site *Inverted Horizon* and the report that “sought to unpack the history of the site as a process of ongoing transformation”. Searching for historical and material continuities as well as ruptures, it argues that “all layers of the site, including and in particular those composed of its recent and present daily use, are regarded as archaeologically significant” (Forensic-architecture.org, 2013). Further, they provide the basis for making the strategy and concepts of memorialization. Both platforms are



dynamic, interactive, developing and offering plenty of chances for their own ergodic reading and hyperlinking.

### 2.2.3 Results and Added Value

All four cases of digital memoryscape are spaces of digital memory making, knowledge production and sharing, but only two platforms/repositories figure as tools for “true” digital placemaking of the memory and trauma spots. Nevertheless, the two digital platforms as places where online groups coalesce also present a challenge whether the online groups can stay alive, active and survive offline. Can the digital community function in real space and can the aggregation, production and sharing of knowledge become an impetus for real actions that effectuate change?

## 2.3 *Budapest (Hungary): A mobile Application of Historical Trauma*

### 2.3.1 Presentation: A mobile Application “Unlocking a Window” into Historical Traumas

IWalk is a mobile application of the USC Shoah Foundation that – as the description in the PlayStore says – “unlocks a new window into our past”. Visitors and students at authentic sites of history and memorials can discover curated IWalks – tours that connect specific locations of memory and memorialization with testimonies from survivors and witnesses of genocide, violence and mass atrocity. With the cooperation of local organizations, IWalks were (and still are) created for various cities in several countries, among which Central European cities dominate (Czech Republic, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, United States). Here, we will pay attention to IWalks available for Budapest in Hungary, where a Hungarian non-profit organization, the Zachor Foundation for Social Remembrance, took a major role in producing, organizing and teaching the know-hows of thematic walks.

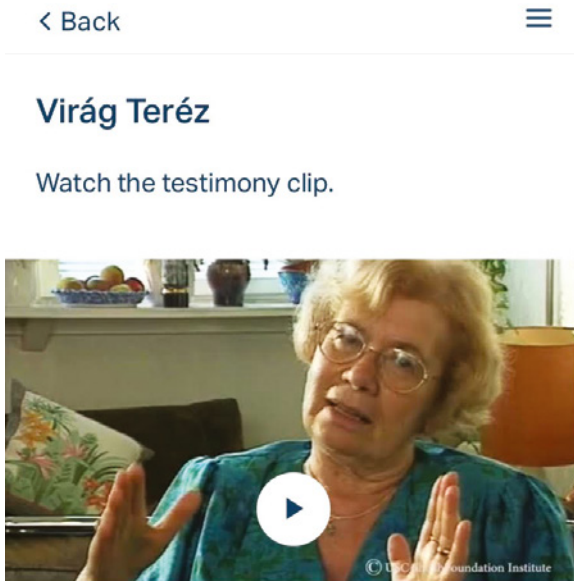
Within the context of Hungary – where memory of the Holocaust still functions as a locus of various political, social and cultural stances for denying responsibility over the happenings of World War II – IWalk has an extra high stake: as a pedagogical resource it indeed has a potential of spreading knowledge about the Holocaust, but also advocating tolerance and acceptance: the conditions of a secure life.

### 2.3.2 Placemaking: “Digital Flaneurs” Re-signify Traumas

IWalks – which focus on authentic historical sites related to the Holocaust – are primarily orchestrated by curators who, besides designing the route of the walks, select the exact reminiscences of the past, that is, they carefully insert excerpts of video testimonies, photographs and documents into the app. Within this process, witnesses become summoned whose absent presences

become present absences: we never hear their whole testimonies, only edited versions of their narration (See Fig. 16.1). At the same time, ultimately, it will be the user who – with the help of the curator and the witness – performs practices of meaning construction.

IWalks in Budapest are either focusing on larger neighbourhoods (such as the Jewish Quarter or the 14th District) or specific locations (such as the Jewish Local History Collection of Elizabethtown, the Glass House, the Shoes



Teréz Virág was born on October 8, 1930 in Budapest, Hungary. As a child, she was taken to a yellow star house with her family. She was taken to the Budapest ghetto, where she was liberated in January 1945. After the war she studied psychology. As a psychoanalyst, she studied transgenerational trauma and found that second and third generation survivors of trauma inherit repressed trauma. She founded a psychotherapy clinic called KÚT.

FIGURE 16.1 Screenshot of the App IWalk showing the Testimony Clip of Teréz Virág  
PHOTO: JÚLIA SZÉKELY, 2023

Memorial on the Danube Bank and Memento Park). In each case, the aim is to establish various kinds of connections.

This aim is already evident by opening IWalk: users not only become immediately presented with a map that pinpoints the exact stations of the specific urban walk, but, ideally, they are already standing at that very physical location (See Fig. 16.2). This mingling of the actual and digital places or the blurring of reality and representation becomes further emphasized by the parallel act of

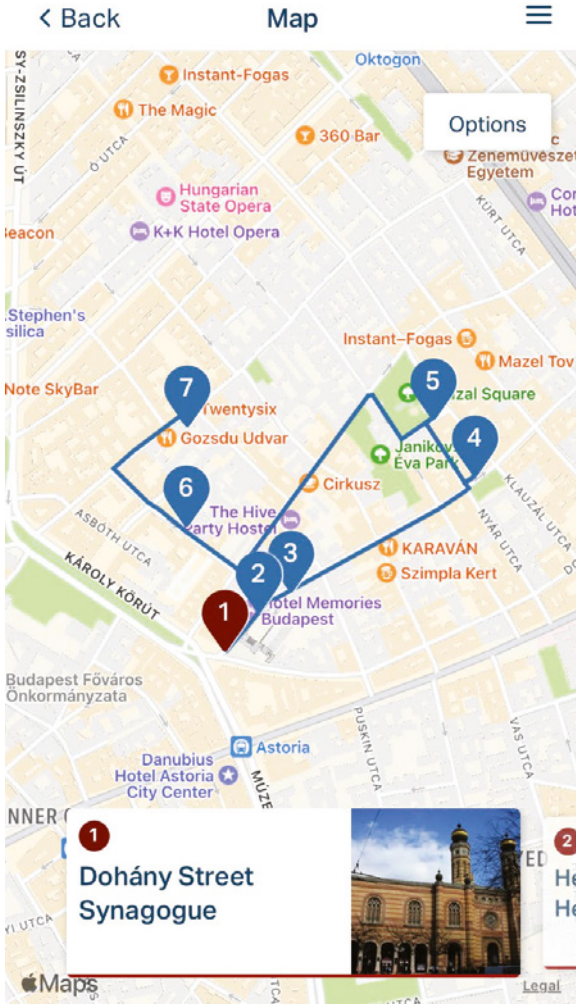


FIGURE 16.2 Screenshot of the App IWalk showing the Map of the Jewish Quarter Walk in Budapest  
PHOTO: JÚLIA SZÉKELY, 2023

walking through the present-day conditions of certain sites and experiencing stories and images from the past.

Michel de Certeau (1998) argued that “walking in the city” can be understood as a way of operating that constitutes “the innumerable practices by means of which users re-appropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production” (De Certeau, 1998, p. xiv). Walking – similarly to the verbal and visual memories represented in the app – re-appropriates, re-signifies spaces, and makes them places.

This continuous process of reinterpretation is also echoed in the questions built in the app that target one’s changing perception of a place. Questions often inquire about first impressions of a historic location, which then recur, asking for second opinions after a short excerpt from a video testimony (e.g. in the case of the Glass House).

Within these specific spatio-temporal settings, everyday geographical realities, such as the Danube in Budapest, become reconstructed as heavily loaded signs of historical, social, cultural and – finally – emotional processes. Feelings of security and insecurity are not only thematized by the interviewees (several witnesses talk about their feelings of insecurity during the Holocaust or their anxieties about revisiting certain sites, such as the river or a building after World War II), but users (who can also be labelled as post-generations) are also asked to reflect on notions, such as fear, threat, heroism or protest. The city becomes rewritten as a place, in which it becomes evident that one’s well-being is not only dependent on taking responsibilities for ourselves, but for each other as well.

### 2.3.3 Results and Added Value

IWalk “unlocks a new window into our past”, which has a double meaning: it indeed opens a new window on our phones, but it also reveals memories suppressed by the present layers of urban architectures or socio-political unwillingness to remember. Users as digital flâneurs (Sonnevend, 2009, pp. 29–31) stroll the city and conduct excavations. Nevertheless: will these users – who are primarily high school students – be able to change the course of remembering in cities like Budapest?

## 3 Discussion on Outcomes and Results

While our cases from Koper-Capodistria (Slovenia), Belgrade (Serbia) and Budapest (Hungary) all reflected the historical event of World War II and its consequences, there were significant differences in the subject of traumatic experiences, especially regarding the Sloven case, on the one hand, and the

Serb and Hungarian, on the other. The case study from Koper-Capodistria elaborated on the post-World War II event of the Istrian exodus that functions as a breaking point in the historic narrative and collective memory of Italians and Slovenes. In contrast to this event, which can primarily be understood as a catalyst of divergent narratives and memories between two groups, the case studies from Belgrade and Budapest concentrated on the historical event of the Holocaust and its invisibility in the actual urban space. Despite these differences in the focus of trauma, in all cases the historical events have a rather ambivalent position in the state narratives, that is, they are either the subjects of heated debates or simply suppressed. As a logical consequence, all three projects discussed here were initiated by private individuals, representatives of civil society or grassroots organizations.

These carrier groups of the “trauma process” were all engaged in digital practices. Our cases – which we consciously selected along the lines of representing a variety of strategies in digital “trauma making” – focused on several digital platforms in Slovenia, Serbia and Hungary that also reinforced a renewed relationship between the witness and the user.

In her book *The Era of the Witness*, Annette Wieviorka (2006) discusses how the social figure of the witness emerged as an influential actor in contemporary culture. Focusing on the memory of the Holocaust, she argues that from the 1970s we have reached a phase that not only marks the establishment of the authority of the witness, but also its now privileged position in understanding history. At the same time, re-examining Wieviorka’s work, Susan Hogervorst (2020) urges us to re-evaluate the role of testimonies and to consider the effects of the digital age. She argues that the development of new technologies brought about a new approach to testimonies, in which, instead of the witness, the user becomes foregrounded. This process – through which *The Era of the User* (Hogervorst, 2020) surpasses *The Era of the Witness* (Wieviorka, 2006) – can very well be illustrated by the various projects of the USC Shoah Foundation: the route from the Visual History Archive (which contains c. 55,000 video interviews with eyewitnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides) to the IWitness (which is an educational platform providing students access to numerous testimonies for guided exploration) unambiguously describes the growing emphasis on the “I”.

Although in all cases private recollections or testimonies played an important role in the reconstruction of historical trauma, the position of users in this process is somewhat different. The case study from Slovenia focused on the formation of various Facebook groups (“Koper, kot je bil nekoč – Capodistria com’era una volta” and “Koper embot – Koper nekoč”) that allowed a lot of engagement in the sharing and discussing of personal memories, ultimately also merging the role of the witness and the user. The Serbian case study

encompassed four projects of digital mapping of the Holocaust (“Semlin Judenlager in Serbian Public Memory”, “Staro Sajmište: The Living Death Camp Project”, “Visit to Staro Sajmište” and “Mapping the Holocaust”) showing essential differences in the creation of digital platforms that regarded users either as passive consumers of information or as active actors of meaning making. The case study from Hungary discussed an interactive and educational mobile app (iWalk) that shed light on how users can perform processes of reconstructions through the simultaneous act of walking in the physical and digital place where they encountered various testimonies, documents and archival images.

In this sense, our cases also showed that digital platforms can have a huge difference in terms of (non-)interactivity. As the Serbian case study underlines: interactive and digitalized platforms or repositories – in contrast to non-interactive but digitized websites – can enable the extraction of multiple narratives according to the choices of readers/users, their wishes and their previous knowledge. Due to the options of interactivity the number of users that access the platform coalesce into “collective readers”, or into – as Pierre Levy (1997) noted – “collective intelligence” that indicates the specific result of the impact of internet technologies on the cultural production and consumption of knowledge. One of the key characteristics of collective intelligences/collective readers or the community of knowledge is that they can be very quick and effective in gathering, sharing information and coming to decisions/consensus. The developing conversation and dialogue among them and the digital text allows the community to overgrow the earlier established joint cumulative level of knowledge as well as to enhance its own authority. Collective readers as knowledge and interest communities come to hold tremendous power for addressing social issues. In their habitat and ecosystem on the internet, they can fully and smoothly realize potentials of their contributable knowledge. But what are the interests and abilities of those communities for social action offline, in their own physical surroundings?

Within the framework of the Facebook group, the digital map and mobile app, histories, digital memories and trauma narratives were mingling from the past and the present reinterpreting places of traumas in the urban space out of which digital cultural traumas indeed emerged. However, while the case study in Slovenia raised questions about the possibility of a dialogue between two alienated groups, the case studies from Serbia and Hungary pose the dilemma of how “digital flaneurs” can bring about changes in the actual memory landscape of cities.

Summarizing the results of the three cases, we argue the following:

- All the cases showed that digital tools are – even if to various extents – effective in helping to reconstruct the past of places that has been erased or forgotten.

- In all three cases we can see the evidence that all “layers of memory” should be considered, and that perhaps digital tools are the most effective in presenting them.
- All three cases emphasize one of the basics of placemaking – that engaging with public space can be and should be a bottom-up process.
- Public engagement and the creation of collective readers aided with digital tools can help reshape the memory landscape in a way that promotes pluralistic and tolerant ways of remembering.
- The development of advanced hybrid digital tools theoretically could generate – beside a centripetal force responsible for the creation of collective intelligences online – complementary centrifugal forces capable of converting the collective intelligence online into the communities of intelligible and expert action offline (Daković & Uspenski, 2014).

#### 4 Lessons Learned

As we have seen, collective memory (traumatic and non-traumatic) is inescapably connected with the physical (urban) space. Narrative reconstructions add layers of meaning to these spaces, with which they can become part of the process of collective remembering and transforming into places which carry social and cultural meaning for post-generations too. This very process, which was also described by the theoretician of collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs (1992), means that memory is one of the main forms of “urban knowledge” that should be respected and/or could be exploited for the purpose of placemaking activities. As the three presented cases show, digital tools could play a significant role in reconstructing past places in the current physical urban space. However, they should not be seen as a panacea in aiding the process of remembering or in addressing cultural traumas linked to urban places, as their mode of functioning is dependent on several different variables.

A glimpse of those can be seen just by comparing the tools used in the three presented cases, which obviously differ in the dynamics and directions of information flows, in the capacity to effectively store, organize and disseminate knowledge and in size and structure of the target group they can effectively address. The Hungarian and Serbian cases show the effectiveness of targeted web pages and mobile applications made for the exact purpose of reconstruction of the urban past through remembering; however, they function mostly as one-way channels of communication from the witnesses to the users. Among the digital surfaces, mobile applications seemed superior to websites in the ability to deliver information-related experiences directly in the physical space, which activates the user by walking and thus symbolically re-creating

the personal inner image of the explored space in the meantime. Social media on the other side can reach a much wider public than targeted web pages and mobile applications and can make the wider public actively participate; however, they lack organization, focus and curatorial insight, which could turn out to be a crucial element in topics related to cultural trauma, where delicate and fragile social relations and complex discourses intertwined with conflicting historical narratives are at play. Social media groups, which often lack clear rules and active moderation, could thus do more harm than good where cultural trauma is involved. Further research and experimenting with digital tools are needed to determine the clear pros and cons of various digital tools for various processes involving collective memories linked to urban places and possibly such collective memories that contain elements of cultural trauma.

To sum up, the main differences between the presented tools are in the following points:

- Curation and moderation: Selection of content and moderation of dialogue and discussions (important if we aim not to escalate traumas and ensure empathic communication)
- Archiving: Efficient storage and organization of information with the capacity to find it in case of need
- Interactivity/communication flows: one direction of communication (monologue) or both directions (dialogue), or in other words, the level of interactivity (user activation) that is possible to achieve
- Target groups and outreach: which groups do the digital tools address and how large can they be

## 5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have focused on how various places of trauma become reconstructed in the digital space, primarily in the context of Central Europe. All our case studies from Slovenia, Serbia and Hungary reflected the historical event of World War II and its consequences: they elaborated on events that were claimed to be cultural traumas and that were mediated by various representations into the present, where previously they manifested in ambiguous, conflicting or non-existent historic narratives related to urban spaces. As such, the primary actors of these digital meaning making processes – instead of the state – have been private individuals, representatives of civil society or grassroots organizations: cultural traumas emerged in a bottom-up process.

We also presented how they translated in digital placemaking activities or digital urban knowledge creation through the utilization of divergent digital tools, such as social media, websites and a mobile app. Although the



discussion of the memory of World War II, especially the Holocaust, in the “Instagram era” has a growing reception in the field (see e.g. the discussion of Eva.stories from 2020 by Tirosh, 2020, or Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2020), our aim was to focus on the similarities and differences of the *modus operandi* of various digital placemaking activities within particular socio-political contexts where the state representation of these events can be regarded as rather problematic. Obviously, the various forms of digital media can simultaneously be present in one “place” too. For example, besides the mobile app, the events of World War II in Hungary are also represented in websites (e.g., “Yellow Star Houses”, 2014) and social media (e.g. “A Holokauszt és a családom”, 2014). As such, our selection of cases did not focus on the differences in the memory politics between the various countries, but rather on the pros and cons of digital representations that continue to be active to the present day. Certainly, digital representations are growing everywhere and are open to approaches that include AR and VR material – however, they do not always “make it” to the public. For example, in Belgrade the project “Memory of Crises/Crises of Memory: Belgrade 1920–2020”, created by the team of the Belgrade Faculty of Dramatic Arts (under the leadership of Prof. Nevena Dakovic), was rejected by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

The digital tools from our three cases mostly differed in terms of extent of curation and moderation, quality of archiving information, level of interactivity and size and structure of target groups. Based on all these characteristics, we have argued that tailor-made applications and platforms might be the best medium in the field of collective traumas, as they allow higher levels of interactivity and outreach blended with the possibility of quality curation and archiving approaches. These are not only important because of creating “collective readers” that precisely emphasize the potentials of digital platforms in terms of reinventing cultural production and consumption of knowledge by (post-)generations, but also because careful collective cultural traumas are imbued with traumatic emotions and complex discourses and narratives, that need to be dealt with attention and empathy.

Finally, our cases underline the importance of considering the complexity of memory narratives attached to places while planning their future transformations. The layers of meaning created by different collectivities in the urban space are one of the active features that shape the relationship between a community and the space inhabited, a relationship that must be thoroughly explored during placemaking activities that aim to empower a certain community in the shaping of its living environment. When cultural trauma comes into play, the avoidance of this consideration could further escalate social conflicts arising from the traumatic memories, conflicts that could translate into social conflicts related to transformations of the physical space in the present.

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