Holocaust Wagon-exhibition Project

The aim of the Holocaust Wagon-exhibition Project is to acquaint young people with the historic facts of the Holocaust, and contribute this way to the development of their tolerance. They receive a positive example during the exhibition through real life stories, in order to remain human within any circumstances. The main message of the project is that hatred, anger, revenge and violence can never be a solution. All in all the Wagon-exhibition is a museum-pedagogical project that promotes humanism and tolerance.

About myself

I deal with Holocaust and tolerance education for many years now. We have visited many Holocaust survivors with my students and we have recorded their memories. We also received original family pictures from them. **I believe that historical facts of the Holocaust are most effectively taught through personal life stories-oral history.** I experience a great interest from the youngsters this way, they ask many questions. I also think that there's a huge gap regarding this information in our educational system. I have also witnessed, that teachers, educators welcome these initiatives because of the sensitivity of the topic.

The installation

I was contacted by university students in 2004 because they wanted to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. We have contacted MÁV Company, which rented us a period cattle-wagon that was used for the deportations during the war in order to create the installation. I have made research in the Hungarian Historical Museum and the Institution and Museum of War History. I have looked up relevant exhibition materials such as period artefacts, picture documentation and other resources. Finally I have selected 25 pictures to be displayed within the exhibition we have also gained some period suitcases and military uniforms. I have received period sound recordings of trains and other noises from the Museum of Traffic.

The installation was set by a group of volunteers: students, university students and I. In order to reach the maximum effect within a very limited space I have decided to build the exhibition on a personal story of Mr. Sándor Scwarz, a Holocaust survivor. I have personally known Mr. Schwarz from Debrecen, and I believed that his life story was the best for these tasks, because it would deeply touch youngsters, provoke them to think and teach them about humanity. Before his death Mr. Schwarz handled written materials and photographs about his life and he told me everything, so I know his life well.

His message is about being a human even in the most savage circumstances. This makes children think, grips their attention and make to change many of their opinions and misunderstandings. Sándor Schwarz as a young football-player from Debrecen survived 4 years of forced labour and he was deported from the Debrecen brick factory on June 29, 1944. After a year of suffering he was liberated on May 2, 1945. by an African-American army division in the Bavarian Mühldorf pine forest.

Students participate in a time-travel in the wagon, by seeing the history through his eyes to be rejected and survive. They can follow the story of the young man and see how it was when he was an equal member of the Hungarian society he had a family, a home, when he was a patriot of his country. From here they can see as history shifted, and forced labour, ghettos and at last deportations started. And last – but not least they can witness the survival of the man without vindication, hatred, or aim to revenge.

The basis of the installation contains of **25 pictures following the time order of the events of the war**. In order to enhance the experience we display period artefacts as well, such as military uniforms and suitcases, and we also use period sound effects.

The footprints on the ground represent the people who have been forced into a wagon. We have painted different-sized footprints representing all age groups that were affected. We could fit in 76 pairs of footprints, although 60 to 100 people were reported to be pushed in into these wagons at a time. At the

end of each visit we step on a footprint with the visitors and remember the victims of the era.

The children have also selected and painted **citations from the poet Miklós Radnóti**, on the wall under the pictures forming a shaky line, an iconic personality of the Holocaust in Hungary. Miklós Radnóti was a Hungarian poet and translator, who were considered one of the most important 20th-century poets of his country. Radnóti was killed at the age of thirty-five during World War II on a forced march towards Germany. After the war Radnóti's last poems, written in a notebook during the march, were discovered from the mass grave in which he was buried. We have used citations from his entire career, supporting the life story that is followed during the exhibition.

First steps

At the end of 2004 the Hungarian railway company, MÁV wanted to cast off the wagon that we have rented. I wanted to keep the project running and travel with it around the country, so I wanted to find a solution for buying the wagon. I have started negotiations with MÁV and asked for a reprieve. In 2005 I was looking for sponsors and organised a one month exhibition in Budapest at the Eastern Railway Station on the 10th platform. We were accepting visitors for free with volunteering university students.

Thanks to this project I have met with the March of the Living Hungary Foundation (MOTLH). Principles of my project corresponded with the aims of the Foundation, so MOTLH undertook the management of the Wagon-exhibition Project and I have joined the Foundation as a volunteer. With the lobbying of MOTLH we have received the wagon as a donation from MÁV. We also managed to secure the support of the Tiszavas Railcar Repair Company in Miskolc which carried all the necessary reparations on the wagon and prepared for the technical licensing. They have also reconstructed the exterior of our wagon period-style, with brown paintwork and period signs. After the reconstruction it has received an eight-year license which enables it to participate in the railway traffic.

Organisational work; maintenance

Since the project joined the MOTLH, and we have received the ownership of the wagon the biggest tasks are the organisational matters in order to provide continuous exhibition of the project. Since our main target group is the group of students, we adjust our schedule to the school year.

First of all we have to make sure that the lines are free on the way to our destination cities and that we have a line-permission to move the wagon (which is out of service). In every 6 months term we handle the list of cities where we would like to take the wagon to MÁV. They prepare a line-plan and handle it to MÁV Cargo, which makes sure that the wagon gets to its destination two days before the exhibition.

Before the exhibition, representatives of MOTLH contact the mayor and other leaders of the destination city, and they organise the opening event and a press-conference for the exhibition. The exhibition is launched by the local mayor at every site. We also contact the local educational and cultural institutions, and we also look for local volunteers. We are proud that we have received positive reception and a lot of volunteer help in every city we have been to. In the last four years the project has been also reported in most of the Hungarian national media and all local media, the numbers of media appearances of the project are countless.

We stay one week in each city, in bigger cities, like Szeged we stay for two weeks. Usually all educational institutions visit the exhibition with their students, and take part within the unconventional history-class as a part of the mandatory Holocaust-education.

During winter-time and out of season we park the wagon at the Tiszavas Railcar Repair Company in Miskolc in order to conserve it. There they support us also with the mandatory annual technical check-up and the necessary reparations.

Exhibitions

The project started in 2004 and it has been to Debrecen, Kecskemét and Budapest in the first year. In the first year we won an application so we could finance the rental fees of the wagon and other expenses such as paint and other preps.

Since April 1, 2007 our aim is to take the wagon to every Hungarian city, since then 77 813 students have visited it in 35 cities, and participated in the unconventional history class. We continuously travel around the country with the exhibition. The project is run by volunteers. Our volunteers are students, teachers and other people who find it important. We are proud that the project is not just a special exhibition, but also an excellent example of solidarity.

Until April 1, 2015 we bear a renewable technical license, which enables us to move around with the wagon. Until then it can participate in railway traffic all over the country. We may also validate it for international travel, which would enable us to move the exhibition to Hungarian territories outside the border as well.

Annual budget

The project runs on a minimal budget, because we try to manage it on a voluntary basis. We highly rely on donations and in-kind contribution, so most of the costs listed below are estimated. The actual costs are undertaken by MOTLH, covered from grants and donations.

With the support of MÁV and MÁV Cargo the major expenses of the project, appearing as actual costs are the accommodation, travel and telephone costs related to the project. During a year the wagon visits ten cities in average, which means that my **travel costs** reach up to HUF 80 000 (EUR 300). Another important yearly cost is my **accommodation** in each city, what reaches about HUF 250 000 (EUR 920). Luckily, it has happened in some cities that I could organise my stay at friends or acquaintances for free. It also happened that the Hotel owner did not let me to pay for my bill. Last but not least another actual cost group is the communication costs: telephone and postal charges that are the highest in the project due to the extensive organisational work. **Communication costs** reach up to HUF 600 000 (EUR 2200)

I estimate the in-kind contribution of MÁV and MÁV Cargo, that covers **transportation of the wagon**, **route planning** and **management** costing between HUF 800 000 to 1 million per annum (EUR 2940 to 3670). The **renovation** and **technical licensing** of the wagon was also a meaningful contribution, about HUF 1.5 million (EUR 5500). Last but not least **annual service and storage** of the wagon is also a high cost, that we receive as an kind contribution. The costs of it reach up to HUF 600 000 (EUR 2200) per annum according to our estimates.

Message of our project

This extraordinary exhibition displays the full history of the Hungarian Holocaust. In a limited space it is capable of exercising a great impact on the visitors due to its density and authenticity.

We would like to teach young people by the project to **not to be neglectful** towards their society. They, as individuals are members of the society so the future of Hungary also depends on them. We encourage them to think on their own and dare to form their own opinions. They should be open and should be tolerant towards other people of different religions, ethnicity, and so on. We would also like to drive their attention towards the dangers of extremity, which led Hungary to tragedy before and threatens our society today.

If our aim is to better our country and we want the terror of the Holocaust not to happen again we have to start with the **education of the young generation**. This is a long process, and surely it does not have an immediate effect, but it is the responsibility of all of us to do it. We have to talk about because it has happened and the only way to prevent it from happening again is education and information exchange. Therefore it is important that the young generation gets an authentic picture of the events of the war and the Holocaust, and by knowing the historical facts they may learn from the mistakes of the past.