

Memory and Education: Innovative Approaches at Sites of Conscience  
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*“Sometimes one sees it as something that already happened, that is far away as history and that’s it. But being there, one sees that there are people that are still involved because their children are still missing and they seek the remains....it makes me reflect more and put myself in the place of those families.”*

***-Student who visited Villa Grimaldi Peace Park***

Villa Grimaldi Peace Park is located in the former Chilean dictatorship’s principle center for detention, torture, and extermination. Once a wealthy family’s estate, Villa Grimaldi was destroyed as the end of the military dictatorship approached. Determined to preserve the site and remember the events that transpired there, a group of survivors of Villa Grimaldi decided to create a peace park on the site, including a number of symbolic memorials that evoked the experiences of victims. Today, Villa Grimaldi organizes tours of the site for students led by survivors, allowing them to hear first-hand accounts of what happened there. However, despite being a powerful and evocative site, Villa Grimaldi recognized that in order to inspire new civic action it would need to create programs that help identify and address the issues that are most relevant to young people today.

One of the most devastating legacies of the dictatorship for young people is an impoverished culture of activism, as youth who organized against the Pinochet regime were disappeared, tortured, detained, and killed. Villa Grimaldi’s core programs have been dedicated to education, and in particular youth education. One key program draws on successful examples of youth activism to help young people design a project they can implement in school to address the issues they have identified as most critical for them. Villa Grimaldi worked with teachers and students to identify the most pressing concerns in the classroom today: a culture of violence, labeling, and exclusion, expressed in bullying of immigrants and indigenous people that is one of the strongest residues of state terrorism. Based on this perspective, Villa Grimaldi staff developed new tours of the site that move away from the exchange of memories among survivors, and draw more direct connections between the history of the site and the challenges young people now face. Villa Grimaldi’s educators believe that the site must be appropriated by different generations for different reasons if the goal of “Never Again” is to be reached.

Memory, both individual and collective, is all around us. Despite a universal interest in and urge to preserve memory, it is rarely activated to promote civic engagement with contemporary issues, pushing the public to fully engage with the consequences of the past. This is the hallmark of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a network of over 200 museums and historic sites. Sites of Conscience recognize that the power of sites of memory is not inherent; it must be harnessed in the service of promoting civic action and building cultures of peace and respect for human rights and social justice. The Coalition was founded in 1999 by nine historic sites and museums from around the world that came together to consider and rethink the role of the historic site in contemporary society.

In their mission to promote civic engagement and inspire visitors to build a better future based on a culture of human rights, Sites of Conscience put education at the core of their programs.

Memory, particularly as activated through the power of a historic site or place, offers a unique opportunity for youth and adult education because it is applicable to any history and universally accessible.

Like the histories they address, the methods by which Sites of Conscience approach education are diverse. Sites of Conscience are called on to connect with diverse audiences such as school children, youth, and adults, as well as victims and former perpetrators. This diversity of audiences entails a diversity of interactions with the public as well as methods to address the past. Sites of Conscience also work at different stages of memorialization, both early on in the documentation and collection testimonies of the past, as well as providing an arena for sharing these stories with the public later on. The cases that we will touch upon in this article will illustrate these different processes and demonstrate how Sites of Conscience can act as powerful ground for meaningful educational programs. These cases further demonstrate the importance of the educational component to the task of memorialization. We have chosen cases that represent the regional and methodological diversity of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. Body mapping, used by Kenyan Site of Conscience Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health, is a novel psychosocial approach to collect stories from survivors and activate their testimonies; facilitated dialogue, used at American Site of Conscience Museo Urbano, invites the public to engage more fully with the history displayed at a site and empowers the visitor to act as they emerge from the museum space; and intergenerational dialogue at Cambodian Site of Conscience Youth for Peace fosters communication between generations that leads to more profound understanding of the past and opens avenues for reconciliation and peacebuilding.

#### WHAT IS A SITE OF CONSCIENCE?

Sites of Conscience are places of memory—museums, historic sites, memorials, and memory initiatives—that:

- Interpret history through place
- Engage in programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues
- Promote humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function
- Share opportunities for public involvement in issues raised at the site

#### Educating through the Arts

[Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health](#) (TICAH) is a Kenyan organization created in 2003 that uses indigenous culture and traditional rituals to broach contemporary issues of health and sexuality, ethnic tensions, and communal violence as well as past state violence. Among the different methodologies used by TICAH, body mapping is a particularly effective and holistic one. Body mapping is a group art therapy exercise in which individuals create life-size portraits that illustrate their life experiences. It enables individuals to narrate their own story, including their physical and emotional traumas, their systems of support, and their hopes and aspirations.

This psychosocial method was developed out of the Memory Box Project in 2002 in South Africa that sought to help HIV/AIDS patients to prepare for their passing by creating a timekeeper, a depository of memory for their families. Body maps stemmed out of this process, to address the stigmas faced by HIV/AIDS victims and acknowledge their illness not simply through its physical manifestations but also as a way of representing the mental suffering linked

to the illness. Beyond being a powerful tool for self-reflection and psychosocial relief, body maps are used by social science researchers as a source of qualitative data.

Body maps are created with a select group during a workshop usually lasting five days. In this case, TICAH worked with a group of 11 torture survivors, who were illegally detained and tortured at the Nyayo House in central Nairobi under the regime of Daniel arap Moi. Over the course of the body mapping workshop, participants are given a safe space to share their most painful experiences, but also have the opportunity to put past trauma in the larger context of their lives—helping them to recognize other significant events in their past, reflect on their support systems through their traumatic experience, and envision their future. All of these reflections are expressed through the use of art, with participants drawing and painting with the help of one or more facilitator. The body maps are then shared among the participants and narrated. The group setting of body mapping helps survivors recognize that they are not alone in their experience, while giving them the space to share intensely personal experiences. This process takes individual stories and puts them in a larger context, highlighting a pattern of abuse and repression under the Moi regime for example, and enabling the victims to consider the commonalities in their experiences and to begin to identify a shared narrative.

Beyond the healing effects the body mapping methodology can have on survivors, body maps also create a record of stories that are often marginalized, exposing hidden histories and complicating official, often revised, narratives of events. Body maps can also serve as a tool for advocacy, when survivors chose to exhibit their maps for that purpose; education, as body maps are a powerful visual way of sharing testimonies; and reconciliation, as body maps publicly acknowledge the personal traumas of victims, helping the public come to terms with a hidden and difficult past.

### Addressing Controversial Issues through Facilitated Dialogue

[Museo Urbano](#) in El Paso, Texas emerged out of a local grassroots effort to stop the development of the historic neighborhood Segundo Barrio, a port of entry and home for Mexican immigrants for generations. Museo Urbano mounts exhibitions and conducts programs on the history of the Segundo Barrio at city museums, nonprofit organizations, and in schools. As a museum without walls, the Museo Urbano continually collaborates with the local community in a variety of settings. Beyond the Segundo Barrio, Museo Urbano sees the history of the borderlands, especially El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, as its subject.

Museo Urbano was part of a three-year, nationwide Sites of Conscience initiative to launch local public dialogues on the topic of immigration, the National Dialogues on Immigration project. In the United States, immigration is a topic that is personal and local as well as civic and national – touching on issues of identity, culture, and community and relating to public debates on civil liberties, national security, employment, healthcare, education, and the economy. As a result, the immigration debate has been emotional and contentious at every level of society. The National Dialogues on Immigration project sought to respond to this urgent need for new spaces where Americans, including new immigrants, could engage in informed and open dialogue across difference on the enduring and sensitive issue of immigration.

Dialogue is a core tenet at Sites of Conscience, where a public dialogue programs are designed and facilitated in an intentional and very specific way. The Coalition has developed a dialogue methodology by which a facilitator moves a group to a deeply personal discussion of a controversial contemporary issue, grounded in the history of the Site. A Sites of Conscience dialogue program guides participants through an arc of dialogue, with the facilitator initially asking participants safe, broad questions, then moving them to deeper, more difficult questions that invite participants to reflect on their own opinions and prejudices, finally moving them to a place where they consider what individual actions they can take based on what they have learned. Unlike most historic site and museum programs, dialogue programs take participants' personal experiences as the primary focus, recognizing the unique opportunity for discussing those experiences that a powerful historic place provides. Sites of Conscience dialogue inherently recognizes the diversity of experience and thus the existence of multiple "truths". By moving participants from being observers of history to recognizing their own role in the contemporary legacies of that history, dialogue is at the heart of how Sites of Conscience inspire the public to move from memory to action.

Rather than ground their dialogue in an exhibition of the Museo or in the Segundo Barrio, Museo Urbano embraced the entire U.S.-Mexico border as its site. Their dialogue program, mostly conducted with students from the University of Texas-El Paso, focused on bringing the topic of dialogue back to students' local experience on the border, using a set of 20 photographs of people and places, taken from the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border as a cornerstone. After initial questions helping students explore immigration through the lens of their daily lives on the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border, the facilitator asked students to choose a photograph that spoke to them and asked them why. This set off a deeply emotional and personal conversation about the complexity of living in the place where two countries meet; transforming what is often a vitriolic debate about immigration into a respectful and thoughtful dialogue grounded in the realities of life in the borderland.

#### Connecting Past to Present Across Generations

Creating avenues for dialogue across age groups has been a powerful way for Sites to help their communities work towards reconciliation and understanding and across difference. Intergenerational dialogue is another method used at many Sites of Conscience which opens spaces for older and younger generations to talk about what might be a painful past or topics they might otherwise not have a space to discuss. In addition to opening an opportunity for younger generations to learn about the past their elders' perspective, intergenerational dialogue allows for both generations to connect with their pasts and reflect on their hopes for the future.

This method has been used with a great success in the context of Cambodia, where genocide resulted in the loss of social structures in a very traditional society, leading to a pervasive silence on the trauma of the past, a lack of communication between generations, and a disenfranchised youth that is disconnected from their country's past. Cambodia is estimated to have lost between one and a half and three million people under the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975-79, annihilating an entire generation and resulting in a lack of role models for today's youth. The level of violence and type of abuses committed have deeply torn the social fabric of Cambodian society, profoundly impacting family relations and traditions as well as community support structures. Today, Cambodian youth have difficulties comprehending or believing what

happened in their country. Youth often find themselves unable to cope with societal problems and react either with violence or passivity, creating further societal problems.

Cambodian Site of Conscience [Youth for Peace](#) was created to help educate youth using the history and traditions of Cambodia. Since youth have a very limited understanding of the events surrounding the Cambodian genocide, Youth for Peace invites survivors and older generations to teach youth about their history. Such an approach of engaging with the past as well as its contemporary legacies offers a novel avenue to connect both young and old generations.

Through its intergenerational dialogue programs, Youth for Peace transforms sites of mass killing into places of learning, remembrance, peace building, and engagement. At such sites, youth engage in memorialization projects, such as gathering personal stories and testimonies from survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide and then transforming these testimonies into works of art. For example, at former security center Kraing Ta Chan, youth painted murals on the walls of their community center based on the testimonies of elders, creating a lasting representation of the elder generation's stories. This exchange of stories creates a foundation of support and sharing on which to build strong relationships between elders and youth. These exchanges also foster youth empowerment, as young people begin to envision an active role for themselves in violence prevention and peace building. At the close of intergenerational dialogue workshops, both generations participate in traditional Buddhist rituals designed to symbolically cleanse the elders and put the spirits to rest. Thus, intergenerational dialogue enables the empowerment of youth by transforming them into agents of their future through the recognition of the trauma and resilience of elders.

#### From Memory to Action through Education

In this article, we have shown the particular approach to memory work central to Sites of Conscience by highlighting three methodologies. Body mapping as used by TICAH is initially a psychosocial approach that can lead to wider engagement with a community as well as serve as the base for educational programs through the display of maps and accompanying dialogue. Facilitated dialogue, as practiced at Museo Urbano, is a powerful tool to engage audiences in reflecting on their personal experiences as well as bringing positive changes of attitude on complex issues. Intergenerational dialogue, as illustrated by the example of Youth for Peace, allows societies to find joint solutions to enduring challenges across age groups while empowering youth to recognize the importance of the lived experience of their elders.

Though very different, these methodologies are centered on dialogue, an approach which enables a multiplicity of voices to emerge, be recognized, and given legitimacy. Through dialogue, Sites of Conscience reinterpret articulations of the past expressed through individual narratives as collective memory. Moreover, dialogue at Sites of Conscience is not simply between individuals but also a dialogue between past and present, allowing participants to contextualize contemporary struggles in the lessons of the past. Furthermore, the crucial work of Sites of Conscience in facilitating dialogue is part of a larger process of reconciliation, in which competing pasts are articulated and accepted. Through the use of dialogue, Sites of Conscience ensure that memory work is a community-led process, leading to a context-specific memorialization and a non-prescriptive approach.

Though the histories, programs and approaches of Sites of Conscience are numerous, a number of important elements are common to successful site-based memory education programs and should be considered by practitioners in choosing a methodology. First, consider who? Who will activate the site? Who are the stakeholders? Then consider what? What specific issue are you seeking to address? What are the objectives? Then consider when? What is your timeline? Is your project sustainable? Finally consider why? Why activate a site and history? Why identify, recover, preserve or open an activity/site to the public? Why is it important? These key questions will lay the foundation for developing a program that connects past to present in the service of building a better future.

The programs presented in this article demonstrate that Sites of Conscience have developed into important loci of learning, where history is interpreted, contemporary human rights issues are addressed, and in which visitors and participants are invited to become active learners. Sites that were once the scene of violence and trauma are transformed into spaces for dialogue and engagement. In engaging with local communities and establishing platforms for victims and survivors to share their stories, the museums, historical sites, and organizations that make up the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience are activating a troubled past as a new way forward towards peace and reconciliation today and long into the future.

#### Suggested Readings

Building Peace by Teaching Peace (in English): [http://www.sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Members\\_member-Benefits\\_006.pdf](http://www.sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Members_member-Benefits_006.pdf)

Ciudadanía y Memoria, desarrollo de Sitios de Conciencia para el aprendizaje en derechos humanos: <http://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOid=2477043&fileOid=2485360>

Designing the Arc of Dialogue (in English): [http://www.sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Members\\_member-Benefits\\_010.pdf](http://www.sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Members_member-Benefits_010.pdf)

De la memoria a la acción: Conjunto de herramientas para la memoria en sociedades posconflicto: available upon request to the Coalition.

Fortaleciendo la memoria, la justicia y los derechos humanos en Brasil y el hemisferio sur: available upon request to the Coalition

Para deconstruir las Violencias del Estado. Educación en derechos humanos desde un sitio desde memoria: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=59537777002>