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Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

## **A Concentration Camp in Our Town: How Students in Landsberg Have Uncovered a Place of Horror; Could This Have Taken Place Anywhere?"**

Students at the Ignaz Kögler Gymnasium have literally prevented grass from growing over a concentration camp and its memories of the dead. The memorial stone inscribed "Concentration Camp Subcamp Kaufering-Landsberg, Camp XI, stood here from 1944 to 1945," would never have been erected had we not initiated the project, and we would not have pushed ahead with it if Karl Rom had been able to locate the site of the camp where he had worked and suffered fifty years ago. But he complained to our history teacher, Barbara Fenner, when he wanted to remember his comrades who had been killed there, but he couldn't identify the site. We all agreed quickly that a memorial stone alone was not enough to remember Camp XI, the largest of eleven Dachau subcamps located at Kaufering-Landsberg.

Where had the concentration camps in our town been located? There was really nothing left to be seen of Camp XI. Nearly 3,000 Jews from all over Europe had been crowded together there; they were tortured and murdered while building a large subterranean factory. The Nazis called it "destruction through labor." More than half of the 30,000 individuals who worked in the eleven camps of the Kaufering-Landsberg subcamp during the last ten months of the Nazi rule of terror perished.

Our history project group, "We are making a concentration camp visible," energetically went to work looking for clues. Survivors were interviewed, photographs located, and the terrain was surveyed. Step by step, a place of terror, which even today many Landsberg residents do not want to know about, emerged before our eyes. At that time, the weakened, emaciated prisoners had to

perform heavy physical labor. And they built an enormous factory, an underground airplane plant, where the first jets, the Messerschmidt 262, were to be produced. The immense underground bunker, 280 meters long, 28 meters deep, and more than five meters thick, is still used by the German army today.

Where did the people who built this live, or better phrased, where did they waste away on inadequate food? That was worth finding out. The students set out to discover the past with measuring tapes, map materials, and tools. One student, working on the fringes of the group, poked through the underbrush to discover what looked like a large pot, which at first was a mystery. But concentration camp survivors reported that this was the communal soup pot, which had held thin watery soup for fifty prisoners at a time. This pail was one of the highlights in the exhibition in which the students presented their findings to the public. Some people at school were upset that, in the photograph, the students were smiling with pride at their discovery; this is difficult to understand. As if throughout the entire one-and-a-half years of the project we had always worked sorrowfully! To be sure, we had often felt like weeping.

Thus, it is possible today to see the foundations of the former concentration camp washrooms, which we students uncovered. But where are the stakes that we had pounded into the ground to mark the foundations? They had disappeared overnight. As a result, photographs for comparison with old aerial photographs from 1945 could not be made. Consequently, the Bavarian Minister for the Environment Goppel had promised that he would take the students along in his helicopter. He made this promise, but was never heard from again. We should actually try to initiate this again, since there seemed to be good will present and he had suggested it.

Anyone who takes a closer look at the new plaque installed on the memorial stone by the town of Landsberg has to admit that the plaque should be changed. At first, the city had erected only the memorial stone on the fiftieth anniversary of the camp liberation, and that only because of the students' initiative. Obviously, we would not have wanted an explicitly Christian roadside cross for a concentration camp where almost all of the prisoners were Jews; we would much rather have seen a boulder, but that was too expensive for the town. We also did not understand why the inscription was decorated with a meaningless photograph. Had we been consulted, we would have used a captioned photo to make it clear that the memorial stone was located at the former roll-call place of Camp XI. Instead, the town used a meaningless, unclear aerial photograph without a descriptive caption. And we wonder: "Was this unintentional, or were the forces who insisted well into the 1980s that 'Landsberg should not become a second Dachau!' still at work?"

We had to keep trying to get anywhere. It is important to know how Landsberg residents deal with the concentration camp past of their town. At least all students should know about the killings that occurred here and we should talk about them. So we asked the city fathers for a room in the youth center where a photograph exhibition and the artifacts could be permanently displayed, so that these objects would not be sent to the museum at Dachau. They belong here, and should make clear to the students in the Landsberg district what some of their classmates had found in one and one-half years of voluntary work. But we were told that there was no money available.

Even today, three years later, the exhibition with its 200 photographs and many artifacts is still traveling to various schools. It is now in Munich, and can be borrowed without cost.

(In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [FAZ], 17 February 1997, p. 35 under the rubric: *Jugend schreibt* [Written by Youth].)