



## STUMBLING STONES

Munich, Germany

48.1351, 11.5820



Image courtesy of Geordie Enoch.

### Executive Summary

*Stolpersteine* or 'stumbling stones' are components of a project initiated by German artist Gunter Demnig in 1996 to commemorate victims of the Holocaust. The memorials, in the form of cobblestones installed in public streets, now number in the tens of thousands across Europe and beyond. However, they have also been criticised, and some cities, including Munich, have banned their installation. This case study examines the competing opinions and responses of individuals and groups and the difficulties associated with Holocaust remembrance in public spaces.

## Introduction

*Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) are small brass cobblestones installed in the streets of many European cities. They are inscribed with information about victims of the Holocaust, detailing their name, date of birth, and date and location of death. The project was initiated by German artist Gunter Demnig in 1992 and continues to shape and alter urban landscapes around Europe, now forming the 'world's largest decentralised monument to the Holocaust.'<sup>1</sup> Gunter Demnig cites the Talmud when explaining the need for the *Stolpersteine*, stating that 'a person is only forgotten when his or her name is forgotten.'<sup>2</sup> This sentiment is the motivational current underscoring the project; installing stones with inscribed names on the pavement is an act that inserts permanent memory into the fabric of daily life. When locals, tourists, and passers-by 'stumble' over the stones, they look down and are reminded of the concrete ways in which the Holocaust affected individuals' lives.

This project, however, has its critics – over the years, the debate has been considered and revisited many times, with some cities such as Munich going as far as to ban the installation of *Stolpersteine* throughout the city.

## Background

### *Stolpersteine in Europe and beyond*

*Stolpersteine* are concrete cubes measuring 10 centimetres by 10 centimetres with a brass plate. The cubes, integrated into the existent cobblestone landscaping of roads or streets, are located in front of the homes where victims of Nazi extermination or persecution last resided. Each brass plate bears an inscription with the phrase '*hier wohnte*' (here lived), followed by the name of the victim who lived there, their date of birth, their date of arrest (if applicable), the year of their deportation, information about their internment in a concentration camp, and the date of death, which is preceded by the word '*ermordet*' (murdered).<sup>3</sup> Other inscriptions are chosen for those who were not murdered in concentration camps - for example, the word '*befreit*' (liberated) is used for survivors, and the phrase '*Flucht in den Tod*' (flight into death) is used for those later to suicide.<sup>4</sup>

The first *Stolperstein* was laid on December 16, 1992, by Gunter Demnig in Cologne. The stone was installed in front of the city's historic town hall to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> year since Heinrich Himmler's decree for deporting Sinti and Roma to extermination camps. The laying of future *Stolpersteine* in front of the victims' last chosen place of residence was triggered by Demnig's encounter with an inhabitant of Cologne who was convinced that neither Sinti nor Roma had

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<sup>1</sup> Eliza Apperly, "'Stumbling Stones': A Different Vision of Holocaust Remembrance," *Guardian*, February 18, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Stolpersteine, "Home," *Stolpersteine*, accessed December 6, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Stolpersteine, "Steps," *Stolpersteine*, accessed December 6, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

ever resided in her neighbourhood. By the end of 2017, there were at least 75,000 *Stolpersteine* in 1,250 cities and towns in Europe.<sup>5</sup> As of December 2021, there are *Stolpersteine* in 29 countries.<sup>6</sup> More than 25 *Stolperschwellen* (stumbling steps commemorating larger groups of victims) have also been installed, including in Argentina, the first non-European location for the memorial.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars Mary Rachel Gould and Rachel E. Silverman believe that the *Stolpersteine* have a necessary place in a larger continuum from state-sanctioned to vernacular memorials. According to them, these small cobblestones are 'uniquely vernacular' because they can be considered a 'counter-memorial'.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, the counter-memorial movement began as a response to state-sanctioned memorialisation projects occurring in the post-war period. These counter-memorials are defined as having power in their subtlety, along with a 'non- or anti-presentational character that succeeds in establishing a non-hierarchical, anti-authoritative relationship with viewers.'<sup>9</sup> Counter-memorials also generally 'take advantage of the sprawling landscape of the vernacular city, and through their dispersed physicality convey a sense of democratised memory' - a type of commemoration accessible to all.<sup>10</sup> The *Stolpersteine* project epitomises these notions.

Individuals who would like to have a *Stolperstein* installed must first obtain permission from local authorities. Intensive research must ensure that the information about the victim is correct and that the victim's family members are informed and have consented to install the stone(s). The next step is to decide on an inscription and to send the desired wording to an individual on the *Stolpersteine* team. An appointment for laying the *Stolperstein* is then made, subject to the artist's schedule, who endeavours to place as many of the stones as possible himself. A final practical consideration is the cost. As of February 2021, it costs 120 euros to sponsor a stone, which encompasses payment for the stone's manufacture and installation; additionally, accommodation is requested for the artist where overnight stays are required.<sup>11</sup> Each stone, therefore, is privately funded. However, the project must be publicly approved in each location as the installations generally occur on public streets. It is important to note that the *Stolperstein*, as a privately sponsored method of commemoration, raises questions regarding its inclusivity and accessibility as a form of remembrance.

## History of the Contestation

<sup>5</sup> Deutsche Welle, "Germany: 75,000th 'Stolperstein' for Holocaust Victims Laid," *Deutsche Welle*, December 29, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> As of December 2021, countries with *Stolpersteine* include: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine. For more on the numbers see the official site: <https://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/home/>

<sup>7</sup> Stolpersteine, "Steps," Stolpersteine, accessed December 6, 2021; Deutsche Welle, "First 'Stolperstein' Holocaust Memorial Laid Outside Europe," *Deutsche Welle*, October 31, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Rachel Gould and Rachel E. Silverman, "Stumbling upon History: Collective Memory and the Urban Landscape," *GeoJournal* 78, no. 5 (2013): 791.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 793.

<sup>11</sup> Stolpersteine, "Steps," Stolpersteine, accessed December 6, 2021.

Most local governments have supported the installation of *Stolpersteine*. However, the local authorities in a notable city, Munich, remain opposed to the project. In 2004, after heated debates on the subject, the City Council banned laying *Stolpersteine* throughout the city on public streets (though not on private property). Since then, the ban has been deliberated and revisited, never truly fading into the city's collective consciousness. Yet, each iteration of the case to date of this study upholds the ban on *Stolpersteine*.

### *Voices of opposition*

The opposition to the *Stolpersteine* in Munich is spearheaded by Jewish citizens, with Charlotte Knobloch, president of the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde München und Oberbayern* (Israelite Religious Community in Munich and Upper Bavaria), being one of the most prominent opponents. To her, people trampling on the names of the victims of the Nazi regime would be unbearable and an expression of extreme disrespect and disregard for the dead.<sup>12</sup>

Knobloch's views reflect those of many others. The scholar Ulrike Schrader sees the *Stolpersteine* as unnecessary since many monuments and memorials commemorating Holocaust victims already exist. In her view, the wishes of regional Jewish authorities should be respected if they do not want their ancestors to be 'trampled upon.' To this effect, Schrader cites a conversation with a descendant of a Holocaust survivor, who stated vehemently that she did not wish to be reminded of her own parents' murders daily.<sup>13</sup> She also notes an element of 'chain-like coercion' in the project, arguing that many *Stolpersteine* supporters are not entirely acting of their own volition but rather due to pressure from supporters of the memorial.

### *Voices of support*

Despite the vocal opposition to *Stolpersteine* in Munich, many still support the project. Reiner Bernstein, affiliated with the Left Party, argues in terms of fundamental questions of governmental involvement creating a collective memory, such as whether the city has a right to deny individuals their desired form of remembrance for their loved ones. Bernstein also worries about the influence that the *Stolpersteine* ban in Munich will leave on other parts of Germany and internationally. For Bernstein, then, 'recollection cannot be [subject to] a state or communal monopoly'; in his view, personal and individual wishes should be permitted and honoured.<sup>14</sup>

From a scholarly perspective, Gould and Silverman also believe in the necessity of the *Stolpersteine*:

...the act of walking through the city...and at times 'stumbling' upon the voices of the past, allows us to read the city in a way that renders our experiences an act of translation. Although the

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<sup>12</sup> Josef Memminger, "Good or Bad Remembrance? No *Stolpersteine* in Munich," *Public History Weekly* 4, no. 7 (2016).

<sup>13</sup> Ulrike Schrader, "Die 'Stolpersteine' oder Von der Leichtigkeit des Gedenkens: Einige kritische Anmerkungen," *Geschichte im Westen (GiW)* 21 (2006): 176.

<sup>14</sup> Reiner Bernstein, "STOLPERSTEINE und kein Ende der Ablehnung in München?" *MitLinks*, no. 31 (2010): 24.

translation is always partial and incomplete, the fragments – hallmarks of the vernacular city – have a profound effect on our individual and collective memory.<sup>15</sup>

According to the authors, citizens are deprived of impactful forms of remembrance because this kind of translation is prohibited in Munich - the *Stolpersteine*, through their 'dispersed physicality', are a more democratic, and therefore more desirable, manifestation of memory than state-sanctioned monuments.<sup>16</sup> For them, there is a distinction between state-sanctioned memorials, guided forms of remembrance encountered with a strong intent to remember, and *Stolpersteine*, which can catch the pedestrian by surprise and prompt individual recollection of the past without any rigid framework. Gould and Silverman argue that 'by formalising impermanence and celebrating the changing form', counter-monuments like *Stolpersteine* 'refute the self-defeating premise of losing memories with time and take ownership of a history many wish to forget,' and thus deserves a place in cities like Munich.<sup>17</sup>

*New Yorker* contributor Elizabeth Kolbert has another, more personal, view of the value of the *Stolpersteine*. In her article, she speaks of her own great-grandmother's deportation to and death at Auschwitz, as well as the laying of a *Stolperstein* for her. She recounts how anticlimactic the ceremony of laying the *Stolperstein* felt, describing a sentiment of futility. She concludes her article by noting that 'there was never going to be justice for the Holocaust or reckoning with its enormity. The *Stolpersteine*, in a way, acknowledge this. They don't presume to do too much. That is perhaps why they work.'<sup>18</sup> For Kolbert, because the *Stolpersteine* are small, unassuming and reside underfoot, they can accurately represent the feelings of individuals in the present grappling with the enormity and gravity of the Holocaust.

Finally, the artist behind the *Stolpersteine*, Gunter Demnig, also hopes that stones can be laid wherever people wish for their presence. He argues that the stones' ability to confront individuals is unmatched by state-sanctioned memorials such as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. For Demnig, 'to think about six million victims is abstract, but to think about a murdered family is concrete.'<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Demnig rebuts the argument that stones can potentially be ignored or stepped on by highlighting that reading the inscriptions requires one to bow down to the victim physically.<sup>20</sup>

### *Public relations surrounding the Stolpersteine*

Support for the project is evident in the number of people who attend Demnig's installations, listen to his lectures on the project and its larger meaning, and continue to add to the list of commemorated people. Countless *Stolpersteine* initiatives in local municipalities are other manifestations of support for the project, offering help to individuals who wish to have their

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Rachel Gould and Rachel E. Silverman, "Stumbling upon History: Collective Memory and the Urban Landscape," *GeoJournal* 78, no. 5 (2013): 794.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 793.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 798.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Kolbert, "The Last Trial: A Great Grandmother, Auschwitz, and the Arc of Justice," *New Yorker*, February 9, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Demnig cited in Lois Gilman, "Memory Blocks: Artist Gunter Demnig Builds a Holocaust Memorial One Stone at a Time," *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 10, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Damián Morán Dauchez, "Stolpersteine: Stumble Upon Memory in Europe," [mus.er.me.ku](http://mus.er.me.ku), October 3, 2018.

family members commemorated. Demnig has also been the recipient of numerous awards for his efforts, including the German Jewish History Award (Berlin) in 2005, the Giesbert Lewin Prize (Cologne) in 2007, the Josef Neuberger Medal (Düsseldorf) in 2009 and the Otto Hirsch Medal (Stuttgart) in 2011, among others.<sup>21</sup>

Despite this support, Demnig has received three death threats, one of which stated explicitly, 'I would be happy to hear from the man that killed this bastard', in reference to Demnig.<sup>22</sup> Voices of opposition to the project often reach national and international news. For example, in 2017, one couple filed suit to remove a *Stolperstein* from their street in Amsterdam, claiming that 'being confronted by the stone every day [was] too large an emotional burden' and that 'their privacy [was] affected by passersby who [would] stop and intrusively look at their home', thus affecting the atmosphere of their street.<sup>23</sup> The story made national news in the Netherlands and made waves in Israel.<sup>24</sup> Adverse social media reactions to the couple were immediate and widespread, eventually causing the pair to withdraw their claim.

Most opposition to the project is voiced in public settings, whether in open meetings or on online forums, such as the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* "*Stolpersteine: 'Ehrung im Straßenschmutz' oder angemessene Form des Gedenkens?*" (*Stolpersteine: 'tribute in street dirt' or appropriate form of commemoration?*).<sup>25</sup> Some who disagree with the project's aims, unable or unwilling to limit themselves to dissenting words, have resorted to stealing and vandalising the stones. For example, in 2015, five *Stolpersteine* were stolen from a Jewish family's former home in Spijkenisse in the Netherlands, and several more from Middleharnis earlier that year; additionally, several *Stolpersteine* were stolen from a street in Rome in 2012 and replaced with cobblestones.<sup>26</sup> In January 2017, vandals in Milan defaced with black paint a newly installed *Stolperstein* commemorating Dante Coen. He was deported to Auschwitz and killed at Buchenwald on April 4, 1945.<sup>27</sup> These examples constitute extreme forms of negative public responses to the project, pointing to the existence of vehement opposition to such forms of public remembrance and memorialisation.

Though in-person activism has been carried out in the form of speeches, protests, and illegal removals and vandalisms of the stones, it is the online sphere, including the aforementioned virtual discussion forums and online petitions in Munich, which continue to gain a particular degree of traction. Technology has thus become a crucial platform for public reactions to large-scale memorialisation projects such as the *Stolpersteine*. As of December 2021, the official project Twitter account @\_Stolpersteine\_ has over 26,900 followers, while the corresponding

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<sup>21</sup> Stolpersteine. "Biography." Stolpersteine. Accessed December 10, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Katja Iken, "Der Mann mit dem Hammer," *Spiegel Online*, 19th July 2017.

<sup>23</sup> NLTimes, "Amsterdam Couple Drops Lawsuit Against Holocaust Memorial Stone After Social Media Outrage," *NLTimes*, April 3, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> AT5: Echt Amsterdams Nieuws, "Ophef om struikelsteen haalt Israëliische media," *AT5*, April 3, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Süddeutsche Zeitung. "Stolpersteine: 'Ehrung im Straßenschmutz' oder angemessene Form des Gedenkens?" *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 5, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Eliezer Sherman, "Jewish Stepping-Stone Memorial Stolen from Southern Dutch Town," *Algemeiner*, September 16, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "Vandals Deface New Milan 'Stumbling Stone' Holocaust Memorial," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 24, 2017.

Instagram account @stolpersteine has over 11,200 followers.<sup>28</sup> Supporters of the project often share these photos or their own photos on their accounts, generally accompanied by captions including the hashtags #neveragain or #neverforget. On Instagram, the *Stolpersteine* hashtag is associated with 35,478 posts and counting.<sup>29</sup> Some municipalities have created social media accounts, like @stolpersteine\_schiedam on Instagram, which shares photos of the city's *Stolpersteine* with its followers.

Opposition to the project is not as prevalent or as discoverable, on social media platforms, with only a few posts on Instagram and Twitter using the hashtags #StopptStolpersteine (stop *Stolpersteine*), #KeineStolpersteine (no *Stolpersteine*), or #NoStolpersteine. It is thus possible that opposition to the project has found greater success via in-person campaigns. In contrast, support is expressed through both in-person and virtual methods.

### *Similar opposition in other locations*

In some German cities where the rejection of the memorial has not occurred outright, local governmental bodies have taken a significant amount of time to decide whether to permit the installation of *Stolpersteine* legally. In Hamburg, for example, deliberations over the project lasted six months; in Cologne, the process took three years.<sup>30</sup> Munich thus stands out as a significant city that continues to deny a form of remembrance advocated for and supported by many.

Several other cities have also exemplified this opposition. The small town of Villingen in Germany's Black Forest region has played host to the same kind of intense deliberation over and repeated rejection of *Stolpersteine*. As of 2015, Villingen had voted twice, first in 2004 and again in 2013, to refuse permission to allow privately funded *Stolpersteine* on public property. The town's municipal deliberations have, similarly to Munich, been marked by a polarisation of the issue among pro- and anti-*Stolpersteine* groups.<sup>31</sup> Opponents of the *Stolpersteine*, spearheaded by local politician Renate Breuning of the Christian Democratic Union, make similar arguments to Knobloch; in addition, she suggests that 'marking the sidewalk in front of specific homes might give the impression that their current owners benefited financially from the Third Reich's theft of Jewish property.'<sup>32</sup> These arguments have, over time, continued to take precedence over the arguments of *Stolpersteine* advocates.

The city of Pulheim is another example of heated debate and eventual rejection of the *Stolpersteine*.<sup>33</sup> In this case, however, the reasons for rejecting the stones are largely attributed to administrative limitations. The municipality is already engaged in another remembrance project, *Das Projekt Synagoge Stommeln* (Stommeln Synagogue Project), which aims to

<sup>28</sup> Statistics taken from twitter.com and instagram.com on December 10 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Statistic taken from instagram.com on December 10 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Katja Iken, "Der Mann mit dem Hammer," *Spiegel Online*, 19th July 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Lisa Lampert-Weissig, "The Vanished Stumbling Stones of Villingen," *Tablet*, June 3, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Wolfgang Mrziglod, "Bürgeranträge: Stadt Pulheim will keine Stolpersteine," *Kölnische Rundschau*, May 29, 2010.

'stimulate a lasting dialogue' on the 1938 anti-Semitic pogroms in Germany.<sup>34</sup> Because this initiative commenced in 1990 and is a focus of the municipal government, opponents of the *Stolpersteine* project argue that resources would be overstretched should the installation of the cobblestone memorials be approved in the city.

However, opposition to *Stolpersteine* is not limited to Germany. In 2019, the municipal council in Schio, Italy, rejected a proposal to install 14 *Stolpersteine* in the town. Many local and national organisations were outraged by this decision, including the president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, Noemi Di Segni, who stated, 'The fact that "stumbling blocks" have been considered a provocation by the municipal council of Schio represents a shameful legitimisation of the attempt of oblivion on the crimes of the regime.'<sup>35</sup>

This opposition has also been visible in Poland, where the national government has recently been accused of anti-Semitism due to its refusal of many *Stolperstein* applications.<sup>36</sup> The rejection letters stated that Germany, not Poland, was to blame for the atrocities memorialised by the *Stolpersteine*; thus, the Polish state did not want Poles to be viewed as perpetrators.<sup>37</sup> Because of these rejections, Poland has very few *Stolpersteine* compared to other European countries, despite having the largest pre-World War II Jewish population (3 million).<sup>38</sup>

## Decision-Making Processes

In the context of the debate between *Stolpersteine* supporters and opponents, the Munich City Council was set to vote on the validity of the *Stolpersteine* ban on July 29 2015. On opposite sides of the debate were Terry Swartzberg, the leader of the *Stolpersteine* initiative in Munich, and Charlotte Knobloch, along with the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde München und Oberbayern*. To the chagrin of *Stolpersteine* supporters, the ban was upheld by a majority of the City Council. This reaffirmation of the ban occurred despite a petition spearheaded by Swartzberg and signed by over 80,000 individuals. Bavaria's highest court later backed the decision to ban *Stolpersteine*.<sup>39</sup>

### *Responses to the ban*

The repeated denial of the *Stolpersteine* in Munich has resulted in alternative creative methods of commemoration. The artist Michaela Melià has developed the *Memory Loops* project, comprised of a virtual repository for audio files related to the Holocaust, with 300 German and 175 English tracks. Each file constitutes 'a collage of voices and music thematically tied to a place in the former "Capital of the Movement"'.<sup>40</sup> Another example from the arts scene is *Hier*

<sup>34</sup> Synagoge Stommeln, "Das Kunstprojekt Synagoge Stommeln," *Stadt Pulheim*, accessed December 6, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Rossella Tercatin, "Italian Town Says 'No' to Holocaust Memorial, Calling It Divisive," *Jerusalem Post*, December 2, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Day, "Poland Accused of Blocking Holocaust Remembrance Plaques," *Sunday Telegraph*, December 15, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Katarzyna Markusz, "Polish City Refuses to Install Memorial Stones for Holocaust Victims," *Times of Israel*, December 23, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Jewish Population of Europe in 1933: Population Data by Country," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, accessed December 6, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> BBC News, "Munich Bans 'Disrespectful' Holocaust Memorials on Ground," *BBC*, July 27, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Memory Loops, "Über," *Memory Loops*, accessed December 6, 2021.

*wohnte* (here lived) by Wolfram P. Kastner. This initiative takes its name from the opening line of the inscription on most *Stolpersteine* and is similarly a non-governmental, grassroots form of memorialisation. However, instead of using cobblestones to commemorate Holocaust victims, *Hier wohnte* encourages citizens to contribute by placing white suitcases bearing labels with victim's names, last addresses, and dates and locations of death in front of houses in Munich's Maxvorstadt district.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Knobloch has been a vocal proponent of the *Hier wohnte* initiative. In a statement on *Hier wohnte*, she expresses her thanks to Kastner, calling the white suitcases a 'worthy and impressive form of commemoration'.<sup>42</sup> Her support for this initiative, in contrast to her opposition to the *Stolpersteine*, emphasises her continued concern that individuals might disrespect the memory of victims by stepping on their names for the last project.

A further form of commemoration has been the documentation of *Leerstellen der Erinnerung* (blank places of memory) in Munich and the surrounding region, a project developed by students at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. The students hope to identify and investigate places and fates of victim groups that have otherwise received little attention, including the concentration camp outside Kaufering VII, the concentration camp outside Utting, the forced labour camp of Neuaußing, the male munitions' depot 'MUNA' Hohenbrunn, the bomb search command, children forced into labour, women, and 'asocials'.<sup>43</sup>

Since 2018, Munich has installed memorial plaques, similar in design to the *Stolpersteine* but located on external walls instead of on the ground outside buildings. Additionally, the victims' pictures are included on the plaques, allowing viewers to 'look the victims of the Nazis in the face'.<sup>44</sup> This project, too, has its critics, who feel that the memorials are too similar to the *Stolpersteine*. Some concerns having the little information provided on the plaques (the same information as that on *Stolpersteine*) will be insufficient for generating empathy for the victims.<sup>45</sup>

## Summary and Conclusions

The *Stolpersteine* debate represents the tensions inherent in commemorative spheres. Whereas cities like Munich and Villingen continue to choose other forms of remembrance over the *Stolpersteine*, adhering to the voices of those who reject their presence, other cities like Berlin have accepted these cobblestones into the fabric of their urban landscape, choosing to honour the wishes of those who view the project favourably. Considering the range of memorial types supported by municipalities and how members of the public have reacted to those movements, it is clear that forms of commemoration resonate differently for every individual. For some, the ideal commemorative effort may remain personal and private, allowing for quiet reflection and

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<sup>41</sup> KunstAktion, "Wer wohnte hier?" *KunstAktion*, accessed December 6, 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Charlotte Knobloch, "Eine würdige und beeindruckende Form des Gedenkens," *KunstAktion*, accessed December 6, 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Münchner Leerstellen, "Über das Projekt," *Münchner Leerstellen*, accessed December 6, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Jakob Wetzel, "München soll den Opfern der Nazis ins Gesicht sehen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 26, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

solitary remembrance; for others, remembrance should ideally encourage public discussion in an open forum.

Yet, even though municipalities have made their choices, deliberation over such memorials has not ceased. Here, it is crucial to acknowledge the existence of debate and the idea that people have continued to engage with the difficult past decades after the far-reaching and long-lasting events of the Holocaust. The gravity of these conversations is visible in debates over which acts of commemoration to accept and reject, as well as which forms of remembrance are best able to honour the dead and spur people to engage with traumatic histories. Such discourses demonstrate a 'commitment to explicitly and officially coming to terms' with the past and thus shaping the future.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Kirsten Harjes, "Stumbling Stones: Holocaust Memorials, National Identity, and Democratic Inclusion in Berlin," *German Politics and Society* 23 (2005): 139.

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## About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions, whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

## About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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