

A German house. Controversy over commemoration of the Polish victims of the Second World War

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Commissioned by the German state, a German-Polish House is to be built in Berlin. This concept is the result of a debate lasting several years about whether it would be legitimate for the German capital to see the creation of a monument to the victims of crimes perpetrated against the Polish nation during the Second World War. In line with the currently valid concept, the initiative will be based on three main elements: commemoration (creation of an 'artistic element'), the construction of a museum housing a permanent exhibition and temporary displays, and educational projects. The substantive aspect will focus on the Nazi German aggression against Poland and its brutal occupation in 1939–45. The project will be carried out by two German institutions: the Foundation of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which prepared the House's concept, and the German Institute of Polish Affairs, which is responsible for the initiative's operational aspect and the preparation of educational programmes. Political supervision of the project is carried out by the Federal Chancellery represented by Secretary of State Claudia Roth (the Greens).

The present concept of the House has sparked major controversy and doubts. The German initiators of the original version of the memorial to the Polish victims have expressed serious reservations and called for separating that part of the project, which involves the memorial and commemoration of the victims, from the museum and education centre. These reservations are legitimate because the construction of any museum in Germany is a project which lasts many years and requires huge logistical and financial efforts. It will thus take a long time until the memorial is built in its presently planned form, if it is built at all. However, what does cause concern is mainly the fact that the concept presently valid, the manner of its presentation and the statements of its authors all suggest that these individuals are convinced of the project's uniqueness and the superiority of the German culture of remembrance over other manifestations of victim commemoration. This may result in presenting the House's construction as an initiative which effectively replaces all other important history-related activities in Germany's relations with Poland, including compensation for war damages. Meanwhile, contrary to declarations, this project is not bilateral but solely German, both in its substantive and financial aspect and in the selection of experts, and also in the manner of victim commemoration.



The genesis of the project

Władysław Bartoszewski strongly believed that a monument to the Polish victims of the Nazi German occupation should be constructed in Berlin. In his capacity as the Polish prime minister's plenipotentiary for international dialogue (2007–2015), he sought to have such a monument built for many years, but to no avail. The most frequent argument presented to him was the allegedly sufficient number of memorials commemorating the crimes perpetrated on Poles which were already in place across Germany.

The issue only began to be taken more seriously at the end of 2017, when a group of German politicians and social activists came up with an initiative to build such

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a monument (*Polendenkmal*)¹ in Berlin. Their proposal sparked heated debates² and various groups, including German MPs, expressed their support for the construction of this memorial. On 30 October 2020, following a motion tabled by the CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP and the Greens parliamentary groups, all parties represented in the Bundestag except for the AfD supported the concept to establish ‘a commemoration and meeting place to present the truth about the nature of Polish-German history and to contribute to the development of special bilateral relations’ (hereinafter: the Polish Memorial).

A year later, a team of experts led by former German ambassador to Poland Rolf Nickel devised a concept which was later unveiled by the then German foreign minister Heiko Maas (SPD), according to which ‘a memorial should be the central element of this site. This place should serve as a reminder, admonish and provoke reflection. It should create an opportunity to mainly think about the Polish victims of the Second World War and the German occupation of Poland’.

Following the 2021 federal elections, the task of enforcing the Bundestag’s resolution on the Polish Memorial was transferred from the MFA to the Federal Chancellery. This was motivated by the intention to concentrate the most important history projects in one place, that is in the hands of the minister of state for culture and the media (BKM), Claudia Roth. Ms Roth is also supervising the enforcement of the Bundestag’s resolution regarding another initiative, the construction of the ‘German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War’ Documentation Centre (see Appendix).

In May 2022, Roth ordered the preparation of a new concept of the Polish Memorial. Two institutions are responsible for this: the Foundation of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (hereinafter: the Memorial Foundation) and the German Institute of Polish Affairs (DPI). Despite the declared close coordination of actions, a clear division has formed between these entities. The Memorial Foundation is mainly working on the conceptual part of the project, while the DPI is mainly involved in taking care of the operational aspects and preparing educational programmes. For 2023–5, the Foundation received a €1 mn target subsidy from the BKM for preparing the concept of the memorial.

¹ This group included the retired head of the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning Florian Mausbach, former director of the German Institute for Polish Affairs Prof. Dieter Bingen, former speakers of the Bundestag Rita Süßmuth (CDU) and Wolfgang Thierse (SPD), and a Berlin-based rabbi and former director of the Topography of Terror memorial place Andreas Nachama.

² S. Lehnstaedt, ‘Plädoyer für ein polnisch-deutsches Museum: Die Nachbarn verstehen lernen’, *Tagesspiegel*, 2 August 2018, [tagesspiegel.de](https://www.tagesspiegel.de).

Selected aspects of the new concept

The most recent concept of the German-Polish House (GPH)³ was unveiled in August 2023. According to its authors, the purpose of this facility is to “remind the public about Poland’s suffering in 1939–45 and about the brutal deaths of more than five million Polish citizens, including around three million Jewish children, women and men. The central point of the GPH, both in the emotional sense and as regards its practical operation, is the Second World War alongside Germany’s aggression against Poland and six years of occupational terror”. In its present form, the project consists of three main elements (see Appendix):

- commemoration in the form of an ‘artistic element’ (formerly a monument),
- a museum in the centre of Berlin housing a permanent exhibition and temporary displays, a lecture hall, office space, a library and a museum shop,
- educational projects focused on issues such as the German occupation of Poland and Polish suffering and resistance; they are planned to be carried out not only in Berlin but nationwide.

In line with the assumptions, each of these points can be implemented separately, which may for example accelerate the creation of the ‘artistic element’. Engaging youth in developing the GPH is viewed as one of the most important aspects of the initiative. Targeting young people with the educational activities (such as the Flying Academy and the Youth Centre of Ideas) is intended to boost their knowledge of history. This is a task of key importance, especially in the context of the fact that a mere 10% of young Germans agree with the statement that their forebears were the ‘perpetrators’ (*Täter*) of the Second World War.⁴

Research has shown that in Germany’s western federal states the level of knowledge of Poland is lower than in the former East Germany.⁵ Taking this into account, the prospect of the GPH carrying

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out its activities outside Berlin is of huge importance. This may for example involve temporary exhibitions and other initiatives (workshops, seminars, nationwide competitions) which will be organised outside its headquarters. In addition, although the debate regarding the GPH is mainly taking place among experts, in the long term it may facilitate the awareness raising activities among the public to spread knowledge about the crimes perpetrated in occupied Poland. It may also help to promote the knowledge of Poland in the German public space.

Two proposed locations are being considered for the GPH. If it is built in Berlin city centre, on the site where the Kroll Opera House once stood (in the vicinity of the Bundestag and the Federal Chancellery, in Tiergarten park), this would encourage not only Berlin residents and Germans in general, but also tourists to visit it. However, there is a problem with obtaining a permission to use a portion of this highly popular park. Civil society organisations will likely protest against it (some trees would need to be cleared for it to be built, which will face resistance).

³ *Polish-German House. A framework plan*, Foundation of the Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe, German Institute for Polish Affairs, Berlin, August 2023, deutschpolnischeshaus.de (accessed: September 2023).

⁴ *MEMO Multidimensional Remembrance Monitor 2023*, Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG), Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC), Stiftung Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft, 2023, stiftung-evz.de.

⁵ R. Formuszewicz (ed.), *Polska w oczach Niemców*, PISM, 9 October 2023, pism.pl.

The other location proposed by the concept's authors is the Anhalter Bahnhof, an area in the vicinity of the former railway station at the Askanischer Platz. This location is more favourable because it operates in line with official spatial planning strategies, which could accelerate the construction process. This advantage is also emphasised by the initial authors of the concept to commemorate the Polish victims. They argue that, since the Documentation Centre for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation is located nearby,⁶ it could facilitate the selection of this location. However, it is far from the city centre.

A new idea involving the construction, in the same location, of a museum dedicated to German emigration in 1933–45 (Exilmuseum) may be another potential problem.

Thus far, a foundation has been

established to build this museum and a competition for an architectural concept has been announced. Cornelia Vossen, the curator of the Exilmuseum foundation in Berlin, has said that the initial stage of the design work is underway. This museum will cost €60 mn, and so far a third of this sum has been collected under a crowdfunding initiative. According to initial plans, the museum will open in 2028 and an exhibition presenting its concept and visualisation has been set up in the vicinity of the Anhalter Bahnhof.

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Controversy and challenges

The construction of the GPH has sparked controversy and posed long-term challenges. These mainly involve the lack of major progress in implementing the Bundestag resolution and the modification of the initial concept of this project. This has come under criticism from the initiators of the commemoration centre. In March and again in June 2023, they wrote a letter to Ms Roth, in which they indicated that the most recent plan does not contain the word 'memorial', which was a key element of the initial version of the project. They also emphasised that the most important goal of this initiative should be to spread knowledge of Polish-German history among the German public. "Poles know what they suffered during the German occupation. They attach importance to a dignified commemoration of their plight in the German capital, in which this tragedy was born, to a sign of Germans publicly pleading guilty, mourning the victims, bearing responsibility and seeking reconciliation". In addition, the authors of the letter argue that it is necessary to separate the victim commemoration memorial from the museum and educational centre.⁷

Although the current version of the concept does envisage a 'distinct artistic element', its interpretation may vary greatly. This has also been raised by the document's authors during meetings. They argue that the form of commemoration depends on the results of an international competition for its design. It is thus clear that, for the Germans the question of the form is an issue of rather minor importance, although they are willing to accept a particularly futuristic or modern concept and may prefer these. It is also unclear whether visitors would be allowed to lay wreaths at the 'artistic element'. Although the concept suggests that this will be possible, last year during the celebrations commemorating the outbreak of the Second World War (which were effectively by the GPH on the site where the former Kroll Opera House once stood) neither flowers nor candles were allowed, most likely due to security reasons and the proximity to the Federal Chancellery.

⁶ 'Otwarcie wystawy stałej Fundacji Ucieczka, Wypędzenie, Pojednanie', Institute for Western Affairs, 18 June 2021, iz.poznan.pl.

⁷ G. Gnauck, 'Streit über Polen-Denkmal in Berlin', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 14 March 2023, faz.net.

Another challenge involves the need to compete with other government projects focused on the culture of memory of the victims of the Second World War. This mainly involves the above mentioned 'German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War' Documentation Centre. The concept of constructing this institution is more recent and was conceived in response to repeated demands to commemorate the Polish victims. However, it was intended to comprise all individuals, who suffered as a result of the Nazi occupation, and thus to ensure a very broad context of victim commemoration. This was intended to enable Germany to avoid being accused of tolerating a certain 'victim competition' on the historical map of Berlin.

The GPH concept has not clarified its relations towards the Documentation Centre (the Memorial Foundation is involved the development of both these initiatives).

During meetings, the Foundation's

head Uwe Neumärker clearly states that his tasks include efforts to avoid repetitions as regards the commemoration of the Polish victims in the two projects. This prompts the conclusion that the Documentation Centre will pay little attention to the memory of the Polish victims because 'Poles already have a museum'. The competition between these two initiatives seems important, especially as, for example, in the event of having to choose one exhibition on the German occupation during the Second World War, most visitors (including groups of schoolchildren) would likely prefer the Documentation Centre as a place which houses a comprehensive presentation of these issues. Moreover, since work on developing this centre is much more advanced, it may be assumed that it will be opened sooner than the German-Polish House.

The GPH's most urgent problems include the torpidity of the system and the issue of funding the construction works. Previous German experience, including the debate on the creation of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in the heart of Berlin, which lasted more than twenty years (it began in 1988 and the memorial was inaugurated in 2005), suggests that it may take more than a decade until the place of commemoration of the Polish victims is built. In addition, in Germany, implementation of large construction projects (such as the airport in Berlin, the headquarters of the Federal Intelligence Service, the concert hall in Hamburg) is often delayed and run over budget.

Another obstacle to the Bundestag allocating funds (around €150–200 mn) for the GPH involves a permanent lack of interest in this initiative on the part of Germany's most prominent politicians and the public (except for individual journalists). Other important barriers include Germany's budget problems and economic stagnation, as well as the expected rise in the cost of this project in the coming years, resulting from its expansion. Moreover, as regards funding, the above mentioned overt rivalry between individual historical projects planned by the government is of key importance in this context. This involves not only the 'German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War' Documentation Centre,⁸ but also the future Center for European Transformation and German Unity.⁹ It may be impossible to provide funding to all these initiatives in line with the initial plans. The GPH is the least advanced, which additionally jeopardises its future funding. However, serious as this is, it is not the controversy which has sparked the most heated debates.

⁸ M. Wagińska-Marzec, 'Uchwała Bundestagu zielonym światłem do budowy Centrum Dokumentacyjnego „Druga wojna światowa i okupacja niemiecka w Europie”', Institute for Western Affairs, 24 October 2023, iz.poznan.pl.

⁹ The Future Center for European Transformation and German Unity (Zukunftszentrums für Deutsche Einheit und Europäische Transformation) will discuss the transformation that occurred in Germany and in Europe post-1989 and will pay special attention to East German experience. It will be located in Halle (Saale). The facility will be inaugurated in 2028 and its cost stands at around €200 mn.

Doubts regarding the concept of the German House

Reservations have also been voiced in particular regarding the plan of the permanent exhibition. Its main narrative will present the German occupation of Poland, including the aspects of everyday life and forms of resistance. The project also explicitly refers to more than five million victims, who were citizens of Poland. However, the assumption which had been included in the version prepared by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 2021, saying that 60% of this part of the exhibition is to focus on the Second World War and, in particular, the German occupation, has been removed from the concept. Another problem involves the failure to highlight the role of the perpetrators, who are very often omitted from the debate¹⁰ or remain anonymous, unlike the manifestations of German resistance to Nazi Germany, which are presented for example in the German Resistance Memorial Centre in Berlin. Moreover, the concept of the exhibition does not contain information that the overall purpose of the occupation was to destroy the Polish nation.¹¹

Despite the progress of the work, a number of issues need to be clarified. For example, it is unclear what is meant by the statement that the permanent exhibition

“should surprise the visitors with

its choice of topics and perspectives, with unusual questions asked by Germans to Poles and by Poles to Germans”. It is also unclear what the passage concerning education and meetings means in the context of the project as a whole: “the concept of an educational space and meeting place should emerge as a German-Polish project focused on Europe and the future, devised by independent male and female experts using state-of-the-art design solutions which are detached from particularist interests”. This suggests that one of the GPH’s goals is to educate Poles and this is directly communicated by the design of the facility presented: “The goal should be for Germans to learn something new about Poland and for Poles to learn something new about Germany, but also for Poles to get to know more about Poles and Poland after seeing the exhibition, while Germans should get to know more about Germans and Germany”. Moreover, the authors of this concept arbitrarily indicate what the Polish preferences, for example regarding the future location of the GPH, are: “For both Poles and Germans, the preferred location of the German-Polish House, that is the site of the former Kroll Opera House in the vicinity of the Reichstag, is that particular place in Germany which symbolises the attack on Poland and thus the beginning of the Second World War”.

Another contentious issue is the lack of interest among the German public as regards their participation in historical projects. Schools and youth organisations have been reluctant to become involved in developing the GPH concept and some individuals who are taking part in these activities are from a migrant background (most often Polish and Ukrainian).

Conclusions: the future is uncertain

The concept of the German House contains contradictory information about its authorship and target group. Sometimes it is described as a ‘German’ initiative, sometimes as a project which is ‘carried out in cooperation with another nation’ or even a ‘Polish-German’ project (the same is said about its individual components). Contrary to what the project’s initiators claim, the project should be regarded

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¹⁰ See S. Salzborn, *Zbiorowa niewinność. Wypieranie Szoah z niemieckiej pamięci*, the Pilecki Institute, Warsaw 2022; G. Paul (Hrsg.), *Die Täter der Shoah. Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?*, Göttingen 2002.

¹¹ According to the definition of genocide proposed by Rafał Lemkin, for more see the website of the Pilecki Institute regarding the Lemkin Collection, instytutpileckiego.pl.

as a fully German initiative because it has been commissioned by the German government, is financed from the German budget and, most importantly, reflects the German assumptions of the policy of memory and promotes the German view of both history and how it is commemorated. In its present form, it can hardly be regarded as the manifestation of a dialogue with Poland.

The most important examples of the intention to promote the German culture of remembrance include the absence of the word 'memorial' in the GPH's concept and Germany's evident reluctance to build one, despite the fact that the aim of the grass roots initiative behind the project was precisely to build a memorial to the Polish victims of the German occupation. Moreover, efforts are also being made to avoid other notions which are questionable from the point of view of German historical policy. The focus is not on the nation and the state, but on the cities and regions (most often those which have a common German-Polish heritage) and on society at large. This may lead to a relativisation of the German state's political agency in contacts with the Polish state.

The involvement of Polish experts in the initiative is also problematic. Its absence would strip the Polish side of access to information and of the possibility of influencing the form of the project and would expose it to accusations of boycotting the initiative. Their participation, on the other hand, equates to them legitimising a project on which they effectively have only an illusory influence, all the more so because the German side decides which Polish researchers should be invited to participate. Experience gathered thus far suggests that these decisions are arbitrary and fail to reflect the actual diversity of figures and views present in our historical debate.

This choice of researchers triggers numerous questions, for example whether Poles employed at German universities and state institutions (such as the German Historical Institute) and Germans holding similar positions in Polish institutions are viewed as researchers representing the broadly understood 'Polish side'. This is especially important because the project's organisers frequently refer to 'consultations with the Polish side'. If, in line with their declarations, they intend to 'create a place for intellectual debate on Polish-German issues in the European sphere, both those which unite and those which divide', it is surprising that no scholars representing a different view of the politics of memory than the German one have been invited to the project.

The manner in which the specific elements of the project take form will be the primary concern. The document presented is a framework plan, sometimes very vague, with numerous passages which require a more specific wording or even more substantive content. Considering what tasks have been assigned to the project, for example in the informational aspect, it seems that its purpose is mainly compatible with the German perspective. For example, a paragraph says: "The role of the GPH will not be to impose answers but to ask questions: what is our responsibility for the past? Which aspects are German and which are Polish both now and in the past? How much of Poland is there in Germany and how much of Germany in Poland? What do these questions mean in the 21st century for (post) migrant, highly diversified societies? Why are Germans and Poles perceived as neighbours who are strangers to each other? What is the origin of the frequently fundamental lack of understanding or even misunderstanding between the two societies?". If the discussion on the GPH is to revive the German debate on the perception of the Second World War and its first victims and to challenge the image of Germany as a state which has come to terms with its past in an exemplary manner (this has been promoted for years) then the following questions would need to be asked: Why did Germans seek to exterminate the Polish nation? Why did they exterminate the Polish intelligentsia? Why have the perpetrators remained unpunished and how does this affect Polish-German relations? What was the origin of the conviction that Poles and Poland represent an inferior civilisation? Can the manner in which Germans treated the Poles be analysed in colonial terms?

The optimum and compromise solution seems to be a speedy construction, in a prestigious neighbourhood in Berlin, of a monument commemorating the victims of the German occupation of Poland and, subsequently, of an educational centre on German-Polish relations. Both sides should contribute to these equally, in terms of both funding and research. They would thus have an equal right to decide on the initiative's form and content. The main aim of this facility would be to provide contemporary Germans, in particular young people, with knowledge of the details of the German occupation of Poland.

APPENDIX

The concept of the German-Polish House and the permanent exhibition¹²

- Location: the site of the former Kroll Opera House (the Tiergarten district). A proposal has been put forward to put a memorial plaque there immediately.
- The building is to be designed by a team of Polish and German architects.
- A special place is to be arranged on the premises to enable visitors to lay wreaths to commemorate the Polish victims.
- Each year, on 1 September, the parliament is to hold a special session.
- Temporary exhibitions (according to the concept these are presented as more important than the permanent exhibition) are to be offered in various digital formats and located in the future GPH. They will serve as a 'laboratory of friendship and mutual understanding' and ultimately form an element of a mobile academy' (modelled on the projects which are currently carried out by the DPI).
- The educational projects should focus on the German occupation of Poland and on Polish suffering and resistance. Moreover, they should also promote those values which are important for a peaceful and democratic neighbourhood in Europe.
- The GPH will also offer space for holding seminars, a lecture hall/screening room, office space, a library, a shop with items related to the museum's subject matter and a café serving traditional Polish and German dishes.
- Two advisory bodies will be formed: a Conceptual Council (ten individuals from Poland and Germany) and a Polish-German Project Support Group (comprising individuals involved in the project's development, that is: politicians, representatives of various institutions, researchers).

The concept mentions the need to ensure the participation of the Polish side and of the representatives of non-governmental organisations in the decision-making bodies which will be formed later.

Permanent exhibition

According to the concept put forward by the authors of the GPH, the goal of the permanent exhibition is to expand and improve the perspective of looking at several hundred years of common and shared Polish-German history up to recent times. This exhibition will present issues such as the perception of oneself and of others, the migration-related experience and the process of mounting 'hostility',

¹² On the basis of the Framework plan of the Memorial Foundation and the DPI announced in August 2023 and information shared by the organisers at a later date, for example at the Transparency Forum.

as well as rapprochement and reconciliation, which are often characterised by ‘very unequal relations of power’. The exhibition’s narrative will not be chronological but thematic. It is intended to present selected medieval, modern and recent historical events and myths, which are of special importance to Polish-German history and to the remembrance culture observed in the two states.

Main assumptions of the permanent exhibition:

- 1) The timelines and maps will offer a chronological and topographic presentation of Polish-German history.
- 2) Thematic rooms:
 - Room 1 – introduction – identities,
 - Room 2 – concepts of the state and the nation,
 - Rooms 3 and 4 – two main thematic rooms dedicated to the Second World War,
 - Room 5 – the post-war period,
 - Room 6 – migrations and population flows,
 - Room 7 – myths.
- 3) General topics discussed in various rooms: biographies, cities, regions, languages.

The ‘German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War’ Documentation Centre¹³

The decision to build the centre was the result of a debate held in 2017–20 on the commemoration of the victims of German crimes in Europe and was made by the Bundestag on 9 October 2020, coming several days prior to the decision to build the Polish Memorial. The centre’s establishment was to some degree conceived as a supplement to the construction of the memorial in order to avoid the so-called ‘victim rivalry’ which has been present in the German view of the problem (the suggestion voiced by the former Ukrainian ambassador to Germany Andriy Melnyk that a similar memorial should be built to commemorate the Ukrainian victims is frequently cited as an argument to support this view).

The German Historical Museum (DHM) is responsible for devising the centre’s concept. The permanent exhibition focuses on specific issues, whereas the perspective highlighting the individual nations’ experience with specific forms of occupation has been abandoned. Plans have been made to focus on issues such as forced labour, camps, looting, the destruction of culture, hunger, the killing of hospital patients, the Shoah, the genocide of Sinti and Roma, collaboration proposals and coercion, resistance movement, and in the epilogue, the legal settlements carried out post-1945. Issues linked with Poland form elements of the individual exhibitions (for example in the context of the extermination of the Jews and the intelligentsia).

The centre’s construction work is much more advanced than the design of the Polish Memorial. In May 2022, the federal government approved a plan for the centre’s development, which specified the details of the thematic scope of the permanent exhibition and the aspects of the temporary displays. Their main emphasis will be placed on expanding the knowledge of specific facts from the Second World War period (for example the massacres) and of events linked with the war which occurred after it had ended (for example the Nuremberg trials). Another intention is to prepare new publications as part of the centre’s work and to carry out a comprehensive education and research programme. The cost of the centre’s construction is €120 mn, the preparation

¹³ *Realisierungsvorschlag*, Dokumentationszentrum «Zweiter Weltkrieg und deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft in Europa», 18 March 2022, dhm.de.

of the permanent exhibition will cost €14 mn, and the annual remuneration for the employees will be €6 mn. The estimated cost of the first three temporary exhibitions is €21 mn. The concept's authors expect that around 756,000 individuals will visit the exhibition annually.

The faster pace of constructing the centre is in part due to the fact that it represents one side (the German one) and, unlike in the case of the Polish Memorial, only one institution (DHM) is responsible for its construction and interior design.

The problems faced by the authors of both initiatives include issues linked with the commemoration of the victims according to their nationality. Partly, the German experts are concerned that "the facility [that is the centre but also the memorial] may be politically seized, in a nationalist sense, by those groups of victims which have thus far been less visible". Furthermore, the German capital is very reluctant to ritualise the practice of commemoration (for example by laying flowers). This is the implied meaning of the passage in the centre's concept which says that "specific places of historical suffering in Germany and Europe are the right locations for solemn commemoration ceremonies", rather than Berlin.