



KATHOLISCHE
PRIVATUNIVERSITÄT LINZ

“The Shadows of Past”

Im Wintersemester 2024/25 fand bereits zum dritten Mal die Lehrveranstaltung „The Shadows of Past. Linz and Upper Austria in the Nazi-Period“ für Incoming-Studierende an der KU Linz statt. Unter der Leitung von Dr.ⁱⁿ Verena Lorber erhielten internationale Studierende einen umfassenden Einblick in die Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus, mit besonderem Fokus auf Oberösterreich und Linz als sogenannte „Patenstadt des Führers“.

Die Lehrveranstaltung deckte eine Vielzahl von Themen ab: eine Einführung in die Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus und die Rolle von Linz als „Führerstadt“, das System der Konzentrationslager, NS-Zwangsarbeit und NS-Euthanasie, jüdisches Leben vor, während und nach der NS-Zeit, Formen des Widerstands, die Kirche im Nationalsozialismus, Franz Jägerstätter sowie der Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit und die Erinnerungskultur.

Zur Vertiefung der Inhalte wurden drei Exkursionen zu Lern- und Gedenkortern organisiert. Die erste Exkursion führte am 25. Oktober 2024 zur KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen. Der Besuch des ehemaligen Konzentrationslagers erwies sich als äußerst emotional und bewegend. Er rief nicht nur zahlreiche Fragen auf, sondern regte die Teilnehmenden auch dazu an, intensiv über den Umgang mit der Vergangenheit nachzudenken.

Im Folgenden einige Eindrücke der Teilnehmer:innen über ihren Besuch in Mauthausen:

Erste Eindrücke

“It's true that it was a sunny autumn day, and I don't know if the place would have the same effect on me in winter. All the same, at first it was difficult for me to imagine and above all to realize that so many people had suffered here and that atrocities could have been committed in such a peaceful and harmonious natural setting.”

“My visit to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria was very emotional and made me think deeply. As an art history student, it gave me a chance to think about history, art, and architecture in connection to memory, trauma, and human rights. The visit helped me understand more about the Nazi period and showed me how important it is to remember places like this, so we never forget these terrible events.”

Emotionale Reaktionen und Reflexionen

“Visiting Mauthausen and seeing those things in person was a deeply emotional experience for me. By connecting the past and present, these sentimental objects, places and stories inspire reflecting and a dedication to honoring the memory of those who lost their lives.”

“When I think about my visit to Mauthausen, I feel that empathy, understanding, and remembering the past are important to fighting cruelty. The visit also made me see the need to preserve memories through art and architecture. These forms of memory help us connect with the past and learn from it.”

“It made me question what kindness really means and whether we-people are as good as we like to think we are.”

Spezifische Orte und ihre Bedeutung

“First one was the Crematoria and Killing Facilities room because it represents the horrifying culmination of the suffering endured by the prisoners. It is a stark and visceral reminder of the ultimate cost of hate, prejudice, and unchecked power. This space encapsulates the darkest aspects of humanity's capacity for cruelty, and it forces us to confront history in its rawest form. This place evokes a deep sense of sadness, disbelief, and anger in me. Standing in or imagining this space brings a chilling awareness of the immense scale of human suffering that occurred there. It forces me to grapple with the idea of systematic dehumanization and the fragility of human rights when societies lose compassion and accountability. It is both overwhelming and sobering to realize that real people - men, women, and children - spent their final moments in such a harrowing environment.”

“Each stone, scarred by the labor of countless prisoners, carries a history of both torment and defiance. Together, they form a monument not just to suffering but to the human capacity to endure.”

Bedeutung der Erinnerung und des Gedenkens

“Today, against this massive dehumanization of prisoners, Mauthausen reinforces the reality of the human person. Where there was a desire to dehumanize, where people were reduced to ashes in the same way as bulky rubbish, the Mauthausen museum and its team give us names, anecdotes, photos, drawings and quotations.”

“Working with memory is the main way to not forget the most terrible pages of history. So in the black history of the Mauthausen concentration camp there is a hopeful final point that gives hope that this will not happen again. I consider this final point to be the Hall of Names in Mauthausen. The black room with the list of the 81,000 identified victims of Mauthausen. This important room symbolizes for me the act of returning the identity of the victims, which was taken from them in life. This memory is not embodied in the impersonal number – 81,000, although this number is enormous and terrible itself. This memory is embodied in the names that were taken from the victims during their lifetime and now, after many years, returned to them after their death. Working with memory is a way to not forget and not to consign to oblivion even the darkest pages of history.”

Persönliche Reflexionen

„Today, standing before it with full knowledge of its history, I am overwhelmed by the weight of its symbolism and the proximity of my ancestors to such horror.”

“I am grateful that I had the opportunity to be connected to this history and the pain of the Austrian state and to recognize more closely what is hidden in the beautiful Alps.”



KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen (©FFJI)

Die zweite Exkursion führte am 29. November 2014 zum Lern- und Gedenkort Schloss Hartheim. Angeregt durch die Führung am historischen Ort und die Ausstellung setzten sich die Studierenden intensiv mit der Frage auseinander, welchen Wert das Leben hat und wer darüber entscheidet, welches Leben als wertvoll angesehen wird – Fragestellungen, die auch heute von großer gesellschaftlicher Relevanz sind. Um Einblicke in die Schlüsse und Erfahrungen der Studierenden zu erhalten und ihre Reflexionen über den Besuch nachzuvollziehen, folgen einige Auszüge aus ihren schriftlichen Arbeiten:

Erste Eindrücke

“The castle’s architecture, combined with the weight of its history, contributes to a reflective environment where visitors can pay their respects and engage in personal contemplation. The experience is designed to be both educational and emotionally impactful, fostering a deeper understanding of the past and its implications for present and future generations.”

“Visiting Hartheim was the first time I had heard of Nazi euthanasia or killing centers. Even today, this part of the Nazi regime remains in the shadows, unlike the concentration and extermination camps, which are universally known. Yet all three structures had the deaths of thousands of people in common. So why this difference? Why are euthanasia centers still unknown today? The story of Hartheim intrigued me: a specific goal, achieved by a specific process.”

Emotionale Reaktionen und Reflexionen

“Seeing the historical evidence in Hartheim Castle made the past feel incredibly real. Walking through the gas chamber and morgue, I felt the weight of what had happened there. The rooms were simple and quiet, but they told a story louder than words. Knowing that people were led into these spaces, not knowing their fate, made me feel helpless and angry.”

“Standing in these places made it hard to separate the present from the past. It was no longer just something I read or heard about; it was something I could see and feel. It made me think about the responsibility of remembering these events and the importance of learning from them.”

“Visiting Hartheim Castle became an incredibly strong and important experience that allowed me to more deeply understand the cruelty of the Nazi regime and the scale of its crimes. This tour uncovered unknown pages of history that contrast with the beauty and tranquility of the surrounding architecture. The absurdity and inhumanity of the Nazis' actions are especially acute in the context that they killed not only 'others' but also their own citizens – people with physical or mental disabilities who were deemed «unnecessary». These events vividly illustrate how propaganda, control, and fear turned society into a silent witness to atrocities.”

Spezifische Orte und ihre Bedeutung

“The grave site in the yard, where some victims' remains were found during excavations, gave the memorial an additional sense of sorrow. Visitors are reminded to think about the many lives lost inside Hartheim Castle's walls by this simple yet powerful area. The grave site serves as a powerful reminder of the costs that discriminatory and dehumanizing ideologies take on human lives. Its existence emphasizes the value of memory and our shared obligation to respect and preserve the lives of those who were silenced.”

“The Value of Life is a powerful exhibit that helps visitors understand the tragic history of Hartheim Castle. Its design, message, and emotional impact make it one of the most memorable parts of the visit. It forces visitors to confront difficult questions about how we judge the worth of others and how those judgments shape our world. By connecting the past to the present, the exhibit ensures that the lessons of Hartheim Castle are not forgotten. It is a reminder that history is not just something we learn about; it is something we carry with us and must learn from.”

Bedeutung der Erinnerung und des Gedenkens

“Preserving such places is not only an act of remembrance but also a warning of what hatred, ideological blindness, and indifference can lead to.”

“Visiting Hartheim is not just an encounter with the past but an immersion into profound ethical and philosophical questions about human rights, dignity, and the moral responsibility of societies.”

“The visit to Hartheim is not merely an encounter with history but a profound reflection on the ethical responsibilities of societies. It is a reminder that remembrance is not passive; it requires active engagement, critical reflection, and a commitment to building a world that values every life.”

Persönliche Reflexion

“On a more personal note, for me this exhibition was a key moment in the first semester's course on National Socialism, giving us a broader view of the situation and its origins. Here, we will focus more specifically on industrialization, Darwinism and eugenics.”

“And once again, the same question that had arisen at Mauthausen appears: how was it possible for the villagers or the Nazis to put up a barrier between these two worlds? How could the Nazis live comfortably as if nothing had happened, while hundreds of disabled people were being gassed to death on the floor below?”

“The question 'What kind of society do we want to create?' lingers long after leaving the exhibition.”



Lern- und Gedenkort Schloss Hartheim (©FFJI)

Die dritte und letzte Exkursion führte am 13. Dezember 2024 in das Zeitgeschichte Museum der voestalpine, das sich der Geschichte der Zwangsarbeit am Standort der ehemaligen Reichswerke Hermann Göring widmet. In der Dauerausstellung wird das Schicksal der Zwangsarbeiter:innen beleuchtet, die zwischen 1938 und 1945 in den Werken eingesetzt wurden. Die Ausstellung basiert auf umfangreichen Forschungsarbeiten, Archivmaterialien und Interviews mit Zeitzeug:innen. Der Ort dient nicht nur der historischen Bildung, sondern auch dem Gedenken und leistet einen wichtigen Beitrag, die Erinnerung an die Opfer der NS-Zwangsarbeit lebendig zu halten und weiterzugeben.

Durch die Lehrveranstaltung wurde den Studierenden auf vielfältige Weise ein Zugang zur NS-Vergangenheit in Oberösterreich und Linz eröffnet. Die behandelten Inhalte wurden im Kontext der NS-Ideologie und des NS-Regimes eingebettet, um ein tieferes Verständnis für diesen Abschnitt der Geschichte zu vermitteln.

Verena Lorber

Beitrag und Zusammenstellung der Inhalte aus den Essays der Teilnehmer:innen der LV