

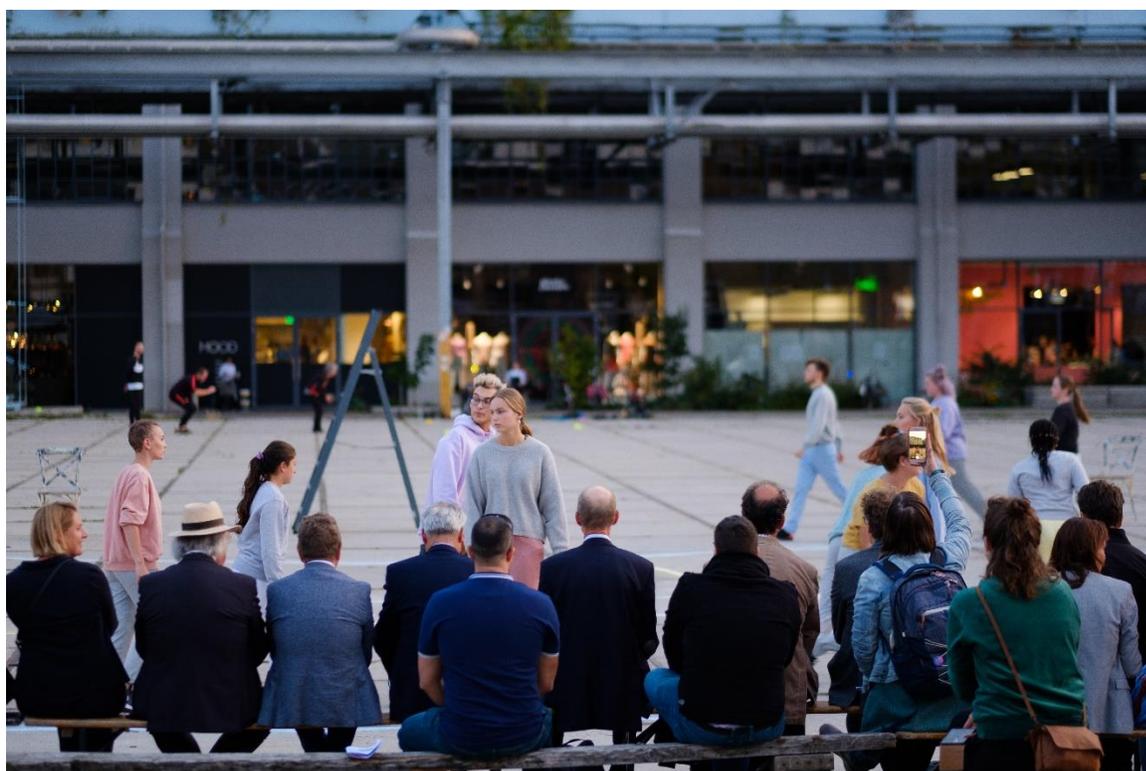


Past:Forward
Reflect • Rethink • Remember

Past:Forward Conference

Reflect, Rethink, Remember

9-11 September 2019
Eindhoven and Waalre



English summary of our publication about the Past:Forward Conference

Introduction

During the Past:Forward Conference, which took place from 9-11 September 2019, more than 50 participants from 11 different countries worked on the future of commemoration and remembrance. The conference marked the celebration of 75 years of freedom in the south of The Netherlands and was the starting point of the Brabant Remembers program.

The participants followed an inspiring program with sessions and workshops given by national and international (young) professionals at interesting locations in Eindhoven Strijp-S and Waalre. The program contained examples of commemoration and remembrance, such as theatre, a talkshow and music. The conference was prepared and carried out by a project team of young professionals and the participants were from different age groups. The provincial Commemoration of Brabant's Fallen in Waalre was treated as a case study during the conference and the participants prepared a contribution which was shown during the memorial. This contribution is an inspiration and a boost for future forms of commemorations.

We are happy to share with you the results of the conference and we will make recommendations for those who want to get started with developing and designing more inclusive and diverse commemorations.

Background

Since the end of the Second World War, commemorations in the Netherlands have largely been organized in similar ways and following a fixed set-up. This also applies to the provincial Commemoration of the Brabant's Fallen. Our participants submitted their studies and practical examples in the field of commemoration and remembrance. We have discussed these themes together in an international and intergenerational context.

Collective commemorations play an important role in society as a reminder of the terrible consequences of war. Gerdi Verbeet referred to this during the Freedom dinner which took place on the last day of the conference. She stressed the importance of telling young people about the importance of these commemorations with the means to guard each other, so that, hopefully, wars no longer occur.

Young people often experience an underlying warning within this message: to keep on organizing commemorations, but without making any changes to current ways and traditions. We believe that young people should have control over the future of commemoration and remembrance. That's why we worked together with a project team consisting of young professionals and created a program with a lot of room for intergenerational exchange of ideas.

The benefits and challenges of the Past:Forward Conference

> The Past:Forward Conference has created a place for exchange about commemoration and remembrance.

Participants were given the stage to share their research and we facilitated a place for sharing ideas and experiences in the informal and innovative programme. The programme also provided examples from various disciplines such as digitalisation, design, the visual and performing arts and food culture. Due to the international character of the conference, the participants were able to learn more about commemoration and remembrance in other countries. Demand for this will remain in the future, but a first step was taken during the conference toward more international meetings and exchange for (young) professionals.

> The Past:Forward Conference initiated a more open and broader approach to commemoration and remembrance

The participants of the conference came from different age groups and countries. During sessions and breaks, they talked to each other and shared personal stories. The result of this was that many participants indicated that they have become much more aware of the differences between them and other Europeans, and that it was nice to be able to name those differences. We discussed the intrinsic value and meaning, but also more specific topics such as engagement and young people. We raised questions such as: how do we develop new ways for commemorating and also ensure the inclusion of multiple perspectives? Some participants indicated that, due to the political situation, they are less used in their home country to get free space to question current ways of commemoration. This is one of the reasons why it is extremely important that these participants also have the opportunity to participate in European discussions about commemorative culture.

> The Past:Forward Conference proves that younger and older generations can work together towards a joint approach for future ways of commemoration and remembrance

Intergenerational exchange and cooperation was one of the most important tasks of the conference. The conference was prepared and conducted by a project team of young people professionals and through a survey have young people from the Netherlands and other European countries presented their ideas for sessions. In addition, all sessions were organized

and moderated by young people. The participants indicated afterwards that because of this approach, the differences between older and younger professionals became smaller and the conversation more equivalent. This is endorsed by our workshop teachers, who noticed that the participants, despite the apparently large (age) differences, were able to work together and were respectful towards each other. During Past:Forward, the method of intergenerational working was successfully applied, but we will continue developing this method in upcoming events.

> The Past: Forward Conference offers inspiration for future forms of commemoration and is a plea for interdisciplinary work

During the conference, the participants worked towards a contribution to the Commemoration of Brabant's Fallen. Singer Nana Peijnenburg and visual artist Geerte van Beers prepared a concept that was adjusted and added to during the conference. The result is a performance in which a story is depicted through projection on a bunk bed as they were used in the barracks of Camp Vught. Their performance constituted a strong contrast with the more traditional contributions in the commemoration. Because the performance came about through the collaboration of people with different disciplines, the result was innovative. You can apply this by distilling multiple elements of future commemorations with people who can add something from other disciplines. You may think of theatre, dance and music, but also work together with people in education and healthcare. By implementing these different perspectives, future commemorations will become more diverse and inclusive.

Recommendations for future commemorations and celebrations

1. In the upcoming years, there will be fewer people who can share their lived experiences of the Second World War. The way we commemorate will change. The time to work on the future of commemoration is now!
2. Traditions and established rituals ensure a bond with the past. At the same time, there is a growing demand for new interpretations of contemporary commemorations. One of the conclusions of the conference is that traditions and new interpretations reinforce each other and need each other to guarantee the future of commemoration and remembrance.
3. Traditions ensure connection with the past. Current ways of commemorating can continue to exist alongside the forms that will be added in the future. It is important that younger and older people work together, to ensure the endurance of traditions in new forms of commemoration.
4. Listening to and collaborating with people of all ages and with different backgrounds creates more inclusive commemorations.
5. By retaining an open attitude and giving space to people who are not (yet) involved in organizing commemorations, more people will feel involved and they will share the ownership of commemorations.
6. Connect the past, where possible, with current events: this makes the past tangible.
7. In the Netherlands, especially the veterans and victims of the Second World War are commemorated. However, there are also young veterans and victims for whom more recent conflicts have played an important role in their lives. Make an effort to hear their stories and involve them in your work.

8. Take your own story and your own experiences with freedom as a starting point if you have to speak during a memorial. This keeps your message authentic, but also prevents you to make wrongful statements about someone else.
9. Do not just bring young people as guests, but work together.
10. It can be difficult to approach young people. In addition, you may mainly meet young people who are already active in the organization of commemorations. You may work together with organizations that already are successful in approaching young people. You may also consult network organizations. They may be able to introduce your project to others.
11. Find new inspiration by working together with people from other disciplines. Not only does this yield surprising ideas, you also get to know new people who want to work with you on the future of commemoration. You may look for new partners with a different background, for example in the arts, but also business and local communities.
12. If you would like to work with young people, try to ensure that they can work with you for a longer period of time. It is also best to work with them in all phases of the project, because by only brainstorming occasionally, you are unlikely to achieve that the young people feel involved in your project.
13. Discuss what expectations you have of each other, for example on the time investment and the reimbursement you can offer. There must be a clear reciprocity in your cooperation whereby it is clear what both parties can expect from each other and what can be gained by working together. It is important to take into account that young people may have limitations which prevent them to participate fully, such as work and school.
14. The events that took place during the Second World War and other conflicts have left a profound impression on people's lives. It may be helpful to use certain elements from personal stories, to illustrate the consequences of the event as a whole.

15. All stories are worth telling. The differences offer us several starting points and more capacity to continue to organize commemorations in the future.
16. Use commemorating and remembering as a verb. We recommend you to focus first on working together and creating a common goal and only secondly on ceremonial celebrations.
17. Personal stories are an inspiration for many people to be involved with commemorations and remembrances. It is important to collect and save these stories so that they can continue to serve as an inspiration in the future.
18. The commemorations that are more traditionally designed have a fixed form with recurring rituals. To modernize a commemoration, you could try to experiment with the contents of the programme. For example, you may want to organize a Freedom Dinner prior to, or instead of, the commemoration. You could also think of trying to experiment with different layouts for your venue, like a living room setting instead of rows of people. Be creative!



We would like to thank everyone who participated and contributed to the Past: Forward Conference!

Our special thanks go towards the people and organizations who have lent their objects to our popup museum: Mohamad Badenjki, Museum the Moved Years, Military History Museum Achtmaal, War Museum Overloon, Peerke Donders Foundation, Liberating Wings and Het Waalres Museum.

More information

You can find more information, photos and videos of the Past: Forward Conference on: www.erfgoedbrabant.nl/projecten/pastforward-conference-reflect-rethink-remember/

About the organization

Brabant Remembers collects stories about life-changing moments in the lives of people during the Second World War (1940-1945). Together they provide an impression of the impact of the Second World War on society. Together with municipalities and partners, these stories are translated into an innovative cultural program in 2019-2020.

www.brabantremembers.com

Erfgoed Brabant is the center of expertise for the heritage field in the province of Noord-Brabant. In 2018, Erfgoed Brabant organized with partners the four-day program The Future is Heritage during the European Cultural Heritage Summit of Europa Nostra in Berlin. This was a program for young professionals, which, just like Past: Forward, was prepared and implemented by a project team of young professionals. More than 50 European heritage professionals from 16 countries presented their work and exchanged ideas. These young people are the start of the European network The Future is Heritage. Erfgoed Brabant prepared the Past: Forward Conference commissioned by Brabant Remembers.

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