

MAGNA CARTA

A Historical Framework for the LRE Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Background of the LRE Foundation

The LRE Foundation (LREF) is a growing international, inclusive network that connects people and organisations dedicated to preserving and valorising the tangible and intangible cultural heritage related to World War II, its history, memories and meanings. The organisation's main objective is to underline the relevance of this history and to make it accessible, especially for the younger generations.

The key projects are based on three pillars:

- The Liberation Route Europe is a certified Cultural Route of the Council of Europe that links the main regions along the advance of the Allied Forces in 1943-1945. In order to make the route a physical part of the European landscape, LREF is developing a network of Liberation Route Europe trails that allows new ways to experience the route by hiking and cycling.
- 'Europe Remembers' is a remembrance and commemorative platform that brings together commemorative sites, museums, and events in a collaborative and inspirational portal that enables diverse communities to reflect on the complex heritage of World War II from multiple historical perspectives.
- Engaging the younger generations is a key objective for the LRE Foundation. The LRE Youth Programme promotes innovative forms of active remembrance and memory transmission, ensuring that even as living memory becomes history, the stories, experiences, losses and sacrifices of individuals will not be forgotten.

The LRE Foundation started as a Dutch organization in 2008 and expanded into Europe in 2013. The LRE Foundation has made concerted efforts to bring together different narratives of the Second World War, fostering an inclusive understanding of the past. With its international offices in Arnhem (the Netherlands) and Brussels (Belgium) and national branches in the UK, France, Italy, Germany and Poland, the Foundation has evolved over the years as a European organization, including a variety of members and expanding its outreach, necessitating the development of a comprehensive framework to guide its activities.

Objective of the document

This document, the second iteration of the Magna Carta for the LRE Foundation, seeks to provide this essential framework. While the first version of the Magna Carta, written in 2014, outlined a general overview of the historical context and key aspects of World War II history for each partner country, the document gradually became too extensive to be easily utilized.

In response, this version of the Magna Carta aims to streamline and clarify the fundamental principles, historical focus, and methodology underpinning the LRE Foundation's work. Though it does not serve as an exhaustive historical document, it provides insights into the key historical themes and multi-perspective approach that define the Foundation. The aim of this document is to present a clear, workable framework to understanding and participating in the LRE Foundation's mission, fostering an enriched, nuanced comprehension of the history of the Second World War.

While we embrace a wide range of perspectives and narratives, it is essential to clarify that we have definitive boundaries, as set in the LRE Charter. The LRE Foundation is committed to upholding values of democracy, freedom and tolerance, and therefore, we do not tolerate extremist views or values inherited from fascist, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, and any other attempts to deny or distort historical facts.

HISTORICAL SCOPE

Definition of the era

The LRE Foundation focusses on World War II, extending from the onset of hostilities in 1939 to the cessation of active conflict in 1945 and the long-term effects of the conflict. This broad time frame allows us to fully explore the multi-faceted and complex history of the war. Various projects within the LRE Foundation may concentrate on specific periods within this timespan. For instance, the Liberation Route Europe emphasizes the final phase of the war, while Europe Remembers casts a wider net to include the entirety of the war and its encompassing themes.

The LREF recognizes that for many nations, particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe, the end of World War II did not signify an immediate return to freedom and self-determination. Instead, these regions fell from one form of oppression to another falling under Soviet domination. Therefore, we can extend our framework when relevant to include the aftermath of the war and the various paths to liberation that unfolded across Europe in the ensuing decades.

Key events and themes

The LRE Foundation originally placed a strong emphasis on the liberation period of World War II, a crucial period spanning from the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943 through the broad climax of conflict in 1944-1945. During this time, extensive efforts were made by Allied forces to liberate the territories that had fallen under the control of Nazi Germany and its allies, from the West, South and East. This period forms the central narrative for many of our initiatives, including the Liberation Route Europe.

Over time, our focus has expanded to incorporate a wider array of themes and events spanning the entire World War II era. This also includes examining topics such as among others the "Anschluss of Austria" and invasion of Czech lands, the non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet

Union which led to the invasion and division of Poland in 1939, marking the start of the conflict in Europe.

We also scrutinize the differing occupation strategies employed across Europe by Nazi Germany and its allies, the various forms of collaboration, the history of the Holocaust of Jews and Roma and other cases of persecution, starvation, forced labour and extermination.

Our work includes a focus on anti-fascism and the resistance movements that opposed fascist and collaborating regimes during World War II. We examine the various efforts of resistance movements across the continent, highlighting their crucial role in undermining fascist powers and supporting the Allied liberation efforts. These movements were pivotal in shaping the post-war landscape of Europe.

While the aftermath of the war is not our central focus, we do acknowledge its diverse and lasting impacts across Europe. The political and societal transformations that took place, including the reestablishment of democratic systems in Western Europe, the emergence of communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe, and other forms of authoritarian regimes across Europe have shaped the continent's history significantly and continue to influence its present.

In addition to these historical events and themes, the LRE Foundation is dedicated to studying the culture of remembrance surrounding World War II. We examine how different nations, communities, groups and individuals remember and interpret the war, and how these collective and sometimes conflicting memories have developed and are conveyed over time. We also delve into practices of memory culture and public history, and the ongoing discourse on the representation and commemoration of these historical events.

Geographic focus

The LRE Foundation's geographic focus encompasses the breadth of Europe that has a significant historical link to World War II. Our work initially began with the founding countries of the LRE network: Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom. Over time, we have expanded our scope to include other nations whose histories have been profoundly shaped by the war as well, with the goal of maintaining a balanced and comprehensive representation of Europe's World War II narratives (Europe being defined here as the European theater of the war).

Our mission necessitates an inclusive and respectful approach, recognising and honouring the varied historical experiences, sensitivities, and points of view across the continent, within the scope of a rigorous scientific approach. We aim to provide a platform for all relevant European countries to share their historical narratives of the war, fostering mutual understanding through the exploration of our shared past.

We also acknowledge the global implications of World War II, and the need to include perspectives from non-European countries significantly affected by the war. This includes nations like (but not limited to) the United States, Canada or Russia and other former Soviet republics, whose participation had profound effects on the course of the war. It also includes the role of colonial troops (whose experiences influenced post-war nationalist movements) and societies' home fronts which has been largely under-represented. By including these viewpoints, we underscore the truly global impact of World War II.

THE MULTIPERSPECTIVE APPROACH

Definition

The multiperspective approach, which is central to the LRE Foundation's work, recognises the multiplicity and diversity of historical narratives. We understand that perspectives on the events of World War II vary greatly depending on a multitude of factors. This includes, but is not limited to, geographical location, personal and social experiences, socio-political contexts, cultural, ethnic, racial and religious identities, political beliefs, age, gender, sexual orientation, and occupation before, during and after the war.

Across the diverse landscape of Europe, interpretations of World War II can vary greatly. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the narrative often emphasises defiance and endurance during the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. In contrast, for countries such as France and Belgium, the experience of occupation, persecution and resistance may be more central. In Eastern Europe, memories of World War II are further complicated by the subsequent Soviet domination. Non-European nations, too, like the United States and Canada, bring their own perspectives based on their unique experiences during the war.

It is not just between different nations that narratives diverge; within individual countries, diverse experiences and memories exist too. For example, the experiences and memories of the war can vary significantly between different regions, ethnic groups or political cultures within the same country. Additionally, the perspectives of soldiers and civilians, men and women, adults and children all provide various viewpoints that contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the past.

To illustrate, consider the term 'liberation.' Its meaning and use vary substantially across and within nations. For countries like France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, it predominantly represents the end of Nazi occupation. Meanwhile, in Eastern Europe, liberation came with its own complexities due to the subsequent imposition of authoritarian Communist regimes. Even within a single country, such as Germany, interpretations of 'liberation' can range from a sense of defeat to eventual acceptance, reflecting political beliefs, regional differences, and diverse experiences. In Italy, the experience was particularly complex: the Allied landings in Sicily in July 1943 initially constituted an invasion and occupation. However, following the armistice with the Allies and the establishment of a co-belligerent government in the south, Italy found itself divided and took the other side in the war, going through a new harsh war with elements of civil war. This encapsulates the essence of the multiperspective approach championed by the LRE Foundation.

Importance

The multiperspective approach is not merely an academic exercise. It serves a profound purpose in enhancing our understanding of World War II, promoting a nuanced view of the past, developing open-mindedness and empathy, fostering reconciliation, and strengthening the sense of European community.

In order to comprehend the vast complexity of World War II, one must engage with a multitude of narratives. These narratives not only describe the various national, regional, and individual experiences,

but they also help illuminate the multi-dimensional nature of the war. Each narrative contributes a piece to a larger puzzle that ultimately helps us to better understand the connection between these experiences and events.

Beyond its contribution to historical knowledge, the multiperspective approach also fosters empathy and understanding. By presenting a variety of perspectives, we allow for a more nuanced understanding of the human experience during this time, highlighting the fact that there was not a single, uniform experience. This process fosters empathy for the different experiences people had and the impact on them, acknowledging for instance the pain and suffering endured by many, the bravery shown by others, the cruelty and fanaticism of many others, or the complex array of responses people had to the extraordinary circumstances they found themselves in.

The multiperspective approach also contributes to the process of reconciliation. It can assist in healing historical wounds by promoting mutual understanding and respect. Acknowledging the complexity and diversity of experiences during World War II and their postwar legacies can help to break down nationalistic or one-sided interpretations of history that may perpetuate negative stereotypes or antagonism.

The multiperspective approach strengthens the sense of European community. Understanding World War II from a multiperspective approach, and its dissonant heritage, brings to light the shared and interconnected history of Europe. While the war was a time of division and conflict, it also marks a significant part of our shared past, including courageous attempts to imagine a different and more united Europe.

As European societies have grown more diverse through migration, and many families have no direct ties to WWII, connecting new generations to this history is essential. The LRE Foundation highlights universal themes to ensure that WWII memory remains relevant and accessible to all

In sum, the importance of a multiperspective approach lies not only in its capacity to enrich our understanding of the past, but also in its potential to shape our present attitudes and future actions, hence the motto of the Foundation: "To remember the past is to create a better future".

Implementation

The implementation of the multiperspective approach is firmly embedded in all operations carried out by the LRE Foundation. This is clearly demonstrated in our projects, which always strive to incorporate a range of viewpoints and experiences, while adopting a rigorous scientific and historical approach.

For instance, our Liberation Route Europe project goes beyond the conventional focus on military operations, aiming to present a comprehensive view of the liberation. This initiative acknowledges the diverse experiences of various individuals and groups involved in the war, from civilians and resistance fighters to victims of the Nazi regime, as well as collaborators, perpetrators or bystanders. The goal is to deliver a balanced representation of narratives from different national, regional, and demographic perspectives.

In our youth-focused projects, the multiperspective approach also takes on a pivotal role. These initiatives are designed to engage younger generations with World War II history, presenting them with a nuanced understanding that transcends the traditional single-narrative model. By encouraging

dialogue and understanding among young people, we can foster a sense of empathy and responsibility towards the history of our continent.

Additionally, we recognize the increasing multiculturalism of our societies. By providing a diverse range of narratives that cater to the heterogeneous backgrounds of our audience, we foster a more inclusive understanding of the past. This multiperspective approach is instrumental in connecting different groups in society with a diverse narrative, promoting empathy, understanding, and dialogue among them.

While we aim to present a variety of perspectives, it is important to note that this does not imply that all perspectives are considered equal. Presenting different viewpoints is intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of World War II, but it does not equate to endorsing or supporting those viewpoints.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES, ROLES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In upholding the integrity of the LRE Foundation's work, several guiding principles, roles, and responsibilities have been established to ensure the quality, accuracy, and multiperspectivity of our efforts.

The Historical Advisory Board is instrumental in maintaining the validity and integrity of our work. This board is made up of representatives from different countries, each possessing significant knowledge and expertise in the field of history and memory. They provide guidance on the direction, methodology, and content of our projects and ensure that the multiperspective approach is consistently and accurately implemented.

National scientific committees are established in countries where the LRE Foundation has a significant presence and a national branch. These committees parallel the role of the Historical Advisory Board on a more localized level, scrutinizing the historical accuracy and authenticity of our projects within their respective countries. Importantly, a member from each national scientific committee also seats on the international Historical Advisory Board. This arrangement ensures a close link and consistency between the international and national committees, promoting uniformity in the application of our multiperspective approach.

In addition to our scientific committees, we engage with external historians and experts for specific projects. These specialists are carefully selected, often recommended by our scientific committees or LREF members and close partners. This collaborative approach enables us to delve deeper into specialized topics and maintain a broad and accurate perspective on World War II history.

To safeguard the integrity and consistency of our work, we utilize a suite of robust tools and processes, such as style guides and rigorous review processes. These tools ensure that our outputs are not only uniform in their presentation but also accurate, reliable, and representative of the diverse perspectives we are committed to capturing.

Through our efforts, the LRE Foundation aims to promote history and to safeguard the memory of World War II for future generations, emphasizing the importance of public and citizen engagement in history to ensure that this legacy remains relevant, accessible, and inclusive.