

Final Report

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I have had a great chance to work with very friendly colleagues at Andreasstraße memorial site for three months, in a different place, weather, and culture from my native country of Cambodia. Many thanks to Bundesstiftung, which kindly allowed me to be a part of Memory Work in Germany, through which I learned about history and history education of dictatorship in the GDR. In this short report, I describe what I did during my time at the Andreasstraße memorial site, how my experience developed my thoughts, and my next steps.

The historical context of Germany was similar to that of Cambodia and was not difficult to understand for me; I had previously studied and read about it. However, there were many parts of German history that were clarified for me, such as the different periods of dictatorships, the history of the Nazi party to the GDR, the history of Communism, and how the German people have dealt with and are dealing with their past. I was able to learn by visiting many museums and memorial sites in Germany from Berlin to Erfurt, where the modern history of Germany was narrated. I was also able to meet people from the museums and memorial sites, and discuss the fundamental elements of museums, such as archival work, educational programs, and exhibition curation. Moreover, I delivered a few presentations and public talks sharing about the history of Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Communist dictatorship to university students, museum staff, and GDR survivors. During the presentations, we had many questions and discussion comparing the situation of Cambodia and Germany in the context of the era of communism.

Through these visits and discussions, I was able to reflect on my work in the field of archive management. First, after the collapse of the GDR and reunification of Germany, nearly all documents of Stasi were very well-kept because of legislation and implementation of privacy policies, such as the GDR archive. These practices are not yet established or developed in the Khmer Rouge archive in Cambodia yet. The knowledge I engaged with helped me to reflect and share to my Cambodian colleagues while we discussed the rights of privacy at Tuol Sleng one month ago. Secondly, I learned that archive development should connect to the researcher. Some archives I visited showed me apt ideas for preparing content for researchers and readers. For example, researchers can apply and book a date of research, and on that date are warmly welcomed by archivists. These practices I observed changed my perspective in favor of improving the bureaucracies request for research at the Tuol Sleng archive. I am now more open to preparing the archive for researchers, and I encourage my archive colleagues to welcome all young researchers. I hope to publish the information on the Tuol Sleng archive into a leaflet booklet and on the website, to disseminate information on and promote research of the archive, all of which I will implement at Tuol Sleng archive very soon.

The educational role of a museum is another main point of knowledge I gained from working in Germany, especially at the Andreasstraße memorial site. Firstly, the Cambodian perspective of a museum is not for education, but for the re-telling of true history. Tuol Sleng is trying to change this perspective. In Germany, you can visit a historical museum where one can learn from a lot of interesting material, like photography and media, similar to reading a book or participating in a lecture. Secondly, I believe that Germany can be a model of memory work in education, because it includes a good pedagogical methodology, and with educational practitioners. I have already decided to implement teacher training, and I will work with a small target group of young Cambodian teachers who willing to implement these changes. Then, we will discuss creating a curriculum and common method for teaching and guiding students throughout the museum. Thirdly, I will encourage young people to be part of guided tours of the museum. I observed that they are open to discussion and easily do so, and often encourage reflection among the same young visitors. Lastly, we will produce activities for visits, educational tools, and we will link the permanent exhibition, temporary exhibition, archive work, and textile conservation work at Tuol Sleng Museum to be a part of the educational program. By the implementation of these new ideas, I expect to see more practical education and tours in my museum.

In conclusion, it was a good start to both individual and institutional cooperation between my German friends at Andreasstraße memorial site and me, and between the memorial site and my museum. My coming to work in Germany was a suitable plan, since two colleagues of Andreasstraße memorial site came to work in Cambodia before I went to Germany. They understood the historical and political context of Cambodia so much so that they made a good working plan to optimize my learning. Even so, we still have more to learn from each other and more research to do on communist regimes such as the GDR and the Khmer Rouge regime. Nevertheless, we will not have any more barracks of communication, like the Berlin Wall of the past.