POLICY BRIEF

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THE EFFICACY OF MEMORIALISATION AFTER TERRORISM

Based on a paper by Dr. Ana Milosevic within the project Memorialisation of Terrorist Attacks

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INTRODUCTION

This research has a clear policy impact at local, national, and transnational level that can support management of long-term consequences of a terror attack more efficiently.

The 'fight against terrorism' is a priority area of action for the EU. After 9/11 and in particular after the Paris attacks (2015) the proportion of people identifying terrorism as important challenge has increased substantially. In July 2020, almost half (47 %) of people in the EU were very or somewhat worried about experiencing a terrorist attack in the next 12 months: the perception of terrorist threat varies significantly across countries, with the highest degree of fear of a terrorist attack registered in Spain (76 %), France (60 %) and Latvia (55 %), to a lower degree in Ireland (23 %) and Greece (20 %)[1]. Irrespective of the amount of precautionary measures that are taken, the risks of future violence are not eliminated. Yet, cities and states affected by terrorist violence have dealt with memorialisation in an ad-hoc manner without clear policy guidance. Identifying the practices associated with memorialisation of terrorism victims is vital towards the development of policy frameworks that can effectively address victims' needs. This project explored the methods and objectives of such policy guidance, generating the data necessary for identification of best/worst practices through the assessment of memorialisation policies and practices on (trans)national level.

[1] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2020. Security concerns and experiences. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

MEMORIALISATION IN THE CONTEXT

Terrorist attacks are not easily forgotten by those who were affected. Yet, in every society emerging from a traumatic event, such as a terror attack, the urge to honor the dead and remember the tragedy is as ubiquitous as the impulse to try to repress the trauma and move on[2] . Individuals and societies undertake numerous memorial actions to preserve the memory of victims[3]. Spontaneous memorials quickly appear at the location of the tragedy as society uses memorialisation to grieve, show its closeness and solidarity with the victims. This collective mourning seems to have become the first step in memorialisation. Usually, it is followed by creation of a permanent memorial to not only honor the innocent victims, but to help the survivors heal. But what is the impact of such initiatives? Do public memorials, temporary or permanent, advance individual and collective recovery, and help social reconstruction after a trauma?

[2] Milošević, A., 2017. "Remembering the present: Dealing with the memories of terrorism in Europe", Journal of Terrorism Research, 8(2), pp.44–61.
[3] Truc, G. 2017. Shell shocked. The social response to terrorist attacks. Malden: Polity.

Despite the wealth of research and empirical evidence on the ground, the efficacy of various types of memorialisation for both victims and the broader public remains one of the least critically analysed issues in the field of transitional justice and other post-traumatic settings[4]. Democratic forms of memory embrace inclusivism rather than exclusionist views of the past, allowing for multiplication and diversification of memory actors. A wide variety of stakeholders participate in memorialisation initiatives to remember events and persons of particular importance to a [social] group or parts of the society. Memory entrepreneurs[5], as those who are in position to impose and pursue their views on the past, have the capacity to shape memorial meanings and purposes for broader society. Yet, an increasing role has been given to the victims, survivors, their family members, and victims' organisations who actively participate in the memory and remembrance policy making processes. Finally, and especially in the context of terrorism, the society itself can in the same manner be a victim, memory maker and memory consumer.

All these memorial actors use multiple mnemonic tools. The most commonly used forms of memorialisation are monuments, memorials and commemoration. Monuments throughout history have gained a different and wider signification. Monument is not only a statue, but also a building, place, or an attack site that is of historical importance or interest - an enduring and memorable example of something. In a similar manner, the victims of terror attacks from Paris (2015) to Kongsberg (2021), have been mourned and remembered through grassroots' memorials[6] (e.g. graffiti, memorial assemblages), commemorations, memorial plaques, etc. Particularly in the immediate aftermath of tragedy, the society itself uses spontaneous, ad hoc memorials to channel emotions in reaction to the traumatic event. Such memorials have distinct therapeutically use for the affected communities to mourn, remember, but also the ability to become spaces for victims/survivors, their families to receive truth, justice, recognition, and search for healing.

Commemorations are organised in a later stage to mark the anniversaries of a tragic event and shape the narrative of what has occurred. Both commemorations and official memorials are orchestrated by institutional actors and imbued with memorial purposes. The intended purposes and produced effects of memorialisation are manifold, and dependent on the constellation of actors that initiate, guide, and implement the process, as well as reap its results. For instance, a monument can be erected with the aim of raising awareness on certain events and individuals. Awareness raising through memorialisation translates into creating spaces to address a broader audience and inspire knowledge fostering about a historical event and its implications for society. In addition, the purpose of commemoration can be prevention, as created spaces seek to promote dialogue and remind societies of the need to prevent violence, and the atrocities that can arise from it, from happening.

[4] Newman, M. 2019. Transitional justice: Contending with the past. Cambridge: Polity.
[5] Jelin, E. 2003. State Repression and the Labors of Memory. Minnesota: University Press.
[6] See Margry, P. and Sánchez-Carretero, C., 2011. Grassroots memorials. The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death. Oxford: Berhahn.

REMEMBERING TERROR ATTACKS IN EUROPE

Projected purposes of memorialisation, therefore, can have multiple effects, but they can equally be rejected in their attempt at reaching intended objectives[7]. Why this happens and what makes a memorialisation strategy efficacious, and for whom?

Both praxis and literature evidence a number of practical and conceptual challenges involved in the memorialisation of the victims of terrorism. Some of these challenges include the timing, the meanings associated with monuments and commemorations, the presence of multiple actors in the process, and the creation, location and maintenance of memorials. To address societal and political responses and assess the efficacy and appropriateness of post-terror memorialisation this research asked: What remembrance policy choices have been pursued by the EU and in the countries affected by terrorist violence? How do the victims, survivors and their associations meet these actions?

This research analysed memory politics concerning terror attacks on local - national - EU levels by scrutinizing construction of monuments, memorial plaques and memorials, as well as the organisation of commemorations. Four case studies have been chosen because of their temporal closeness and similarity of memorial responses in the aftermath of the terrorist incident. Between 2020 and 2022, the lead researcher on this project has conducted fieldwork in Norway, Belgium, France and Spain to observe and document the ways in which terror attacks in all four (4) countries have been remembered. This policy brief draws data from 22 in-depth interviews held with victims, survivors, their family and friends, curators and directors of museum and archives, political representatives but also randomly selected visitors at the places of memory such as attack sites, monuments, and commemorations.

[7] Milošević, A. 2018. "Can memorials heal the wounds?" Observing memories n.2. 56-63.

The 2011 Norway attacks

On the morning of 22 July Anders Behring Breivik committed two sequential domestic terrorist attacks against the government, the civilian population, and a Workers' Youth League (AUF) summer camp, in which 77 people were killed.

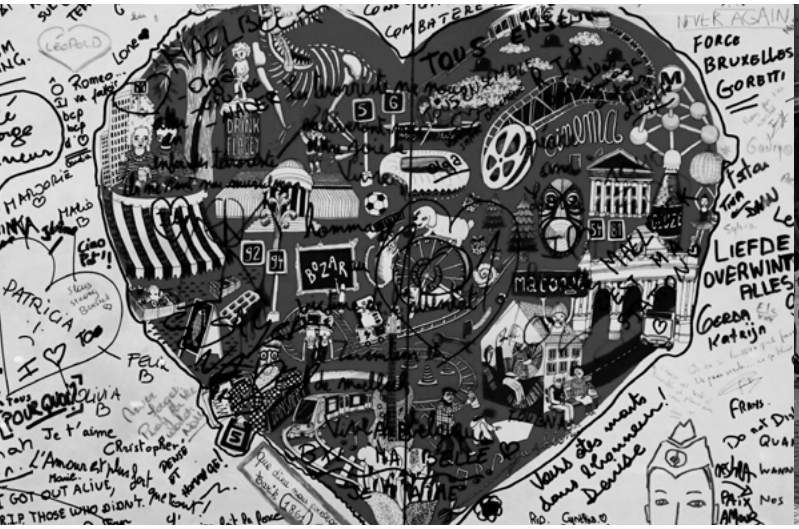
The first attack was a car bomb explosion in Oslo within Regjeringskvartalet, the executive government quarter of Norway. The bomb was placed inside a van next to the tower block housing the office of the then Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg. The explosion killed eight people and injured at least 209 people, twelve severely.

The second attack occurred less than two hours later at a summer camp on the island Utøya in Tyrifjorden. The camp was organized by the AUF, the youth division of the ruling Norwegian Labour Party (AP). Breivik, dressed in a homemade police uniform and showing false identification, took a ferry to the island and opened fire at the participants, killing 67 and injuring 32.

The 2015 Paris attacks

On 13 November, a series of attacks have struck the French capital in Saint Denis stadium, local bars, and restaurants as well as in the Bataclan theatre. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility for the attacks planned in Syria and organised by a terrorist cell based in Belgium.

The attackers killed 130 people, including 90 at the Bataclan theatre. Another 416 people were injured, almost 100 critically. Seven of the attackers were also killed. The attacks were the deadliest in France since the Second World War, and the deadliest in the European Union since the Madrid train bombings of 2004. France had been on high alert since the January 2015 attacks on Charlie Hebdo offices and a Jewish supermarket in Paris that killed 17 people.



The 2016 Brussels attacks

The 2016 Brussels bombings were a coordinated terrorist attack in Brussels, Belgium on March 22nd. Three coordinated suicide bombings occurred: two at Brussels Airport in Zaventem, and one at Maalbeek metro station on the Brussels metro. Thirty-two civilians and three perpetrators were killed, and more than 300 people were injured. Another bomb was found during a search of the airport. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility for the attacks.

The perpetrators belonged to a terrorist cell that had been involved in the November 2015 Paris attacks. The Brussels bombings happened shortly after a series of police raids targeting the group. The bombings were the deadliest attack on Belgium since the Second World War.

The 2017 Barcelona attacks

On the afternoon of 17 August 2017, 22-year-old Younes Abouyaaqoub drove a van into pedestrians on La Rambla in Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain killing 13 people and injuring at least 130 others, one of whom died 10 days later on 27 August. Abouyaaqoub fled the attack on foot, and then killed another person in order to steal the victim's car to make his escape.

Nine hours after the Barcelona attack, five men thought to be members of the same terrorist cell drove into pedestrians in nearby Cambrils, killing one woman and injuring six others. All five of those attackers were shot and killed by police.

MAKING MEMORIALISATION WORK: RECOMMENDATIONS

Successful memorialisation of the victims of terrorism relies in part on the careful consideration of the various issues associated with the memorialisation process. While each case under examination has its own specificities, some common challenges in four cities (Oslo, Paris, Brussels, and Barcelona) have emerged during this research. What follows is a series of recommendations that identifies and addresses such challenges.

TIME SENSITIVE MEMORIALISATION STRATEGIES

Societal and personal paths to recovery and coping with the consequences of terrorism travel on different timelines.

The rush to resume 'normal' rhythms of life in a wounded city does not allow for timely sedimentation of emotion, trauma and memories in the public space. Premature removal of grassroots memorials can hinder societal elaboration of trauma. Equally, a permanent memorial might be seen as a form of an imposed closure, especially when victims/survivors are not included in its making. One-off monuments, created usually for the first anniversary, differ from their spontaneous counterparts that occupied public space in the aftermath of tragedy. They are often seen as static and not reflective of the emotional impact and affective values trauma and its consequences have produced on society and victims themselves. While the annual recognition and acknowledgment of victims' experiences remains important, public performances that contest the imagery of terrorism continue to be enacted thoughout the year through a range of specific and symbolic acts.

Citizens and victims/survivors engage with terrorist attacks' sites actively throughout the year, and not only around anniversaries. Such places have the capacity to communicate beyond victimhood and should be regarded not only as places of memory but as a space to contest the imagery of violence and promote democratic values. State led, the 22 July Sentret, is an important example of good practice. It is a learning center that works with the mediation of memory and knowledge about the terror attacks in Oslo and on Utøya. Situated in the governmental quarter where the first attacks happened, the center's educational programme invites ordinary citizens, tourists, students and teachers into the dialogue about the 22nd of July. The main contribution of the Centre is in encouraging active participation in the negotiation of the attack's significance both at present, and in the future. This suggests that time sensitive memorialisation efforts offer more possibilities for the direct engagement with the consequences of terrorism beyond anniversaries and static, one-off symbolic acts such as memory plaques.

MEMORIALISATION MINDFUL OF VICTIMS' MEMORIAL NEEDS

Symbolic recognition of victims appears to be more effective when the ownership of one's own personal experiences, narratives, and endured consequences is maintained.

The community bound by victimhood – victims, survivors, and their family members – often reject or contest memorial meanings and purposes assigned to the official memorialisation. This is particularly the case with memorialisation strategies that are not mindful of the ownership of victims' personal experiences, narratives and endured consequences. Across cases, victims are often excluded from commemoration planning. The role the authorities reserve for them is one of bearing witness – as their authentic experiences support security, prevention and non-repetition promises and, in some cases, legal and political objectives. As such, their experiences are appropriated by the collective leaving their memorial needs unattended. For instance, annual commemorations and return to the place of crime can stir up a wealth of emotions in victims/survivors, sometimes even setting them back in their path to recovery.

A meaningful memorialisation in victims' view has the capacity to communicate their experiences while considering their dignity and well-being. As example of successful monument in service of their needs, victims and their organisations identify cases that appeal to the 'aesthetics of nature'[8] symbolising rebirth or societal renewal. Such an example is, for instance, the memorial in Forêt de Soignes (Belgium) created with 32 trees to honor victims of the Brussels attacks. In addition, in all cases under examination, victims, survivors, and their loved ones emphasized the need to see/read the names of the fallen inscribed on a monument. When this need is not addressed, as for instance in the case of Belgian national monument for victims of terrorism, memorial is considered unfit.

[8] Heath-Kelly, C. 2018. "Survivor Trees and memorial groves: Vegetal commemoration of victims of terrorism in Europe and the United States", Political Geography 64, pp. 63-72.

ENHANCING CITIZENS PARTICIPATION IN MEMORIALISATION EFFORTS

Monuments and memorials can have wider reach, more impact and visibility if they are brought in communication with its intended user – the society itself.

Due to the nature of terrorism, the society itself is seen as a victim of violence; a memory maker, through use of spontaneous memorialisation; but also, a memory consumer. However, citizens – intended users of state-led memorialisation efforts – often do not engage with such initiatives in the intended way. Public commemorations report low numbers in terms of citizens participation. In some instances, the local citizens are not even aware of the event that is being commemorated nor do they have the possibility to participate in it. This raises an important question: For whom, then, are such commemorations made? For a commemoration to become a support to prevention of future cultures of violence, it is crucial for the victims'/ survivors' voices to become/remain a central part of the narrative and to be heard by the society, and these voices need to be made part of sustained remembrance efforts.

In some instances, monuments fail to communicate with local communities as they e.g., lack authenticity or visibility in public space. At Rambla in Barcelona, even for the intended visitor, it is very hard to locate the monument made in memory of the 2017 attacks. In Brussels, the memorial to all victims of all terror attacks is created far away from the authentic sites of attacks (Maalbeek metro and Zaventem airport). Lack of citizen participation both in consultative process about permanent monuments and in commemorative efforts, weakens the potential of memorialisation strategy. In Norway, where such consultations were held early on, citizens, victims and survivors rejected the first memorial project that aimed at cutting the Utøya island in half. This rejection of memorial paved the path to alternative and more attuned projects that are still unfolding, ten years after the terrorist attacks.

RECONCILING PRIVATE AND PUBLIC DIMENSION OF REMEMBRANCE

One of the most important challenges for policy makers is to create memorialisation strategies that reconcile both private and public dimension of remembrance.

Private memorials remain the main tool for mourning and remembrance for the victims, survivors, and their families. For instance, on the island of Utøya, such a memorial has been made by those who were directly affected by the violence. Through consultation about and work on the memorial itself, the victims and survivors conceived a monument as a place of reflection, grief, and memory of those who directly suffered its consequences. This initiative contrasts with memorial purposes of the national memorial, currently under construction just across the island. The National memorial of the 22 July attacks will reflect on broader understanding of the attacks' consequences for Norwegian society.

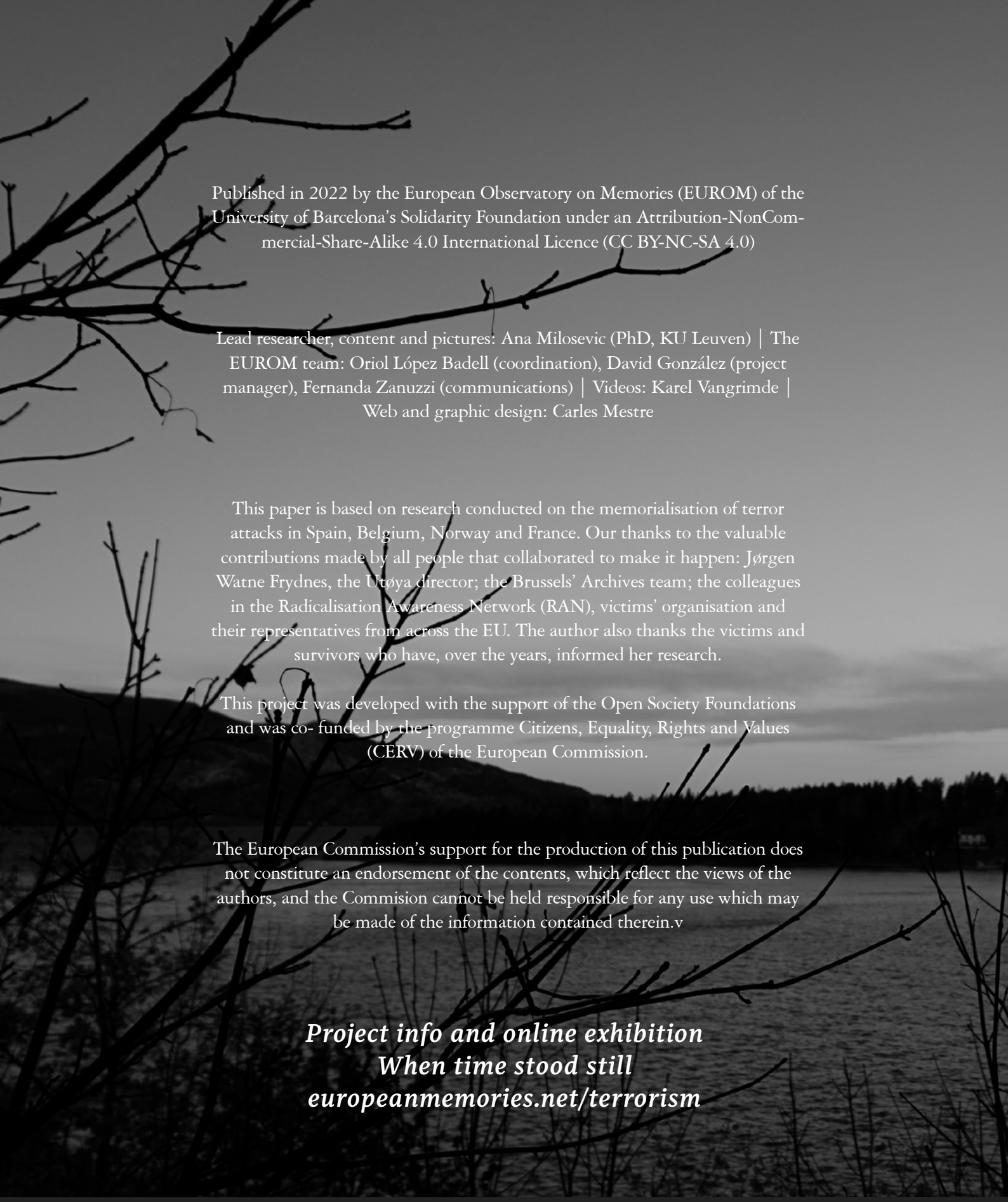
Contrary to the spontaneous and privately created and managed memorial initiatives, the nature of commemorating terror attacks is inherently political and burdened by the competition between different memory frames and memorial purposes assigned to it at local, national and European levels. On EU level, the attempts at creating a unified memorial answer to terrorism has weak results. Member States co-opt those aspects of Europeanised memory that fit their interests and match their experiences, as it is the case with the adoption of the European Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism (March 11th). This remembrance date is observed only in a handful of countries. The challenge here is to foster more inclusive norms of remembrance in relation to the victims/survivors of terrorism, particularly in Member States that have no similar experiences. In France, the National Day of Memory of terrorism victims takes precedence over EU Day, although it is observed on the same date. Local memorial initiatives, especially in neighbourhoods that suffered direct consequences of violence, remain largely invisible and on the side-lines of both EU and state-led memorialisation efforts.

CONCLUSION

Terrorist attacks unravel in modern urban space: on promenades, squares, bridges, in restaurants, or at commuting points such as train stations or airports. These sites are communicative platforms: for terrorists—as a means of communicating the motives of violence; for the state—to display counter measures, and for the affective public—to channel emotion and trauma. Engaging with the authenticity of a terrorist attack site through memorialisation provides an opportunity to develop counternarratives that disrupt the emergence of terrorism's supportive moral contexts and prevent exposure to these settings. On the island of Utøya, the preserved authenticity of the attack's site cohabitates with the new and modern space used as a democracy learning centre for young people. This example goes to show that sites of terror attacks should not be regarded solely as crime scenes or places of memory, but as an opportunity to counter future cultures of violence. Keeping the memory of such atrocities alive as well as the stories of victims and survivors is an essential part of the process for societies to deal with, commemorate and heal the wound inflicted by violence.

As cities and states affected by terrorist violence have often dealt with memorialisation in an ad-hoc manner without clear policy guidance, identifying their practices is vital towards the development of future policy frameworks that can effectively address societal and victims' needs. So far, memorialisation strategies have been based on examples of "best" practices – solutions already chosen by other cities and countries that share similar experiences. These "best" practices relate to the ways in which memorabilia from grassroot memorials is collected and displayed[9] , official ceremonies organized, speakers selected, and monuments created for the first anniversary. Given the similarities in memorial responses among four examined cases, this policy brief identified some of shared challenges and possible policy adjustments able to support the efficacy of memorialisation after terrorism in Norway, France, Belgium, Spain and beyond.

[9] Arvanitis, K 2019, 'The 'Manchester Together Archive': researching and developing a museum practice of spontaneous memorials', Museum and Society, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 510-532.



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Project info and online exhibition
When time stood still
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