

BULLETIN N. 1 – OCTOBER 2019

# Speme

Questioning Traumatic Heritage: Spaces of Memory in Europe, Argentina, Colombia

## What Speme is

**SPEME - QUESTIONING TRAUMATIC HERITAGE: SPACES OF MEMORY IN EUROPE, ARGENTINA, COLOMBIA**

Speme is a four-year RISE 2017 EU-funded project for research, innovation and staff exchange between academic researchers and professionals working in the field of spaces of memory, museums and sites of commemoration in Italy, the Netherlands, Argentina and Colombia. The project's ultimate goal is to create new ways and forms for the transmission of traumatic memories **of the past in the present** through which contemporary social and political issues can be further interrogated.

You can visit our website to find out who we are, and which institutions are involved in the project: <http://www.speme.eu/>



## This issue:

- What Speme is
- What we did in the first 18 months
- Main research topics
- Our future goals and activities

## What we did during the first 18 months

The project officially started in July 2018, and the first meeting took place at the University of Bologna and at the Fossoli Foundation in Carpi (Modena) in **September 2018**. Later, and in order to successfully implement our activities, exchanges have been grouped according to **four periods of mobility each year for different members of the institutions involved, and across the four countries: March** in Buenos Aires, **June** in Bologna, **October** in Bogotá, **November** in Amsterdam. In each of these one-month periods of staff secondments, every hosting institution organizes a schedule of activities targeting different audiences, in light of the research objectives and the implementation and dissemination of our findings. So far, after September 2018, in **2019** we met in Buenos Aires in **March**, in Bologna in **June**, in Bogotá in **October**, and we will soon meet again in **November** in Amsterdam. These months have been selected according to the period of the year judged by each institution to be the most apt for all the activities to take place.



Part of the Speme team  
during the seminar in  
Fondazione Campo Fossoli  
(June 2019)  
Photo by Fondazione Campo  
Fossoli

During our first meeting in September 2018, we worked on:

- a joint transdisciplinary methodology
- the selection of research topics
- strategies for the dissemination and sharing of our activities within the scientific community and with relevant stakeholders

To elaborate a trans-disciplinary method for the investigation of spaces of memory and heritage - involving both academic researchers and museum curators - was the most urgent, initial goal. This method develops a transnational approach involving not only European nations, but also two Latin American countries (Argentina and Colombia) that, notwithstanding their different historical contexts, contribute to a discourse on memory aimed at contrasting and troubling a Eurocentric gaze.



Speme Kick off meeting -  
Bologna (September 2018)  
Photo by Lars Ebert

## Main research topics

During the meetings held in September 2018 three main topics for future research and actions were also defined:

- Memory, artistic practices and public art
- Education and pedagogical programmes aimed at different kinds of audiences
- Memory and Gender



The Speme team at Parque de la Memoria - Buenos Aires (March 2019)  
Photo by Universidad de Buenos Aires

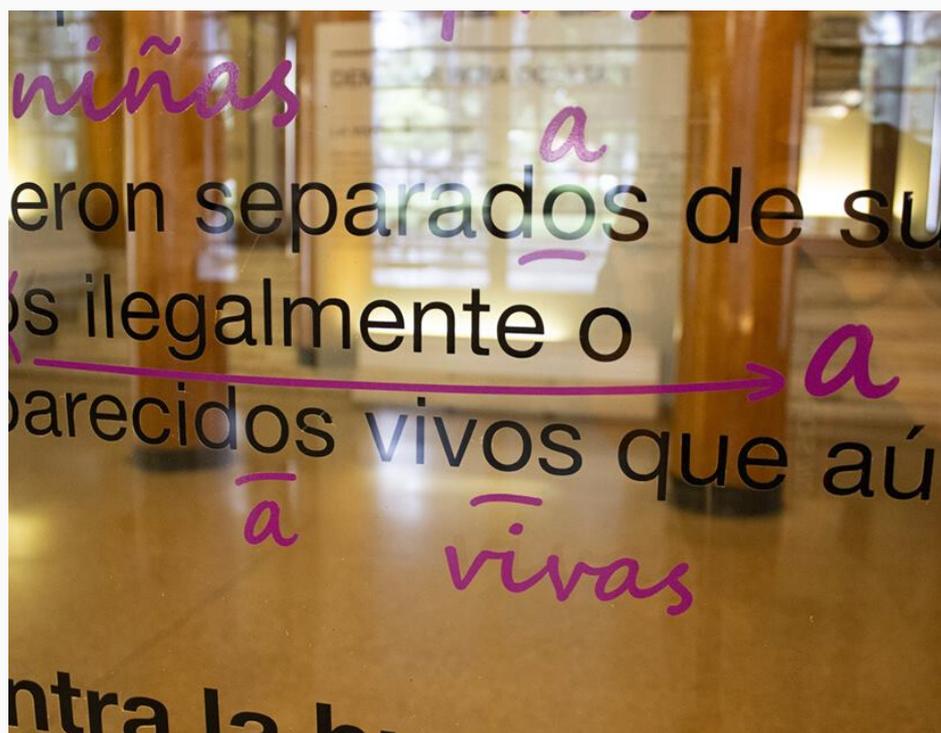
The relationship between memory and artistic practices is at the core of the activities of H401 cultural centre in Amsterdam, and it crucial for the group of UNIBO architects and aesthetics scholars. We investigated this topic in Buenos Aires too, where in March 2019 a two-day academic conference on Art and Memory was organized by the UBA with the participation of a number of Argentinean scholars and artists. In June 2019 a workshop on Transient Memories: "l'architettura della memoria" was organized by UNIBO, with PhD students in Architecture producing blueprints and drawings of spaces of memory. Following the workshop, we organized an international conference on Museums, Architecture and the City. Public Spaces and Spaces of Memory in which art historians, semioticians, architects and philosophers confronted the challenges posed by actual spaces of memories, the role of the artist and of the architect, and the power of memorials and counter-memorials. During the conference, SPEME members from the ESMA (Buenos Aires) presented their institution and their work to a vast audience.

Conference "Arte y Memoria" organized by the Universidad de Buenos Aires team - Buenos Aires (March 2019)  
Photo by Lizel Tornay



Special workshops on education and pedagogical strategies were carried out in an actual space of memory: the Fossoli Foundation in Carpi. The first one - targeting museum curators - took place from September 20th-21st 2018. The challenge was to alternate theoretical discussions with practical activities centred mainly on the role of the body in spaces of memory, and on an educational approach to the practice of storytelling in museums. On June 7th-8th 2019 the second workshop at the Fossoli Foundation focussed on a very particular target audience of spaces of memory, that of the teenagers who normally visit these kind of places as a school activity. A class from a secondary school was involved and participated in the workshop.

As for memory and gender, the exhibition “**Ser mujeres en la ESMA**” (To be women at the ESMA), was launched on March 14th 2019 at the venue of the Museo Sitio de Memoria ESMA. The exhibition explored the gendered position of women inside the Detention Centre during the years of the military dictatorship, and it was the result of academic exchange between SPEME members and other Argentine scholars and curators.



"Ser mujer en la ESMA"  
exhibition - Buenos Aires  
(2019)  
Photo by Viviana Gravano



Speme group at the monumento a los heroes caidos, Bogotá (October 2019)  
Photo by Loreno Arboritanza

Seminar in Fondazione campo Fossoli  
Photo by Isabella Gaffè

One of the SPEME project's main goals is to share the advances of our research not only with academic scholars, but also with stakeholders, memory associations and the public at large. In fact, SPEME is a project that exists because of the link between universities and civil society. This is why dissemination is so important for all of us. An intensive activity of networking took place both in Europe and in Argentina and Colombia, and new relevant contacts have been established during formal and informal meetings, and during visits to museums, sites of commemoration and memorials. In Argentina, for example, we established contacts with the Director of Memoria Abierta, Veronica Torres, and the coordinator of the project "Topografia de la memoria", the architect Gonzalo Conte; with two of the most renowned memory studies scholars: Elizabeth Jelin, founder of CONICET and Vicki Bell (Goldsmith College, London); with Cecilia Sosa (CONICET); Claudia Feld (CONICET); Valentina Salvi (CONICET). It is also worth mentioning the connections we made with members of "Colectivo Historias Desobedientes", such as Lilian Furlò, Veronica Estay and Pepe Rovano.



Moreover, In June some of the seconded members in Bologna and UNIBO participants travelled to Madrid, where, from the 25th to the 28th the **Annual Memory Studies Association Conference** took place. Here, on June 27th one member from each of the partners' team discussed with an international audience the main goal of the SPEME project, its academic objectives and its first results (see the conference programme at the link: <https://www.memorystudiesassociation.org/madrid-conference-2019-info-home>)



The Speme team during the Annual Memory Studies Association Conference – Madrid (2019)

Photo by Mario Panico

The Speme team at the Cemeterio Central – Bogotá (2019)

Photo by Loreno Arborianza

Recently, the partners met in **Colombia**.

Colombia is, among all the SPEME partners, the country with the most difficult situation. After over 60 years of a war which saw fighting between many different forces - militaries, paramilitaries, FARC and other guerrilla groups, narcos - and over 250,000 victims, mainly poor country people, peace has finally arrived, but more on paper than in reality. Colombia is still a divided nation, with many opposing memories and narratives. Such a situation questions the very possibility of reconstruction and the transmission of a collective memory, which affects also the construction of sites of memory. For this reason, the first secondment in Colombia, in September-October 2019 was devoted to visiting various regions of the country, endowed with different stories and different memories: Medellin, where we spent four days visiting local communities of the poorest barrios, such as Comune 3, meeting victims and young generation activists; the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, where we visited a Memory Centre constructed by the indigenous Iku population, and we had extensive conversations with the local population.



Fieldwork in spaces of memory plays a central role in the research of the Speme team.

In particular, many investigations, group activities, interviews with witnesses and activists were carried out in Buenos Aires in March 2019 thanks to the team of the University of Buenos Aires led by Lizel Tornay. Speme staff visited, for example, the ex-Centro Clandestino De Tortura y Exterminio "Olimpo", the Parque de la Memoria, the ex-CRTYE Atlético, and the street theatre in the Almagro neighbourhood with the Compañía de Funciones Patrióticas, whose work deals with marks of memory in the neighbourhoods.



Group Activities at the Ex Centro Clandestino de Detención, Tortura y Exterminio "Olimpo" - Buenos Aires (March 2019)

Photo by Lorenzo Arboritanza

## Our future goals and activities

We will meet very soon in Amsterdam, with many activities, meetings, workshops, field work and excursions awaiting us: we will have an Amsterdam Heritage and Museum Tour; we will visit the Kazerne Dossin memory site in Belgium; we will participate at a workshop on "Memory and Conflict"; and we will attend a series of lectures organized by our Dutch Partners on topics such as the "Grey Zones" in the Dutch Memory of Nazi Occupation.

We are working on three publications: a book with a selection of essays on **art and memory**, that follows the conference that took place in Buenos Aires in March 2019; a volume on **semiotics as a methodology for the study of spaces of memory** that will be published by the University of Amsterdam Press; and a collection of essays on **post-conflict Colombia**.

For those interested in Memory Studies and in Speme, or to send us suggestions, comments or proposals, or to **subscribe to this bulletin** please write to: [info@speme.eu](mailto:info@speme.eu)

For more information on our workshops and conferences, visit the section "Activities" on our website

[www.speme.eu](http://www.speme.eu)