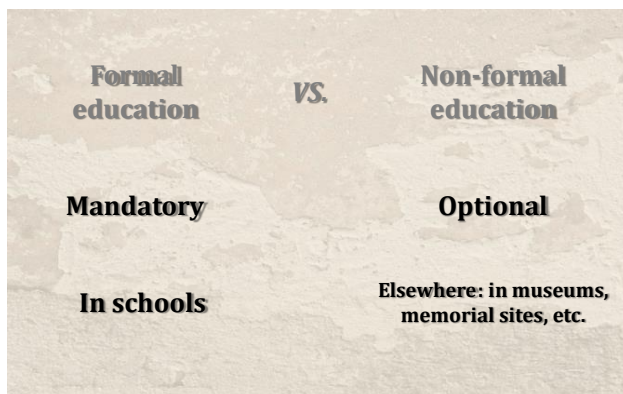


World War II and Auschwitz as it is remembered in Lithuania:

The case of non-formal education



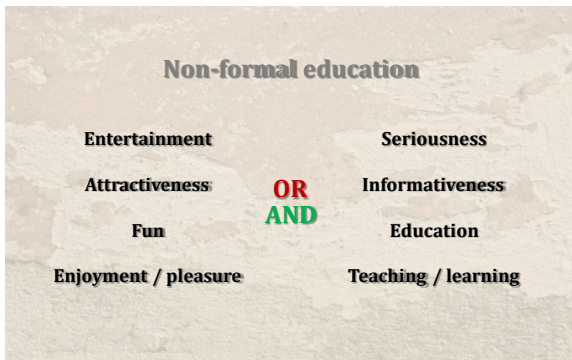
No matter how painful, inconvenient or even unacceptable the moments in the history of the Second World War may be, they are, of course, included in the programs of history, literature, and civic education, taught in Lithuanian schools. There are exemplary cases that even some foreign language teachers present to students testimonies of survivors, memoirs, excerpts of fiction related to this historical topic as a reading or listening task. I will not attempt to assess whether all this is given enough attention in schools, it should be a topic for specialists in their field, however, I want to consider something that concerns me as a museum educator, namely some aspects of non-formal education related to the topic.



When it comes to the mandatory content of the programs, everything is clear, because it is mandatory – the material must be arranged so that students can properly and successfully prepare for the exams provided for in the Lithuanian education system. When all this goes into the context of non-formal education, any obligation disappears. It is said, that what is optional, is not necessary at all! But is it really so? What I mean, is that the inconveniency of the topics leads to a huge and additional effort for educators, who want or have to carry out educational activities related to this topic. After all, something fun, pleasant, and attractive is often expected from non-formal education. And here – war, occupations, broken destinies, lingering guilt, historical responsibility. Oh, what difficult subjects and topics! Teachers easily take a simpler path and go to educations where you can draw, sculpt, cook, etc.

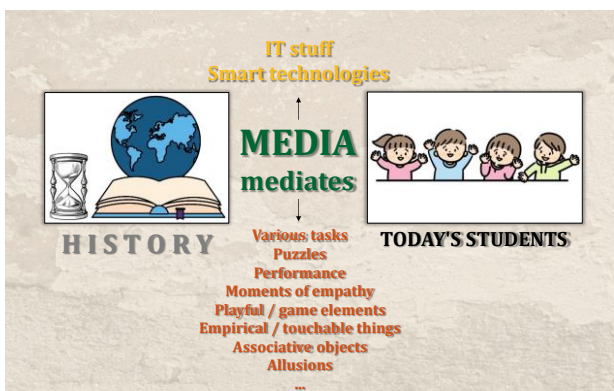
Thus, the task of memorial sites and institutions, related to the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust, is to present the topics and educational activities related to them in an *attractive* way. After all, in the context of Lithuanian education, we have to compete with art galleries, craft and art centers, adventure and amusement parks, etc. And this is where the tense maneuvering (or equilibrium) between two (or many) axes begins: between

entertainment and seriousness, between attractiveness and informativeness, between fun, enjoyment or pleasure and teaching, learning or education... And most often it should be not "one or another", not "either–either", but "one **and** another", "and this, and that". Then begins



the moral or simply mental (mindset, thinking) dilemma of what percentage of attractiveness, pleasure, entertainment, fun, and playfulness to place in an educational activity. There is no unequivocal answer. The only thing that is clear is that if these things were not there at all, then we would not attract any audience.

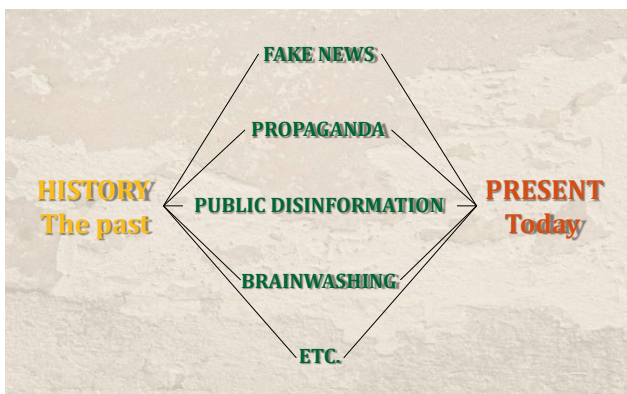
Media is essential for today's students. And for us, educators, media is necessary. **Media** is a common and seemingly very familiar word. But this time I would like to pay attention to its origin, to its etymology: media is something in the middle, standing in between, and mediates. In this case, something is needed to stand between the painful, uncomfortable or



inconvenient, or even unacceptable history and today's schoolchild. Something is needed that mediates between the past and the present. And it doesn't have to be smart technologies and IT stuff. It could be game elements, various tasks, puzzles, moments of empathy, empirical (touchable) things – when the story is illustrated with associative

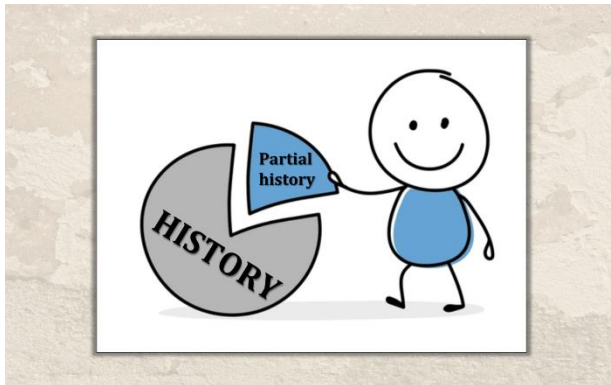
objects, allusions to current realities and issues. Because pure history, history by itself, is not interesting to anyone, and even more so – perhaps even frightening, repulsive or discouraging. But, after all, we want to attract, encourage, and stimulate interest in history and preserve the memory.

I have been working as an educator for just over three years. From this small experience



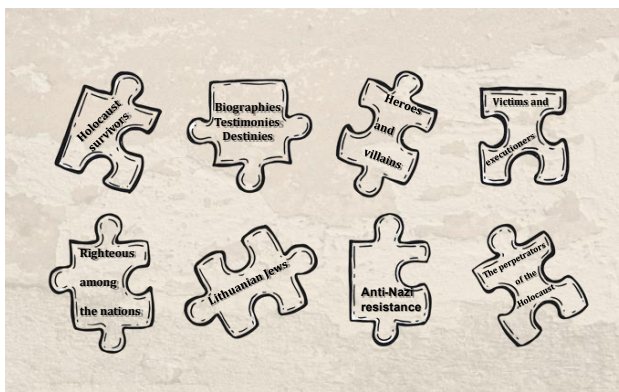
of my work, I can notice and single out a couple of quite interesting trends in Lithuania in the recent period. After the events in Ukraine and after the start of the Israel-Hamas military conflict, when the manifestations of the so-called "information war" intensified in the world, students and teachers became interested in

those educational activities that in one way or another touch on the propaganda carried out by the Nazis and the Soviets: when discussing fake news, propaganda, public disinformation, brainwashing and similar processes. The students themselves analyze media messages and newspaper illustrations (caricatures) of that time, learn to recognize all the negative aspects just mentioned. And somehow, very naturally, they themselves connect those aspects with



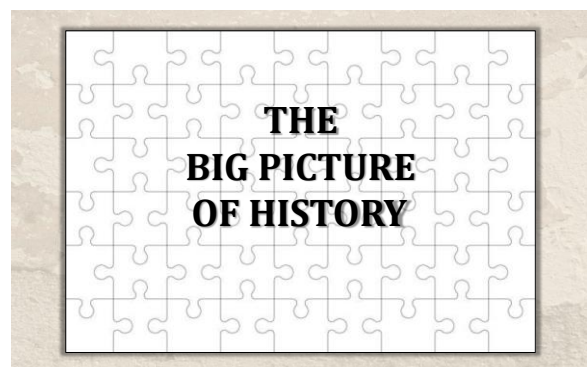
today, they themselves look for allusions, associations, reflections, and when they find them, they very lively discuss about them. And that's great! Because, after learning from history, they become more aware citizens, responsible and critical users of the flow of information.

Another interesting trend in Lithuania is that schoolchildren start to like not a single or chronologically consistent history, but an aspectual history, for example, biographies of the



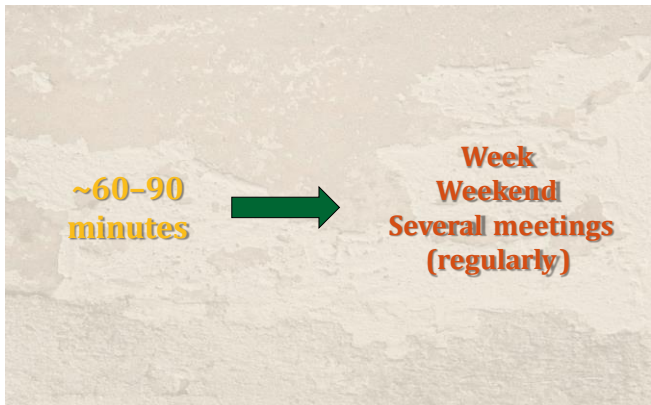
people of their region (city or village) and their destinies, the culture and achievements of Lithuanian Jews, the role of women in the history of anti-Nazi or anti-Soviet resistance, humor that helped to endure the most painful events in history, the executors (perpetrators) of the Holocaust or, on the contrary, the rescuers of the Jews, etc. Of

course, in the case of such an aspectual history, the general picture, the big picture gets affected, but if the students are interested for a long enough time, then step by step, aspect by aspect, detail by detail, they become familiar with that general history, and they could see that big picture.



In Lithuania, the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust is not taught at an early age, in younger classes. Perhaps we don't need to do that. When students reach the teenage years, their consciousness acquires the ability to reflect, think more critically and rationally, make larger generalizations, meaningful comparisons, and draw conclusions. This leads to a higher quality in teaching about that painful history, full of traumatic experiences and uncomfortable pages. What I would like is perhaps more of a continuous and consistent,

long-term non-formal educational process. Because it is common in Lithuania that educations are short, one-time, lasting at most one and a half hours. They are designed to be convenient for groups of schoolchildren visiting a museum or other memorial place. But we could more



quickly assimilate the good experiences of Western and Central Europe, when education means training sessions lasting for a longer period of time – for example, a weekend or even a whole week, during which you can already try out the most diverse educational activities, their forms and genres.



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