

Evaluation of the Series of Webinars on Historical-Political Education

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Cooperation partners: erinnern.at (Dr. Werner Dreier), Pädagogisches Zentrum des Fritz Bauer Instituts und des Jüdischen Museums Frankfurt (Gottfried Köbler), Freie Universität Berlin (Prof. Dr. Martin Lücke) and Landesinstitut für Pädagogik und Medien im Saarland (Alexander König)



Sponsorship of the series of webinars: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)



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1. Introduction

The approaches to National Socialism, the Holocaust and other National Socialist mass crimes have spread out strongly in the last few years. This concerns both the content level and also the teaching level: new didactical approaches, methods and formats have arisen, including webinars, that is to say online seminars. Next to learning with digital media the subject of education in a heterogeneous society is gaining significance increasingly. The pedagogical concepts are changing, and new forms and approaches to remembrance are originating. As part of the culture of remembrance, the places to learn and remember, which deal with the history of Nazism, and the memorials for the victims are experiencing a progressive change.

This development was taken by the *Agency for Historical, Civic and Media Education* in cooperation with the above mentioned organisations as an opportunity to discuss three topic areas in depth and to test the new webinar format in the field of Historical-Political Education: between June 2013 and January 2015 six webinars were carried out on each of the three topics of Memorial Pedagogy, Intercultural Historical Learning and Historical Learning with Digital Media. The common themes of all the webinars were National Socialism and the Holocaust. The webinars were announced on websites, in the social media and in our LaG-magazine. They were also advertised by the cooperation partners and presented in different networks. As it is about a rather unknown training format, the need to inform the potential participants was high.

Unlike a webcast, in which the information flows in one direction only, a webinar enables the communication between the speaker and the participants in both directions. As a result it is live and interactive: the input and the exchange take place within a previously established starting and finishing time. The communication with the participants takes place by voice and text chat. Only the speaker and the moderator are seen. At the same time the learning success and appeal of this format grow thanks to a high interactivity between the participants. Webinars are extended in the areas of Marketing, Technology, Management, Finance and Medicine; in the Historical-Political Education they have not been used much up to now. In view of the current technical possibilities this format is appropriate above all for passing on practical knowledge and less so for dealing with deep, complex subject matters, for which face-to-face communication is far more suitable. Due to the high concentration demanded by webinars, they should last up to one to one and a half hours.

The three series of webinars conducted by the *Agency for Historical, Civic and Media Education* were sponsored by the *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance* (IHRA) and they were therefore for the participants free of charge. There were also no access limitations with regard to education or field of work. As the format does not depend on the place, the combination of the participants was international. Regarding the professional backgrounds the groups were heterogeneous. Their number varied between five and twenty people in the eighteen webinars, of which the subject of Historical Learning with Digital Media had the most participants, whereas the other two were not so strongly attended. Some enrolled people did never log in. Most logged in people stayed till the end. The dropout rate was very low. This applies especially to the participants who live in a foreign country or in small

places, who often attended several webinars. The participation from big cities like Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne or Munich was much lower.

The choice of the speakers was made in consultation with the cooperation partners. It was challenging to find competent specialist speakers as many did not want to get involved in the new format. It was the first time for most speakers that they were holding a webinar. For this reason a test webinar was organised with each of them. This led them to reduce their inhibitions against this medium.

The structure of the webinars changed a little over time. What remained unaltered was that a general input was given at the beginning, however the later presentations could be interrupted for questions thrown in, making them more interactive. Before the beginning of the webinar the participants could check their headsets or headphones and microphones. In this way we wanted to motivate them to oral participation. The text chat proved to be practical but very slow, causing long, continuous pauses until the participants' questions and comments were visible.

The software used in the webinars was Adobe Connect, which proved stable and practicable. It enables the participants to speak in turns without problems and presentations can be mostly well integrated. However it is difficult to insert videos and also the flash application caused problems in some mobile devices. A big drawback of Adobe Connect was that the webinar recording could only be seen in the server and it was not available in mp4 format. It should be checked whether another programme is more suitable, as other webinar providers offer this recording format. In this case all the webinars had to be recorded again and post-produced as videos, which turned out to be a lengthy and demanding process. The webinar recordings were uploaded to the video platform vimeo.com and published under a Creative Commons License, that is to say, they can be used for non-commercial purposes but they cannot be altered. Thus the webinars make later a contribution to the Open Educational Resources and they can be easily used for educational purposes.

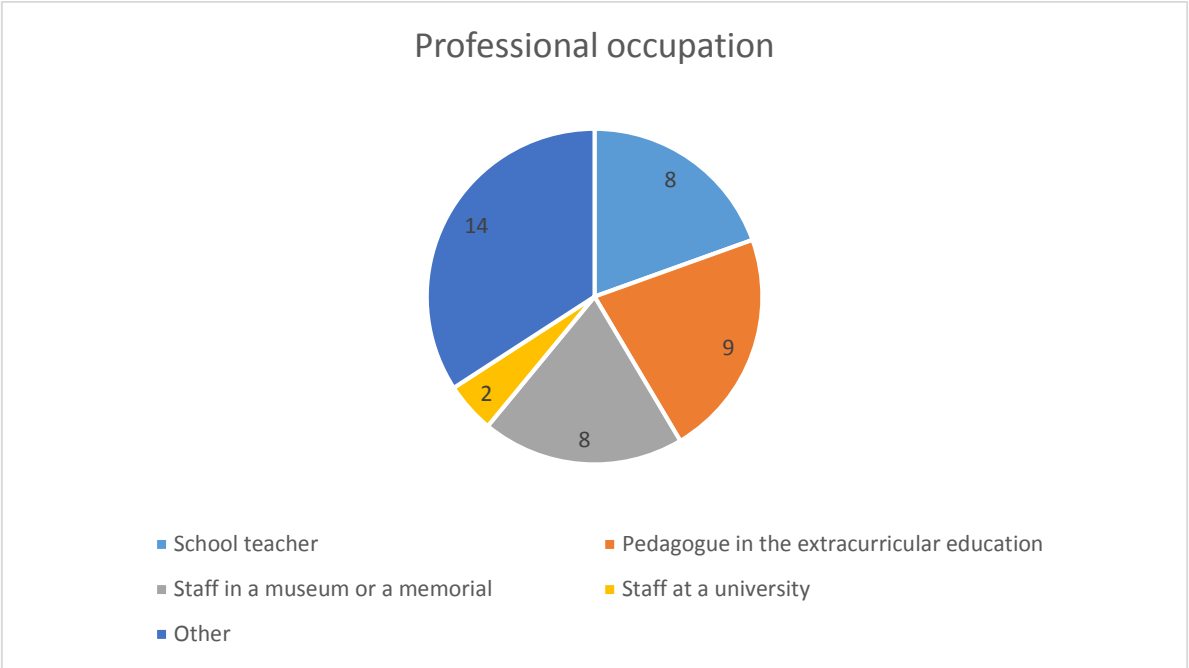
2. Results of the Evaluation

The survey about the webinars was carried out by means of an online form at the *Lernen aus der Geschichte* homepage. Participants of almost all the webinars filled in the form: out of a total of about 120 participants there were 41 forms. The participation was of about one third, which is not uncommon for an online survey. The evaluation served to accompany and to critically assess the trial of the webinar as a new format in the field of Historical Political Education. We wanted to find out how webinars have to be set up so that participants can evaluate them positively and where there is a need for improvement.

a. Professional Occupation of the Participants

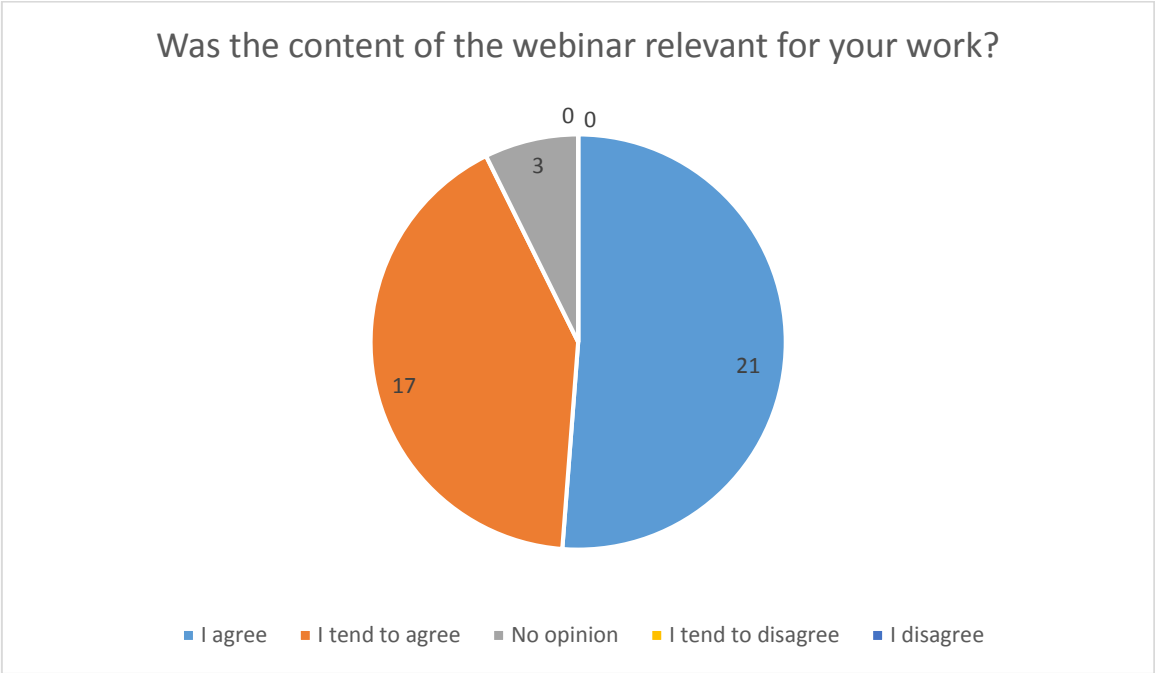
The groups of participants were very heterogeneous in relation to their professional backgrounds, as many areas of educational activity and science were represented. A good quarter of the participants work in the academic field, but they are here under-represented

because only two of them took part in the evaluation. Rather many participants classified themselves in the field "other."



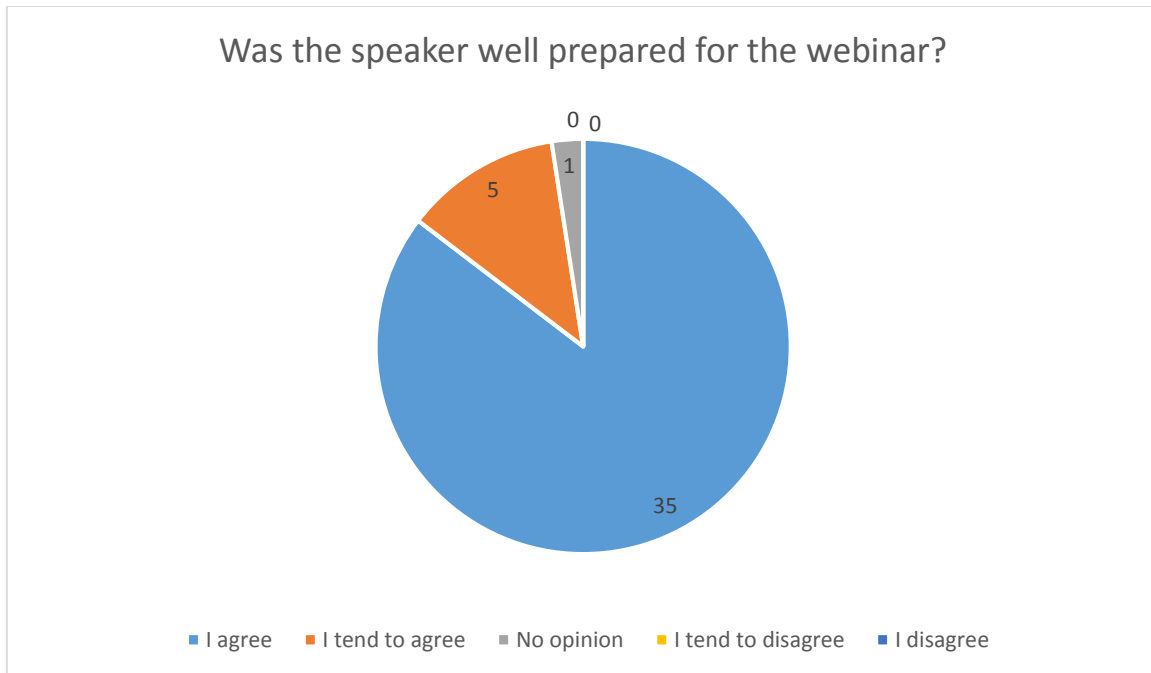
b. Was the Content of the Webinar Relevant for your Work?

One aim of the series of webinars was to establish a high professional relevance and a direct reference to the professional practice of the participants. For this reason the speakers that were involved are either in the intersection between science and practice or whose academic work is highly practice-oriented. For the surveyed participants this priority was obviously of use.



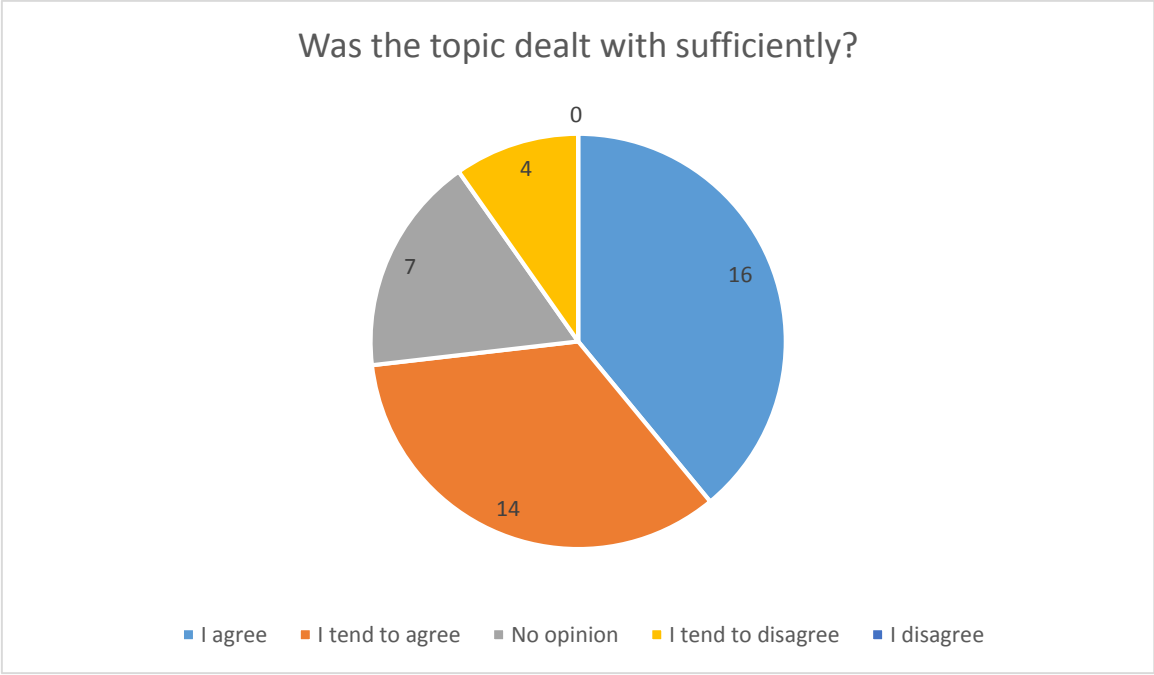
c. Was the Speaker Well Prepared for the Webinar?

In webinars speakers must concentrate on the essential points and cannot go very deep into theoretical questions. Webinars are adequate for short and clearly defined input followed by some discussion, which requires from the speaker a very precise preparation. The surveyed participants expressed themselves mainly positively with respect to this.



d. Was the Topic Dealt with Sufficiently?

Webinars have time limitations and they should not last longer than 90 minutes. This makes it necessary to plan in advance what can be covered in the short time period. This approach of focusing on few key points is very important. Participants should not feel unchallenged and the treatment of the topic should correspond accordingly to its complexity. In this respect a good balance between focusing and working in depth should be aimed at. This was (mostly) the case according to two thirds of the surveyed participants.

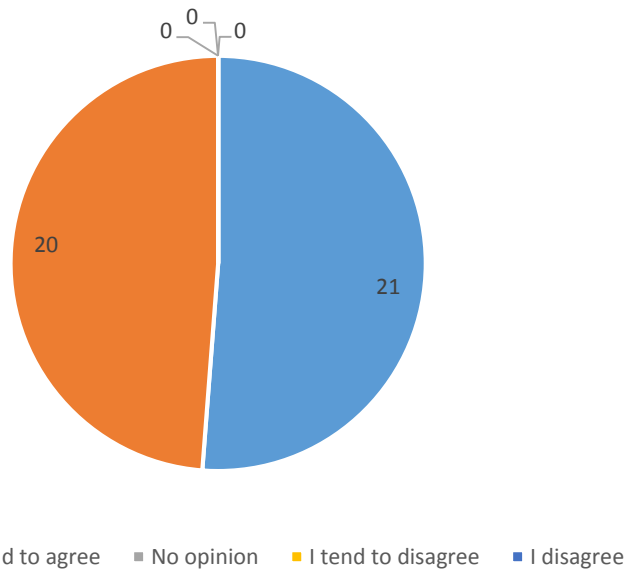


e. Were the Contents Conveyed Understandably?

As the participants are not visible, it is hard for both the teachers and the moderator to judge whether the contents are understood. This makes it also difficult to intervene in a corrective way during the webinar. Whether and in how far the contents are understood can be particularly evident from the asked questions. A problem there is that, if few participants ask, the speaker cannot know for sure whether the input has been understood. However there is the advantage for shy people to ask questions more easily, e.g. by chat, than in a presence seminar as webinars are basically anonymous.

The surveyed participants were generally positive about the comprehensibility.

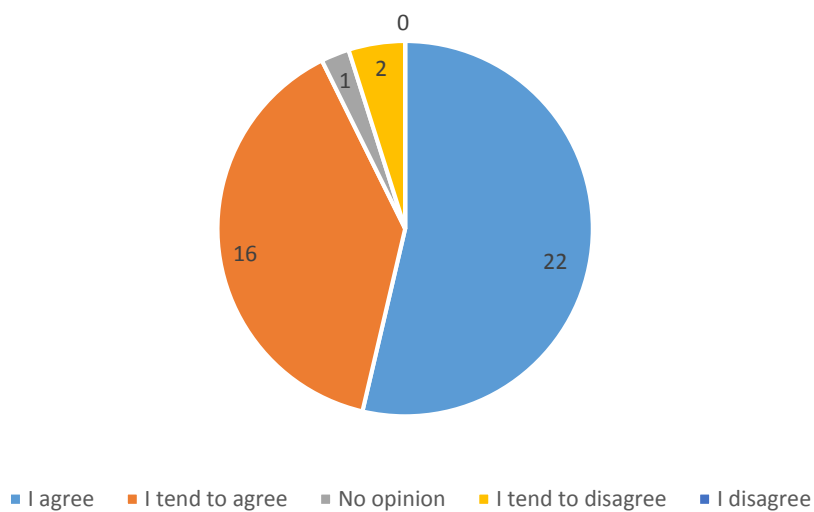
Were the Contents Conveyed Understandably?



f. Was the Degree of Difficulty of the Presentation and the Discussion Adequate?

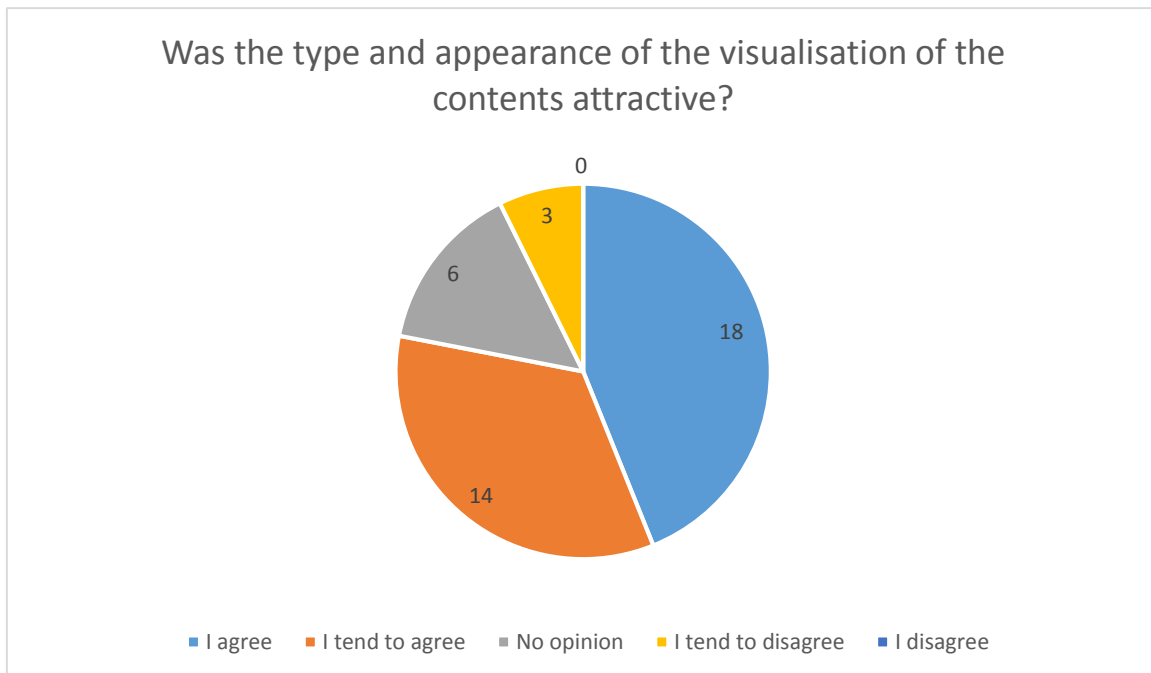
Like in the contents, it is not easy to find out whether the degree of difficulty is adequate or if the participants feel unchallenged or overchallenged. The more interactive the webinar is arranged, the easier it is to adapt the degree of difficulty accordingly, as one can see from the reactions if the level of difficulty still needs to be adjusted. The degree of difficulty was for the surveyed participants predominantly adequate.

Was the degree of difficulty of the presentation and the discussion adequate?



g. Was the Type and Appearance of the Visualisation of the Contents Attractive?

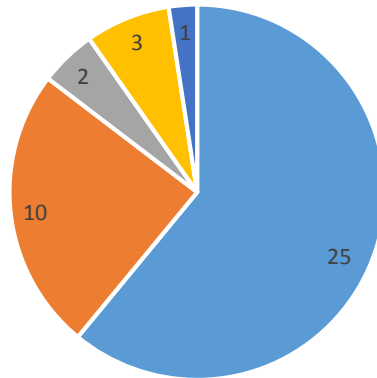
In webinars there are various types of visualisation available. Thus documents and presentations can be opened, the screen can be divided or one can write on a whiteboard. One can choose among these ways – according to what is adequate for the content or the group of attendants. The visualisation is very important because the seminar can be hard to follow without it. As it was a matter of short presentations exclusively, we chose only PowerPoint-Presentations designed with a uniform title page. Like this, the common nature of the series was clearly apparent. The form of the individual presentations was very varied, though. In accordance with this the participants expressed rather discrepant opinions.



h. Were the Contents and the Aims of the Webinar Sufficiently Known to You at the Start?

All the webinars were presented at the website *Lernen aus der Geschichte* with an introductory text about the content and a short description of the speaker. The notices in terms of content were kept short as other numerous technical and general pieces of information were necessary. Nevertheless the notices were sufficient to the major part of the surveyed participants.

Were the contents and the aims of the webinar sufficiently known to you at the start?

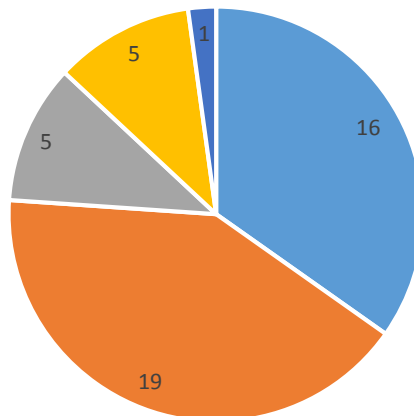


■ I agree ■ I tend to agree ■ No opinion ■ I tend to disagree ■ I disagree

i. Were your Expectations on the Webinar Fulfilled?

Due to the wide professional backgrounds of the participants and based on their different expectations, we thought that it would turn out difficult to fulfil them. The evaluation shows however that among the surveyed participants more than two thirds of them considered them to be (mostly) fulfilled.

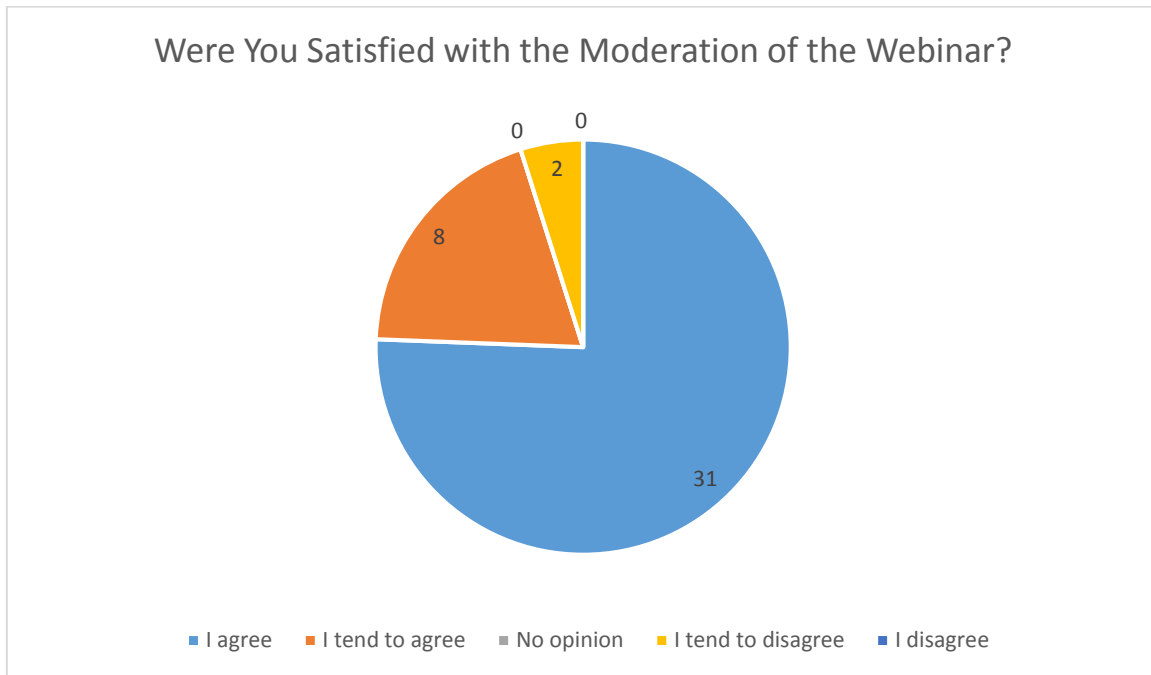
Were your expectations about the webinar fulfilled?



■ I agree ■ I tend to agree ■ No opinion ■ I tend to disagree ■ I disagree

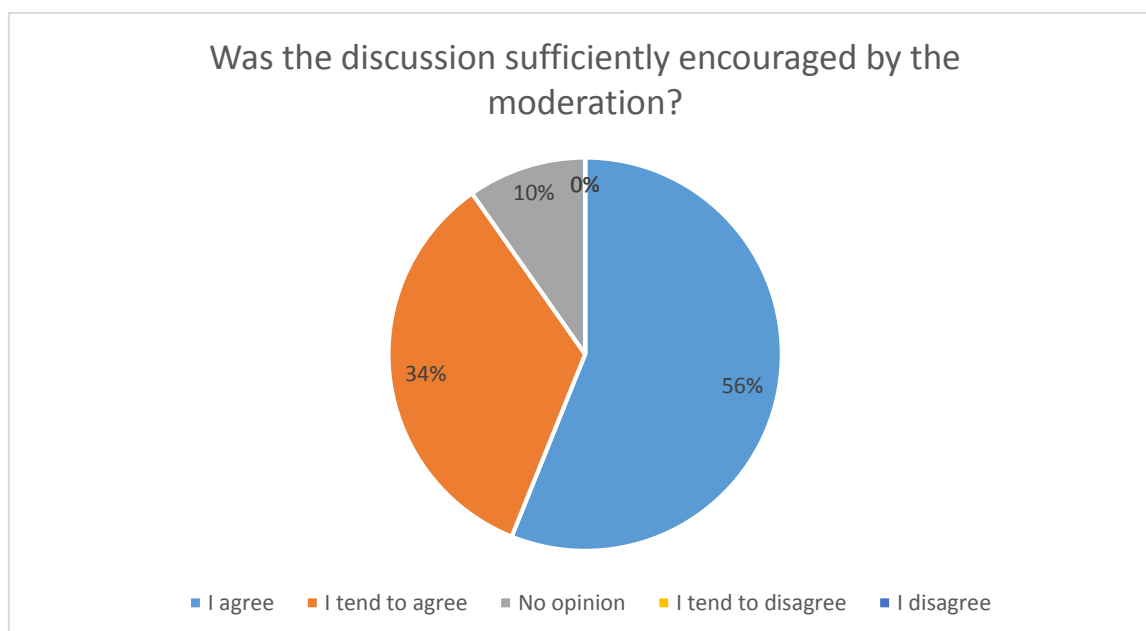
j. Were You Satisfied with the Moderation of the Webinar?

The moderation plays a key role in the webinars as they observe the exchange of ideas in the chat, they take care of possible technical problems or help the participants to attend the webinar if they happen to have any difficulties in understanding. As the speaker has to concentrate strongly on the input, the moderation is responsible for the general set-up. It was shown in the survey that these functions were considered as fulfilled to a great extent.



k. Was the Discussion Sufficiently Encouraged by the Moderation?

Apart from the general set-up as well as the available possibilities for participation, it is also important to encourage the participants to take part, as the learning success and the appeal of the format increase with interactivity. The answers of those questioned indicate that this was well done.



I. Tick Where Applicable

In order to obtain a deeper and more differentiated understanding of important points on how far webinars are suitable as a training method, we have formulated additional statements, which the participants could agree with or leave out. The point was to get clear statements to open questions.

According to the answers it is clear that the participants consider training through webinars as appropriate. Over 90 per cent of those questioned pointed out that they would attend another webinar of this series. This means that this format, which has not been much tested in the Historical-Political Education, has been well accepted in this field. The majority of the surveyed participants stated that they would also watch a webinar video belatedly. The webinar recordings will actually be watched at a later point also as video. Depending on the topic, the use of the webinar recordings is diversely intense.

Statement	Number of answers: 188 (N=41)	Percentage
I find that webinars as specialist input and discussion possibility should be offered more frequently.	34	82,93%
I had already attended a webinar before (by us or another provider).	9	21,95%
Fewer contents should be dealt with.	0	0,00%
The speed of the input was too fast.	0	0,00%
The speed of the input was too slow.	6	14,63%
The webinar could last longer (<1h).	15	36,59%
The webinar could be shorter (>1h).	0	0,00%
I would attend a webinar of this series again.	37	90,24%
I would recommend the webinar series.	35	85,37%
I would watch a webinar as video belatedly.	26	63,41%

There was enough time for the discussion.	23	56,10%
I would rather have a shorter discussion and a longer presentation.	1	2,44%
I would like to have a higher interactivity during the webinar.	2	4,88%

In the following points (m to q) the reactions of the participants will be quoted directly and in their entirety. We show these here in full so that future webinars can profit from our experience.

m. In Case You Had Technical Problems, What Were They about?

The technology is a key aspect of the webinars: if these do not work correctly, the quality of the webinars drops enormously and in the worst of cases they might not even take place. That is why we wanted to know from the participants whether they had technical problems and, if so, what they were about. We got the following reactions, which we quote in their entirety:

- The connection was interrupted for a short time, short breakdowns of the moderator's microphone.
- Mic.
- The sound went off shortly in between.
- I have watched it belatedly as video. Input + repeatability + discussion.
- A crash of the Adobe Connect App in the iPad.
- Despite Email-Invitation could not log in with password. Could not take part in the text chat.
- Powerpoint graphics were not shown correctly.
- When switching on microphone everything stopped.
- The broadcast stopped in the middle and I had to log in again.
- Short interruption in the connection.
- Lags (abrupt failure) – locally conditioned.
- Wi-Fi if not Adobe Connect problems (but not too serious).
- I did not know that my microphone was still mute after the voice sign.

n. What Did You Like Most about this Form of Training?

With this question we wanted to find out about the perception on the advantages and possibilities of webinars.

- That I could easily attend it from home (with kids)!
- The personal contact, fast integration of questions.
- The possibility to take part from anywhere, great!

- Its shortness (1 hour) and at the same time concise input. The duration was exactly perfect, it delivered helpful ideas.
- The possibility to participate myself by asking questions.
- Experiences/input from another field. Easy to organize at the office-PC.
- One was at home!
- Interactivity. Family friendliness.
- Simultaneous interaction among the participants (exchange of links etc.).
- Via Internet, possible from home.
- ... Getting a view within 1h on the work by extracurricular learning locations and being able to ask questions.
- Flexibility of the training (at home), no journey, saving time and still a good quality training.
- The good work of the moderator.
- That it works from home.
- Choice of actual relevant topics in the educational work. Clarity & good structure. Networking and participants' discussion.
- Interactivity, no travelling, live action.
- Interactive exchange, interesting training opportunity within short time.
- Independent from place.
- No waste of energy and no costs to take part in a training course.
- That it was very comfortable: I could sit at my desk.
- Independent locations and qualified speakers at the kitchen table, as well as possible discussion.
- Contact with experts from home.
- Personal contact with speakers. Topic.
- The format of further training from home.
- Low-threshold offer and through the glitter world without walkway.
- I save much time (no travelling etc.). I can see the slides better than when I sit in a room.
- The personal touch, the interactivity.
- It is simple in the organization, much more beautiful than a podcast or a reading.

o. What Do You Think Are the Limitations of Webinars?

Of course webinars also present both drawbacks and clear limitations.

- The discussion cannot certainly go very deep by chat.
- In case of few successful discussion or interruption due to lack of time, there could remain unanswered questions.
- It seems real discussions can rather hardly develop.
- They do not substitute discussions in person. It cannot go so much in depth.
- Few, great idea.
- Interactivity when there are many participants willing to contribute.

- The discussion without microphones was very slow indeed.
- There are only introductory references to the topic, not profound input.
- The presentations give only limited insights in pedagogical materials: what photos/texts are used?
- Discussing via chats is usually hard to get going; or rather, questions/enquiries turn out to be more difficult.
- The necessary switching on and off of the contributors hinders the direct reaction to the individual contributions a little.
- The intensity is not as high as in direct contact.
- I lack the real visible interaction and exchange between the speaker and the participants, and also between them.
- Differentiated communication in terms of content.
- The attention cannot be kept for longer than an hour. This is quite possibly too short for a presentation and discussion rich in content.
- Scarce possibilities for proper discussion.
- I find the interaction/ discussion in a webinar a little bit complicated.
- The personal interaction is very limited: if I do not see those present, I am less ready to contribute myself.
- Time scope.
- Insufficient personal contact.
- None.
- Immediate possibility of testing what was presented.
- The personal exchange is missing, making contacts is complicated.
- I think that the main problem is the bad quality of the sound.
- It is always difficult to find a balance between presentation and discussion. I think the presentations should be a bit shorter.

p. In Terms of Organisation and/or Content Do You Have any Suggestions for Future Webinars?

In order to enquire about topics for future webinars or to optimise their organisation, we asked this question.

- Keep going!
- The presentation can have this length, but plan more time for the discussion.
- No.
- Make preparation material available. Perhaps bibliographical references complementary to the webinar.
- As it is a form of continuing education, a certificate of attendance would be welcome.
- Together with the videos, please make the presentations available as pdf, too.
- Perhaps make the slides available first, so that the participants can also work on their part at the same time.
- Later in the evening or earlier in the morning.

- Include audio/visual broadcast medium more strongly, a webinar about the methods of the Visual/Auditive History.
- First listening to the presentation to the end, then discussing. Gathering the written questions by the moderation and replying to them.
- Webinars not only about the topic of National Socialism, but also about other aspects of history.
- Perhaps picking up didactical topics.
- Museum pedagogy in the digital transition.
- The discussion could become more animated; maybe it takes only practice to contribute despite the technical delays.
- Include more memorials and organisations related to the topic.
- I would find the topic of refuge, forced migration important (European context).

q. Any Other Remarks?

The question is self-explanatory.

- Thank you for the beautiful format!
- Please more of it! I will recommend it for sure! Thanks!
- Thanks for the presentation! I did not have expectations on the webinar, as the topic was (maybe close but) new.
- Carry on!
- Thanks a lot. My first webinar without technical faults!
- I think these webinars should take place much more frequently, it is a great training method!
- Thank you very much.
- Thank you very much for setting up this fantastic series!
- Superb seminar! The technology worked perfectly!
- The webinar was very revealing and has provided me with a lot of new ideas and impulses. Thanks for it!
- I was satisfied!
- Thanks.
- It was really exciting. Thank you very much indeed!
- Fantastic format!

3. Conclusion

The results of the survey show that the surveyed participants were satisfied with the webinars to a great extent. Also, in view of the active involvement, it can be said that this way of learning is very adequate as a training method for Historical-Political Education topics. It has, however, limitations as well. One of them is the need to deal with the topics in an as compact manner as possible. As far as content is concerned, depth and complexity are limited. Although it is possible to ask questions, it is not possible to have a proper discussion

due to the restrictions of the communication channel. For that, face-to-face communication is much more suitable, as it is faster, more immediate and more comprehensive. The format suggests a good deal of practical content: there is a demand for reference to professional everyday life, specific exercises should be offered and one should work with examples. By doing that, the interactivity will also be enhanced.

The decisive advantage of webinars is their place independence; that is to say, one can take part in a training course from home with no commuting needed. For this reason it is also very easily possible to conduct webinars at international level, which allows for the contribution of different perspectives. Therefore webinars can benefit from diversity and enable the participants to have insights into other points of view, experiences and opinions. Webinars are suitable for short, also international training courses with small input and discussions that can be attended in between times. They can be offered to an open audience or a fixed group, also series are very adequate. Webinars can also be combined with other online activities. They are economical since they do not incur travelling costs and they are more family-friendly than presence seminars. Webinars focus stronger on the contents and less on the social aspects, which play a bigger role in presence events. As a relatively new medium, it is still unknown to many: in view of the advantages mentioned above, it can well be expected that it will spread in the next few years. Webinars have a future as a training method. However they do not substitute presence events completely, but they rather complement them.