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City history

The town of Bocholt mourns the loss of Josef Niebur: a pioneer of local remembrance culture has passed away

The loss of a long-standing champion of remembrance work // Author of seminal works on Jewish urban history // A defining contribution to memorial sites, Stolpersteine and educational projects

The town of Bocholt mourns the loss of Josef Niebur, a long-standing local historian and volunteer historian who played a decisive role in shaping the local culture of remembrance over many decades. The town council looks back on his extensive life's work with great respect. Through his meticulous historical research, Josef Niebur leaves behind a lasting foundation for commemorating the victims of Nazism in Bocholt.

With the passing of Josef Niebur, the town of Bocholt has lost a reliable and highly esteemed partner in the town's cultural and educational work. "The news of Josef Niebur's death fills us with deep sorrow. For decades, he shaped the culture of remembrance in Bocholt and restored the dignity and rightful place of the victims of National Socialism in our city's history", explains Björn Volmering, Head of the Culture Department and Deputy Mayor. "We pay tribute to the life's work of a citizen who, with a great sense of responsibility, has always fought against forgetting."

The impetus for Niebur's decades of work came from the attack on the Israeli Olympic team in Munich in 1972 and reports of the destruction of the synagogue in Bocholt. From the 1980s onwards, he devoted himself intensively to the systematic research of the Holocaust and Nazi crimes in the local area. His research took him, amongst other places, to the Federal Archives, the archives of the Zentrum Judaicum, the Arolsen Archives, and on several occasions to Israel to visit the Yad Vashem Memorial. In the Bocholt City Archives, he spent months analysing court and administrative records and conducted numerous interviews with contemporary witnesses and descendants of Jewish families.

This thorough groundwork resulted in publications that are now regarded as indispensable works on the town's history. Following the 1988 publication "Jews in Bocholt", the nearly 500-page "Book of Remembrance - Jews in Bocholt 1937-1945", which, through 183 biographical profiles, restored the names and stories of the victims. With the guide "Unbekannt verzogen (ausgewandert)", published in 2018, he also provided educational materials for use in schools. This body of work was supplemented by more than thirty specialist articles in the magazine "Unser Bocholt", in which he also covered biographies of resistance fighters, the fates of victims of the Nazi murders and the history of the Stadtwald camp.

His civic engagement continues to have a lasting impact on the town's public space to this day. Initially within the German-Dutch-Israeli Society and later in the 'Synagogue Landscapes' working group, Niebur worked tirelessly to promote remembrance. He initiated the naming of streets after victims of the regime and played a key role in the redesign of the synagogue memorial in front of the Haus des Handwerks in 2005. Furthermore, the laying of 49 Stolpersteine to date within the city limits is based on his historical research. He also provided the decisive impetus for the renovation of the memorial to the former Stadtwald camp, completed in 2014, including the newly designed information steles.

A central concern for him remained, at all times, the direct communication of this history to future generations. Niebur developed and curated numerous exhibitions, gave lectures and designed hundreds of city tours focusing on the Stolpersteine for the adult education centre, as well as for school classes and community groups. Whenever relatives of former Bocholt residents of the

Jewish faith visited from abroad, he supported the town council as a knowledgeable and empathetic guide.

In recognition of his outstanding commitment, Josef Niebur was awarded the City of Bocholt's Silver Medal in 1995. He was also honoured with the Federal Cross of Merit on Ribbon and, in 2015, with the Badge of Honour from the German-Israeli Society. The town of Bocholt will remember Josef Niebur with gratitude and carry on his legacy as an enduring commitment to a vibrant culture of remembrance.



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Josef Niebur at a meeting with the descendants of Ursula Friede Bamberger in Bocholt on 10 March 2023 at the former site of the "D. Friede textile factory - mechanical cotton weaving mill, patent fabric mill and finishing works" on Mühlenweg.



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Without Josef Niebur's expertise and cooperation, the Stolpersteine would probably not have been laid since 2007. There are now 49 stones commemorating the victims of National Socialism in Bocholt.