The Great War Remembered: Commemoration and Peace in Flanders Fields
COLOPHON

Author
Maarten Van Alstein

Editors
Tomas Baum
Wies De Graeve

Lay-out
Gramma nv

Cover Photograph
Arne Jennard

Printed by
Drukkerij Artoos

Brussels, 8 November 2011
ISBN 9789078864486

Disclaimer
Although the Flemish Peace Institute exercised the utmost care in the drafting of this report, it cannot be held or made liable for potential inaccuracies or omissions. No form of liability will be accepted for any use that a reader makes of this report.
ABSTRACT

The 2014-2018 commemoration period marks a hundred years since the First World War. The Flemish government has made it one of the objectives of its project for the WWI Centenary that the commemorations should convey a message of peace. This report studies how this objective can be achieved. This is done, firstly, by critically examining the conditions under which peace-oriented war commemorations can be set up in a normatively and historically well-considered manner. Secondly, based on a survey of stakeholders and practice experts, this study investigates how contemporary commemorations can be linked to the idea of peace in practice.

Historical perspective

A historical perspective on the commemoration of the First World War shows that there is a long and diverse tradition of peace-oriented war commemoration. This tradition has been propagated both by local actors and peace movements as well as by authorities on different levels. At the same time, the historical analysis shows that war commemoration is a complex social phenomenon. Various remembrance traditions refer to history in very diverse ways. Consequently, peace-oriented forms of war commemoration are less self-evident than they may seem at first glance. The question arises, for instance, how peace-oriented war commemoration should relate to commemorative practices which convey other messages than the idea of peace. Another question is the relation between memory and history.

A critical analysis of commemoration, history and peace

In this report we explore the critical conditions under which peace-oriented war commemoration can be set up in a normatively and historically well-considered way.

First of all, we will look at how pro-peace war commemorations should relate to commemorative traditions that assign a different meaning to the history of the war. We will argue that peace-oriented war commemoration should not only convey a message of peace, but that it also should strive for a peaceful remembrance culture. This implies that the diversity in war commemoration is recognised and other forms of remembrance approached through open dialogue.

Secondly, the area of tension between history and remembrance – or between historiography and public memory – is examined more closely. In particular, we discuss historians’ criticism of current remembrance practices. To address this criticism we introduce a distinction between two ‘remembrance logics’. The first – instrumental – logic starts from a current objective and uses the past as a means to achieve that objective. The second – motivational – logic, on the other hand, starts from the past itself and assumes that the diverse stories that are told about the war create an awareness of the horror of war as well as of the value of peace. We argue that the second logic offers better guarantees to avoid the risk of a one-sided, anachronistic and possibly manipulative approach of history.

Peace-oriented war commemoration in practice

To examine how peace-minded commemorations can be set up in practice, we organised a survey among stakeholders and practice experts in the fields of heritage, remembrance tourism, remembrance education, etc.
The survey results point to two methods of linking war commemoration to the idea of peace. An explicit approach opts for formulating the message of peace explicitly, for instance on information panels and in brochures. An implicit approach, favoured by most respondents, believes that the idea of peace will develop from the bottom up by telling stories about ordinary soldiers, citizens and children who experienced the destructive impact of the war in their daily lives. In the report we opt for the second approach, notwithstanding the importance of paying attention to historical context and the structural mechanisms and dynamics causing war.

In the international dimension of the commemoration project the challenge of finding a balance between conveying a peace message and recognizing the diversity of war remembrance poses itself pre-eminently. Finding this balance is an exercise in diplomacy, which in itself symbolizes a peace-oriented approach of commemoration.

The architectural heritage of the war (cemeteries, memorials and landscapes) will play a prominent role in the commemoration project. This heritage came into being in a specific historical context. Peace-oriented war commemoration must respect the historical meaning of the heritage. However, on information panels, in brochures and during guided tours, visitors can be encouraged to reflect critically upon war and peace.

During the 2014-2018 commemoration period, remembrance events will be set up both at the local and at the international level. The cultural war heritage will play a significant role in these events. One of the aspects emphasised in the survey results is the importance of telling stories about ordinary soldiers and citizens, as well as of art and culture. Where formal remembrance ceremonies are concerned, two options emerge from the survey. A group of respondents argue in favour of the reform of these ceremonies, in order for them to reach a broader audience. Another group defends the idea of maintaining traditional forms of commemoration out of respect for the groups which over the decades have played a prominent role in those ceremonies. This, however, does not exclude a certain measure of renewal, on condition that one always looks for a balance between old and new.

Remembrance tourism offers possibilities for conveying a message of peace, but as an economic activity it also entails risks, for instance when a commercial logic starts determining which stories about the past are told. Some respondents are very critical about remembrance tourism, while others try to find a balance between the characteristics of tourism and those of remembrance. There is unanimity, however, on the fact that tourism should always pay attention to the ethical framework of remembrance. This concern is reflected in the concept ‘tourism+’, which has been proposed by the Government with a view to the expected increase in tourism in the context of the Centenary.

Education is an important component in the remembrance project. The idea is to set up all kinds of remembrance and peace educational projects for all levels and forms of education on occasion of the Centenary of the First World War. In the survey respondents underline the importance of active project forms, such as exchange programmes, site visits and creative tasks in which new media are used, in addition to telling stories that fit in with young people’s worlds. When setting up educational projects it is important that attention be given to finding a balance between knowledge and experience.
The Government can shape its peace-oriented remembrance commitment in three steps. First of all, it can develop a remembrance philosophy in which it indicates how it wants to link the commemoration of the First World War to the idea of peace. This philosophy can be communicated via a vision document, brochures, speeches, etc. Secondly, this remembrance philosophy needs to be implemented, wherever possible and insofar as this falls under the radius of operation of the Government. Finally, this peace-oriented remembrance philosophy can be conveyed ‘at the negotiation table of remembrance and commemoration’.
1 Introduction: the commemoration of war and peace

The period 2014-2018 marks a hundred years since the First World War held the world in a tight grip. This also implies nearly one hundred years of commemoration of that war. Almost immediately after the end of hostilities, commemoration efforts started in order to ‘place’ the war, which not only deeply influenced the political, cultural and economic course of world history, but also had a profound psychological impact on millions of war veterans and the surviving relatives of war casualties. From these efforts, among other things, sprang many local war monuments, the cemeteries in the Westhoek, the Last Post under the Menin Gate in Ypres and the Armistice Day ceremonies, which still shape the Flemish commemoration landscape. In many aspects, the way in which the war is remembered today still resembles commemoration practices that came into being in the first years after the war. Even so, a lot has changed as well. As a result of the gradual disappearance of the last participants in and witnesses of the Great War, the memory of the war has to be passed on by people who are increasingly further in time from the events they commemorate. Over the course of the decades motivations and war commemoration practices have changed as well. Although formal ceremonies and the visiting of cemeteries and memorials still play an important role in commemoration activities, today the memory of the war is increasingly passed on through other channels, such as tourism, education, science, culture and the media.

The commemoration project the Government of Flanders has been working on over the past few years with the Great War Centenary in mind reflects these evolutions. Not only does the project comprise various components, such as international cooperation, heritage, events, tourism, education and media, the Government also wants to make the commemoration relevant to today’s society. For instance, the Government has stated that the project should not only increase the international visibility of Flanders and considerably boost peace tourism in (West) Flanders, it also wants to relate the commemoration to the theme of peace. This objective is shaped further by the ambition to ‘sensitise current and future generations in Flanders concerning themes such as tolerance, intercultural dialogue and international understanding in light of an open and tolerant society and an active international orientation’.

This research report takes a detailed look at the objective of the Government of Flanders to make peace the theme of the centenary of the Great War. In particular, this report considers how this objective can be achieved. To do so, it bases itself on two approaches. The first approach is to find out how, in practice, the commemoration project can spread the idea of peace. In this context, a number of questions arise, such as the methods, forms and techniques which can best be used to achieve this objective, and whether different approaches are required for the different components of the project. To answer all these questions, we have called on the expertise available in Flanders and Belgium, for instance on the heritage of the Great War, remembrance tourism and commemoration and peace education in schools. A diverse group of stakeholders and practice experts who are involved in First World War commemoration and remembrance initiatives in all relevant areas (such as heritage, tourism, education) were asked about their views on the commemoration project. Secondly, this study also uses a critical approach, which means that it investigates the conditions under which governments can shape their remembrance policy in an historically and normatively well-considered way. Large-scale commitments to commemoration,
with which governments strive to make use of the memory of war in a currently relevant way, are not self-evident. Not only is war commemoration a complex phenomenon due to the diversity of traditions and practices, in the recent past historians have also expressed scepticism regarding the way in which the current ‘boom in the culture of remembrance and heritage’ is taking shape in our society. In a study of peace-oriented commemorations a critical reflection on the normative and historical complexity of war commemoration is indispensable.

The report consists of four chapters. In the first chapter the commemoration of the First World War is studied from an historical perspective. This not only gives an idea of the broader framework of the matter, it also allows us better to place the complexity of war commemoration and understand current trends. In the second chapter war commemoration is looked at from a conceptual angle in order to define the critical conditions under which peace-oriented commemorations can take place in an historically and normatively well-considered way. In the third chapter the views of stakeholders and practice experts are considered. Based on the results of the survey we look into their visions, views and ideas on the concrete practice of peace-oriented commemorations. In the concluding chapter we bring the different lines explored in the previous chapters together.1

1 Various people have collaborated in this research project. Our thanks go to Franky Bostyn, Wouter Brauns, Jan Breyne, Griet Brosens, Geert Castryck, Dries Chaerle, Piet Chielens, Philippe De Coene, Philippe De Coene, Pol De Grave, Lieven Dehandschutter, Frederik Demeyer, Gita Deneckere, Tinne Jacobs, Sabine Poley, Pierre Ruyfelaere, Wouter Sinaeve, Luk Van Elsacker, Luckas Van Der Taelen, Eva Van Hooye, Tine Miet Van Maële, Luc Vandael, Stefaan Vandenberghe, Marleen Vanderpoorten, Hilde Verbaven, Gregory Vercauteren, Tijl Vereenooghe, Marjan Verplancke, Peter Verplancke, Veerle Viaene, and all the participants in the survey.
2 Commemoration of the First World War in an historical perspective

2.1 The nation, mourning, and resistance

The wounds inflicted by wars heal very slowly and leave behind deep scars. This holds true not only for relationships between the states or groups that were each others’ enemies during the conflict, but also for the social fabric of societies afflicted by war such as veterans who have to come to terms with traumatic wartime experiences and for the countless families who have to cope with the loss of relatives or the mutilation of loved ones. The First World War raised this issue in an especially acute form. The losses brought about by this war were massive and unprecedented. What is more, it was not professional armies which fought a life and death struggle for four years in the trenches, but armies of the people, composed of ordinary citizens who were dispatched or drawn to the front in the name of powerful nation-states and colonial empires. Many never returned. Those who did return, as well as the many civilians who suffered because of the war, were scarred by the traumatic experiences of violence that warfare always entails. After the war, some sense of meaning for this gigantic loss of human life had to be found, not just by the nation and society – where the war sometimes caused internal rifts – but also by the veterans and the families of the dead and wounded. Commemorations and various forms of remembrance practices played a crucial role in this. In the years immediately following the war, a key question for the various societies involved in the conflict was how the war and its many victims should be commemorated. The very diverse answers given to this question generated a wide diversity in the forms of commemoration. As a result First World War commemorations and remembrance sites to this very day are characterised by great historical and sociological complexity.

Historical, sociological and political science research into the commemoration of the First World War has approached this complexity in various ways. T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, for instance, distinguish two important histoigraphic schools, each of which focuses on a specific aspect of the commemoration of the war. A first school interprets war commemorations as a political practice that is closely related to the rituals of national identification and the construction of collective national identities. The First World War presented an enormous challenge to the nation-state. In the 19th century, the nation-state had grounded its power of attraction and its strength in the promise of well-being that it would provide for its people. Then came the war, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers and citizens lost their lives in the name of the fatherland. Once the hostilities were over, it was thus also vital for the nation-state to give some meaning to this wholesale slaughter. This was done by representing the deaths of frontline soldiers as a sacrifice for the nation, a patriotic martyrdom that the soldiers took upon themselves to save the fatherland from the existential threat of the enemy. One of the best-known examples in the literature of this imputation of meaning is Benedict Anderson’s interpretation of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. For Anderson, this tomb is the prime example of a symbol of national solidarity. It evokes not only the sacrifice that the citizens may be asked to make as the price of that sense of community, but also the means by which the nation-state seeks to persuade its citizens to die for the national cause, among others by expressing its gratitude for that sacrifice in stone.
the war, similar tombs were erected in many countries throughout the world. The underlying idea was that the body of the unknown soldier could in principle be that of any fallen soldier who remained missing. If the unknown soldier could be ‘anyone’, he could also transcend differences of political opinion, social class, language or ethnic group, and thus serve as the ideal symbol of national unity. Consequently, when selecting an unrecognisable (and thus unidentified) body to be placed in the tomb, careful attention was always paid to ensuring that the soldier in question at least had the ‘right’ nationality. There are myriad examples of war memorials that are nationally and patriotically inspired. One such example is the monument à la victoire in Verdun, an imposing monument in the centre of the fortified town symbolising the memory of the battle as a glorious and heroic victory of the French state over Germany. The famous words of General Pétain, “on les aura”, still adorn the monument. Similarly, written on the Menin Gate in Ypres – originally conceived as a triumphal arch but eventually established as a memorial in honour of the British war dead – are the inscriptions, ‘pro patria’ (for the homeland) and ‘pro rege’ (for the king). Thus elements of a patriotic-imperialistic idiom found their way on to this monument that was dedicated to the memory of the British war dead. In Belgium, the patriotic discourse of commemoration takes concrete form for instance in the Cross of Fire medals presented to every soldier who came under fire at the front. The slogan, ‘salus patriae, suprema lex’ (the good of the country is the supreme law) occupies a prominent place on the medal. The same slogan can also be found on some local war monuments. While the commemoration of the First World War has evolved radically over the course of the 20th century, elements of this national, patriotic and imperialistic discourse of commemoration remain present even today in the commemorative landscape, often in the petrified form of war monuments and memorials.

A second historiographic approach distinguished by Ashplant, Dawson and Roper studies First World War commemorations first and foremost as expressions of mourning. One important author in this school is Jay Winter, whose research into war commemoration investigates how groups of veterans, families and relatives – often on a small scale – attempted to give meaning to the massive scale of death and suffering caused by the war. According to Winter, all too much attention has been given in the literature on commemoration to the interpretation and manipulation of war memories by political and cultural elites. Rather, he points out that many of the remembrance initiatives within societies – particularly after tragic events – happen spontaneously, in bottom-up fashion, not merely guided from above. These spontaneous remembrance initiatives result from exchanges among members of social networks, which sometimes existed before the war but were often created as a result of it. According to Winter, the rituals and objects emerging from these forms of remembrance and commemoration should not be seen as reflections of political authority or of a general consensus (although they could sometimes be this as well), but as an amalgam of profound expressions of the strength of a society. It is for this reason that he focuses his attention on the remembrance initiatives by families and groups of veterans, whom he sees as “small-scale agents of remembrance”, ordinary people who came together to reflect upon what happened to them, their loved ones and their particular social environment when the war so brutally intervened in their lives.

Since both historiographic schools – given their specific focus – fail to shed light on all relevant aspects of war commemoration, they are not mutually exclusive. Ashplant, Dawson and Roper try to integrate the insights from both paradigms by stressing the interconnectedness and politically loaded nature of remembrance and commemorative initiatives in all their forms: both the patriotic commemorative practices of the national elites, and the grief felt and expressed by families and veterans. War remembrance, they suggest, is made up of the complex interactions between individuals, society and the state. While some commemorative narratives gained a dominant
role in the process, others remained ‘oppositional or marginal’. The numerous war memorials erected in many towns and communities after the war provide an example of how these mechanisms have worked. These monuments, where the individual names of the fallen are recorded, gave public recognition to the suffering of the families. They created a medium through which the afflicted could share their feelings of sorrow with other afflicted families as well as with the broader local community. By setting up monuments, the community was able in turn to demonstrate its gratitude to the fallen and to their families. At the same time, the personal loss and suffering of the bereaved were also linked to the state. This is clear from the idiom used in many of the local memorials. Traditional and familiar romantic and religious elements, such as the female figures tending to a fallen soldier, are combined with patriotic symbolism. Thus local war monuments were not only able to offer solace to mourners, but also offered them a way to transform the feelings of sorrow and loss into feelings of pride because of the contribution they had made to local and national solidarity.

In her book, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins explores in greater depth the political dimensions of the remembrance of war and political violence. Edkins argues that traumatic war violence and the memory thereof within society may lead to the formation of resistance and emancipation movements (or bring their existence clearly into focus), and may also create specific possibilities for social groups to oppose centralised political power. More specifically, she describes how the remembrance of traumatic violence may be used to promote change and to challenge the political systems that produced the violence of war in the first place. Commemoration thus can generate transformational movements. Because official commemoration sites such as monuments and memorials are closely interwoven with the values that the sovereign state seeks to promulgate, they are often precisely the places where people wanting to resist dominant commemorative discourses or state power choose to organise themselves. This effort for resistance or emancipation can take various forms. Resistance movements can be very explicit, such as the student protest at Tiananmen Square in Beijing – an important place in the Chinese commemorative landscape. Other versions of liberation are more subtle or implicit. Edkins describes, for example, how the quiet serenity of the Vietnam memorial, designed by Maya Ying Lin and strategically located on the Mall in Washington (the pre-eminent memorial site in the United States), distances itself from the patriotic heroism promulgated by many other national war monuments. Another war memorial she extensively discusses is the Cenotaph in London, designed by Edwin Lutyens in 1919. That monument, too, does not convey any explicit national symbolism, but rather emphasises the trauma of the war and the mourning by veterans and surviving relatives. While the British Government foresaw only a secondary role for the Cenotaph in the commemoration ceremonies to mark the end of the war and the British victory, the monument would eventually come to play a very significant role the British culture of remembrance. This had everything to do with the unprecedented success of the monument among veterans and grieving surviving relatives. They were better able to recognise themselves in the simplicity of the Cenotaph than in the ceremonies the government had planned, which were intended to be joyful and to celebrate the military. Edkins calls both monuments – the Cenotaph and the Vietnam Wall – exceptional because they seem to respond to some desire other than the need to celebrate and re-narrate national glory in the aftermath of trauma. Both monuments refuse to be readily incorporated into the national myth of glory and sacrifice for king and country. The Vietnam Wall, for instance, gives visitors no easy answers, yet, according to Edkins, it is a site that prompts acceptance of the reality of death rather than the myth of sacrifice.

Edkins’ insights are interesting in the context of Belgian commemoration. After the war, the Flemish struggle for emancipation, which had gained momentum with the Flemish ‘Front
The Grea T War remembered: Commemoration and pea Ce in Flanders Fields

Movement’ during the First World War, developed its own tradition of commemoration in the Westhoek region (in English known as Flanders Fields). The Yser Tower, where an annual pilgrimage came to be organised, was built in Diksmuide in the Yser plain which was defended by the Belgian army during the war. The tradition of pro-Flemish commemoration challenged the patriotic commemoration narratives of the Belgian state. Thus gravestones special to Flanders were designed that differed from official Belgian gravestones, whose inscription, ‘Mort pour la Belgique’ (‘Died for Belgium’) was seen as offensive. The Flemish Movement generated its own Association of Flemish Veterans (VOS); and the war experiences of Flemish frontline soldiers are remembered in terms of a sacrifice for the Flemish cause: “Here our blood, when our rights?”. In this way the pro-Flemish tradition of commemoration played an important role in the struggle for Flemish self-rule and the formation of Flemish national awareness.

The emancipatory and transformative potential of war remembrance that Jenny Edkins writes about can also be found in peace-minded forms of commemoration. Until now, these have not been given a great deal of attention in the historical and sociological literature on war commemoration. Nevertheless, from the immediate post-war up to the present, these ways of commemorating have always been a part of the commemoration of the First World War, however much they might have come under pressure from the more patriotic and militaristic-inspired display of remembrance.

2.2 Pacifist war commemoration

During the interwar period various commemorative practices arose, on the initiative of both veterans and civic organisations, that linked the commemoration of the war with the message, ‘No More War’. The experience of the horror of war was transformed into a call to avoid and banish war for ever. If the war of 1914-1918 could signify the end of all wars, then at least some meaning could be found for the boundless slaughter of the war, and the sacrifice of the frontline soldiers would not have been in vain. These initiatives not only distanced themselves from patriotic and militaristic forms of commemoration, they also often constituted a passionate plea for a far-reaching transformation of the international state system. Pacifists argued that this system necessarily led to war because it was based on the military-imperialist rivalry between sovereign states and on an intensive arms race. These wars only benefited powerful elites and rich industrialists. As an alternative to this old, war-addicted system, the focus was placed on newly founded international institutions such as the League of Nations and the supremacy of international law. Pacifist forms of war commemoration arose in various European countries in the 1920s and gained popularity in the 1930s when the prospect of a sustainable peace was clouded by the rise of revengeful and warmongering fascist dictatorial regimes. They were reinforced by a wave of sometimes extremely critical and bitter war novels by soldiers and veterans such as Henri Barbusse, Gabriel Chevallier, Erich Maria Remarque and Robert Graves. These books were received with great interest by the public, but also ran into controversy.

In Britain in the 1930s, the Co-operative Women’s Guild, which was established in 1883 and had joined the international peace movement in 1914, developed the initiative of the White Poppies. With these poppies, the Guild hoped to introduce a pacifist alternative to the annual Red Poppy
Appeal of the Royal British Legion, the largest organisation of British veterans. In 1926 the Guild had suggested that the British Legion should place the inscription "No More War" on the red poppies in place of the imprint "Haig Fund". This proposal was rejected. A few years later, the Co-operative Women’s Guild therefore decided to design their own – white – poppy with the inscription "No More War". The white poppies first appeared on Armistice Day in 1933. The Guild emphasised that its initiative was in no way meant as an insult to the fallen. The campaign quickly received the support of other peace organisations. The following year, the newly established Peace Pledge Union, committed itself to the distribution and promotion of the white poppies.

The white poppies still exist, but have been involved in their share of controversy. The mainstream of traditional British commemoration is rather reluctant to link war remembrance explicitly to contemporary political statements such as a message of peace. In 1988, when the Peace Pledge Union again asked the British Legion to take over the production and distribution of the white poppies, the Legion once again refused.

Nevertheless, the connection between war remembrance and the cause of peace received broader support during the inter-war period in Britain than from the peace movement alone. This can be seen, for example, in a statement by George V during his tour of the battlefields: "In the course of my pilgrimage, I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon earth through the years to come, than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war."

During the interwar period in France various pacifist-inspired commemoration practices emerged, often created and supported by veterans. In 1919, for example, writer and veteran Henri Barbusse established the Clarté movement, a movement of leftist-pacifist intellectuals which included members such as Anatole France and Stefan Zweig. The movement could also for a while count on support from communist and pacifist circles in Flanders. Most French veterans’ groups, to which approximately half of the French veterans belonged in the early 1930s, explicitly turned their backs on militarism. According to Antoine Prost, the remembrance liturgy of the French veterans was characterised not only by funerary elements, but also by peace-minded elements:

"Elle ne comprend ni Marseillaise, ni défilé militaire ou prise d’armes, ni discours des autorités : chacun doit s’effacer, se taire et méditer. Devant l’immensité du sacrifice commémoré, la paix s’impose comme valeur suprême, par-delà les égoïsmes et les orgueils nationaux." ("It includes no Marseillaise, no military procession or parade, no official speeches: everyone should step back, fall silent and meditate. Before the immensity of the commemorated sacrifice, peace imposes itself as the supreme value, beyond selfishness and national pride”).

In Verdun, the most important national symbol of French commemoration of the First World War, veterans organised gatherings with a markedly pacifist colouring. Thus on 12 July 1936 – at a time when a new war was casting its dark shadow – twenty thousand veterans, including Germans and Italians, came together in Verdun. There at the immense Douaumont cemetery, each veteran took his place at a grave, and together they took a vow of peace. After that, flowers were placed at the large ossuary in front of the cemetery. In Germany, the pacifist style of war remembrance was embodied inter alia in the efforts of Ernst Friedrich, founder of an anti-war museum in Berlin. Friedrich gained notoriety with his book Krieg dem Krieg! (War Against War!) in which he printed photographs of mutilated soldiers with the idea of avoiding another war by showing the essence of war in all its horror.

In Belgium as well, soon after the war’s end pacifist tendencies emerged in the remembrance of the First World War. This was not just a bottom-up trend involving civil society or veterans’ asso-
ciations, but a pacifist interpretation of war remembrance which had support from various move-
ments in the Belgian political landscape. The link between the message of peace and the remem-
brance of war thus found its place in a broader revival of internationalist and pacifist ideas which
had started to develop before the war, throughout Europe and across all parties – from Catholic
anti-militarism and socialist international pacifism to liberal notions of the importance of interna-
tional law. On the outbreak of hostilities this way of thinking was abruptly pushed aside. However,
following four years of the atrocities of war, the pacifist, anti-militarist and internationalist ideas
once again gained ground. This occurred within all political movements. The pro-Flemish vet-
erans, for instance, played a crucial role in reviving the anti-militaristic way of thinking within the
Catholic group. It found expression inter alia in the commemorative practices of the Flemish
movement, which alongside its Pro-Flemish and Christian elements was also characterised by
an explicitly pacifist message. On the Yser Tower, consecrated in 1928, the words “No More
War” were inscribed in four languages. Between 1929 and 1934, the Yser Pilgrimage Committee
attempted to promote the Yser Tower as an international pacifist war memorial. The socialists
committed themselves to the international peace movement ‘War Resisters’ International’, which
was established after the war and adopted a broken gun as its symbol. Socialists were also
active in the actual field of war remembrance. In the 1920s, Belgian history textbooks were char-
terised by a heavily patriotic and explicitly anti-German tone. As Minister of Education, Camille
Huysmans issued a directive in which he not only asked educational institutions to devote atten-
tion to the peaceable ideals of the League of Nations during history lessons, but also to ban those
history textbooks that preached hatred against other peoples. On Armistice Day, 11 November
1930, the Belgian Union for the League of Nations also intervened in the area of remembrance
by making peace the central theme of the commemoration ceremony, thereby introducing a
pro-peace message into the commemoration of the war. This initiative was supported by the
liberal Minister of Education, Robert Petitjean, who in the following year encouraged all Belgian
educational institutions to participate in the promotional week of the League of Nations which
was organised from 8 to 15 November 1931.

The pacifism of the 1930s was eventually overshadowed by the rise of fascist regimes in Europe
and by the outbreak of the Second World War. Furthermore, the war of 1939-1945 strongly influ-
enced the remembrance of the First World War, which faded into the background in the decades
following 1945. This happened not only because there was a more recent conflict to remember
(which furthermore numbered more civilian than military casualties), but also because the sac-
rifice of 1914-18 seemed to have failed as a warning against war. Moreover, the First World War
could not be as easily interpreted in such clear political terms as the second. The commemo-ations of the Second World War would not only focus on the many dead but also on polarising
political categories.

Starting in the 1970s, and certainly in the 1980s and 1990s, in many countries interest in the First
World War increased. In Flanders it was a peace-inspired remembrance that came strongly to the
foreground. The Flemish peace movements played a prominent role in this development. These
movements have always promoted the message “No More War” as the central lesson and legacy
of the history of the First World War, and took it as the guiding principle in their educational
projects. This is part of the broader motivation of their peace action, which invokes the history
of Flanders and Belgium as one of the most important battlefields of Europe (and Flanders’ direct
experiences with the horror and suffering of war) to argue for the need and value of peace. In
the 1970s, this peace-minded approach to the remembrance of the First World War also received
a significant impulse from a very local culture of remembrance in the Westhoek region. While in
2014-2018 the First World War will be commemorated throughout the country, in the context of
this report it is interesting to take a closer look at the local culture of remembrance in the southern part of the Westhoek region.

2.3 The local remembrance culture in the Westhoek

At the end of the 1970s, after decades of relative silence, the local remembrance of the war in the region south of Ypres was once again stimulated by two notable projects: the publication of a book entitled Van den Grooten Oorlog (On the Great War) and the performance of a play Nooit brengt een oorlog vrede (War never brings Peace). The book and the play were the work of the Eleven November Group, which was established in 1977 in the context of a regional development project seeking to promote not only economic development but also local cultural initiatives.

The young people from the region engaged in starting up the group were looking for alternative ways to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the First World War, which a year later was to be celebrated in Ypres with the usual military splendour. They came up with the idea of talking to elderly people in their families and villages about their experiences during the war. These testimonies were compiled in a book, which was published on 11 November 1978 under the title Van den Grooten Oorlog. The book told the stories of some fifty people who had lived at or behind the front, either as a soldier or a civilian. The stories were concerned with the outbreak of the war, being a refugee, the many nationalities that stayed in the region during the war, the violence of war and post-war reconstruction. The significance of the stories, which are almost literally presented in the vernacular of the storytellers, lies in their local and familial character. The book took stories that were normally told within the context of families and the villages and introduced them in the public sphere, giving them a place alongside the official history written by the state and formal historiography. Thus the book was indeed a people's history. It showed how war was the everyday reality of ordinary people.

The Eleven November Group transformed the stories from the book into a play entitled War never brings Peace, which was performed by local people. The performances took place from 11 to 15 November 1978 in a forge in Kemmel that had been converted into a theatre. The play was again performed several times in 1979, in Ghent and in Brussels. The play consists of a series of scenes that shed light on various aspects of the experience of war, such as life behind the front, the relationships between soldiers and civilians, and the conversations among soldiers about the meaning of war. The play is anecdotal insofar as it presents various local, 'ordinary' stories about the war. At the same time, however, the purely anecdotal is transcended precisely because in the telling of local stories, the general human dimension of the experience of war surfaces. Although this was not an explicitly stated intention, the play additionally has a peace-minded undertone. Moving in reverse chronological order from 1918 to 1914, the play begins with an exposition by a representative of the Krupp company which sold weapons to both sides during the war and then, after the armistice, offers its services as producer of artificial arms and legs and of machines to remove scrap metal left behind by the war. During the play, the company representative appears on stage on several occasions, at the end confronting Jean Jaurès, who continued to plead for peace even in the summer of 1914. Furthermore, the prologue of the play claims that the subject of the play – the First World War – stands for all wars, while the epilogue, immediately after the murder of Jaurès, suggests that war and arms races are not inevitable but
result from human decisions for which there are always alternatives. In the context of the late 1970s, at a time when the stationing of new nuclear weapons in Western Europe was imminent, this ending conveyed a broader message. For this reason many interpreted the play as political and pacifist consciousness-raising theatre. According to Marieke Demeester, one of the initiators of the Eleven November Group who was heavily involved in writing the play, this had not been their original intention:

I would not describe our play as political consciousness-raising theatre. That was not the intention. We started out from the observation that it is unfortunate that we have forgotten what happened to local people here during the Great War, and that we now have to do something about it. But of course, when you hear all those stories, you begin to reflect and wonder: yes, but why? It is terrible what happened to those people in the war, and what has it got us? And I think that, as human beings, we have to continue to ask that question. But that is something very different from saying that it was ‘theatre with a message’. Our intention was to bring it to the ‘here and now’ so that people would finally think about it.30

The work of the Eleven November Group signified an important turning point in the way the history of the war was approached in the area around Ypres. The history and commemoration of the Great War had until then given little attention to the perspective of ordinary people. The book On the Great War and the play War never brings Peace introduced a new approach. By telling the stories of the people who actually had lived through the First World War, this perspective both raised the local roots of the memory of war as well as the universal-human dimensions of this memory. This approach would profoundly influence how, in the following decades, the war was to be remembered in the Westhoek region. The In Flanders Fields Museum (IFFM), which opened in 1998, chose a similar perspective.31 The central idea of the museum is that war is primarily a reality experienced by people – soldiers and civilians alike. As Piet Chielens, one of the inspirers behind the museum, expresses it, war is a people’s history.32 By taking this idea as its premise, the museum moreover is able to be both universal and relevant in a contemporary context. The museum features a collection of diverse, local, and individual stories rather than a collection of objects or a specific message. Thus the museum transcends outdated national narratives of allies and enemies. For example, the allegorical figures representing frontline soldiers do not wear recognisable uniforms; rather, their uniforms are made of mud-coloured burlap, illustrating the common fate of all frontline soldiers. Because the emphasis is squarely on human experience, the museum only indirectly touches upon the overarching historical story of the war, for instance with interactive modules. Throughout the museum tour, the visitor is not provided with an explicit moral lesson (with the exception of the end where mention is made of how many wars the Red Cross has been active in since the end of the First World War). This does not mean that the museum avoids morality. On the contrary: the problematic morality of war is brought to the foreground precisely by presenting war as a human reality. The museum is arranged in such a way that it encourages many visitors to pose moral questions about war. Thus they can also be incited to reflect upon peace. This is why many people leave the museum with the feeling that they have visited a peace museum, while the museum nowhere mentions peace as such or advances an explicit message of peace. The IFFM also makes a conscious effort not to profile itself as a peace museum. According to Piet Chielens, the museum would be likely to lose some of its effects were it to do so:

In order to talk about peace we have to talk about war, and then the idea of peace will come spontaneously. [...] If people think about peace when they leave, then you can be pleased. Without mentioning the word even once.33
The focus on locally-rooted memory by the Eleven November Group did not stand alone. At the same time, in the course of the 1970s, there were similar efforts emerging within the local government of Ypres. These efforts aimed at placing the peace message centre stage as the most important legacy of the First World War. This movement, which was supported by the call for peace pronounced by Pope John Paul in 1985 in Ypres, became stronger in the 1980s and certainly in the early 1990s. The city of Ypres began profiling itself as a ‘City of Peace’, appointed a ‘peace official’ responsible for coordinating peace initiatives, and started organising an annual Peace Prize. The province of West-Flanders also joined these efforts. In 2002, the provincial administration decided to have actions and efforts concerning the First World War coordinated by a provincial network under the name ‘War and peace in the Westhoek’. The network starts from the idea that the history of the Westhoek region is “both local as well as universal, both past as well as present and future,” and that “what actually remains of the ‘Great War’ in this region is the idea of peace” and “the unrelenting search for peace”. The effort to give salience to the idea of peace as the principal legacy of the First World War is supported by many partners in the region. Over the last few years, for example, the Yser pilgrimage committee in Diksmuide has also decided to emphasise even more strongly the message of peace, inter alia by organising the annual music festival Ten Vrede (For Peace). Furthermore, in 2011 the Flemish Parliament recognised the Yser Tower not only as a memorial of Flemish emancipation, but also of Peace.

The renewed interest in the remembrance of the First World War – initiated in the 1970s by local groups such as the Eleven November Group – only gained momentum and scope in the following decades. Especially in the 1990s and the first decade of this century the trend has become more salient. The great interest in the remembrance of the First World War stands not alone but is part of an increasing interest in remembrance and commemoration in general, which can be observed all over the world in a remarkable, if not spectacular manner. In what follows we will delve deeper into a few characteristics of this ‘memory boom’ in order better to understand the socio-cultural framework in which the centenary commemoration of the First World War will take place.

2.4 The contemporary ‘memory boom’ and the Centenary of the Great War

The increasing interest in remembrance and commemoration is known in the literature as the ‘memory boom’. In recent years, scholars in various disciplines including historians, anthropologists and political scientists have studied this boom. Duncan Bell, for example, has remarked that:

> Memory seems impossible to escape. During the closing decades of the twentieth century it emerged as a cultural obsession of monumental proportions across the globe, a trend that looks set to continue for the foreseeable future.

Exploring this memory boom in great detail would be moving too far beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it seems relevant to point out some of its defining characteristics.
Jay Winter connects the current memory boom with an earlier wave of remarkable cultural and social attention for history and memory which he situates in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century. In this period history and memory were increasing features in science as well as in literature: historians dedicated themselves to national historiography, sociologists such as Maurice Halbwachs developed their theories of collective memory, while Marcel Proust conscientiously reconstructed his personal world of recollections. Moreover, politically and socially, history and social memory played crucial roles in forging and reinforcing national and imperial identities. In the contemporary age, these identities, constructed during the first memory boom, have become increasingly fragmented. Consequently, the unity and certainty of the former age have also disappeared. Present-day people are confronted with hybrid and multiple forms of identity construction. This has resulted in a renewed attention for remembrance and heritage, which are seen as remedies for the loss of old, overarching certainties and as ways to forge not only individual identities but also shared identities and a sense of community in times of fragmentation. In the words of Allan Megill: “As identity grows more problematic, so memory becomes more important.”

Daniel Todman in his turn interprets the two memory booms as reactions to the ‘wounds’ of modernity, wounds that in the 19th century were caused by the rupture with traditional, locally embedded and community-bound relationships with the past. At the end of the 20th and the start of the 21st century such ‘wounds’ are brought about by the disappearance of ‘Grand Narratives’ in times of postmodernism, globalisation and fragmentation. Pierre Nora, the French pioneer of the literature on sites of memory, seems to concur. In his opinion, the boom in interest in lieux de mémoire must be understood in terms of the disappearance of the previously familiar and self-experienced milieux de mémoire of the nation. In a similar vein the Flemish writer Joris Note has written that “a world without utopias” inevitably turns to the past – an observation that might be complemented with the thought that, in turning to the past, late modern people also have to proceed without any grand narratives to give meaning to that past. This last remark can help us understand the prominent role that personalised, individualistic approaches play in contemporary memory culture (see below).

The present-day memory boom obviously occurs in a different socio-cultural context from the first boom of the late 19th and early 20th century. Four trends can be distinguished as typical of the way in which remembrance and commemorative practices are currently played out.

First, during recent decades the memory of both world wars increasingly has been framed in terms of peace, reconciliation in the context of European integration and global discourses on human rights. With regards to Flanders Fields, we have already mentioned how the message of peace came to the forefront of war commemorations. Another example in the Westhoek region is the Irish Peace Tower in Messines, inaugurated on 11 November 1998. The tower commemorates Protestant and Catholic Irish soldiers who fought and died together at the Battle of Messines in 1917. The remembrance promoted in Messines thus resists the way the memory of the war has been used for decades in (Northern) Ireland to intensify opposition between Catholics and Protestants.

Secondly, a striking characteristic of contemporary remembrance are its individualised and personalised dimensions. This goes both for the ‘supply’ and the ‘demand-side’. On the one hand, many recently established war museums and commemoration projects about the First World War...
work with individual soldiers’ and civilians’ testimonies and stories. By telling their personal experiences of war, an attempt is made to make the history of the war more tangible. On the other hand, contemporary remembrance tourists and visitors of war museums seem less moved by an attempt to contribute to the construction of national identities than by a desire to locate their own complex individual identities within broader narratives of family, generation, community, and nation.\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{Thirdly}, remembrance and commemoration are still instrumentalised by politics and society. This currently occurs in a specific context. Identity politics is still part of the order of the day, mainly as a way to try to strengthen social cohesion, a sense of community and national identities in times of fragmentation and globalisation. Additionally, war remembrance also plays a role in education, for instance in remembrance- and peace-education projects.

\textit{Fourthly}, it must be pointed out that the economic dimension of remembrance and heritage practices is becoming increasingly important. French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky notes that in the field of remembrance, which used primarily to be mobilised for the cult of the nation and the public cause, the emphasis is put increasingly on the economic impact and direct or indirect profitability of heritage preservation. In his view, the field of heritage and remembrance is becoming ever more subject to a market logic and commercialism.\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, there are large amounts of money involved in remembrance and heritage. Not only do governments provide sizeable budgets for commemorative and heritage projects, the economic importance of remembrance tourism is significant, certainly in former battlefields regions. The popularity of First World War tourism has grown spectacularly over the last decades.\textsuperscript{51} Whereas in the 1970s, the Last Post under the Menin Gate in Ypres was sometimes sounded without a single spectator present, in recent years it has become a popularly attended ritual.

As the examples above show, the commemoration of the First World War has been part of the wider evolution marking remembrance and heritage culture over recent decades. This also goes for the large-scale commemorative project \textit{“2014-2018: The Great War Centenary”} that is currently being worked out by the Flemish Government. This is also apparent in the project’s aims formulated by the government:

\textbegin{quote}
The objective of the project \textit{“The Great War Centenary (2014-2018)”} is to give Flanders international visibility in the period 2014-2018 and thereafter, by playing out this commemoration, in all serenity, as a top-event in Flanders and throughout the world.

The activities’ programme for the commemoration of the centenary anniversary of the First World War should ensure that the name Flanders acquires international visibility and is permanently linked with the peace theme. Another objective is to sensitise current and future generations in Flanders concerning themes such as tolerance, intercultural dialogue, and international understanding in light of an open and tolerant society and an active international orientation. Finally, a considerable increase in peace tourism in (West) Flanders will be pursued.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

Enhancement of national identity, community development and promotion of economic impact thus seem to be important motives behind this project. Furthermore, the government explicitly wants the project to convey a present-day message of peace, which fits into the broader international trend to frame war remembrance in terms of peace and human rights. Thus a complex multitude of motives come together in the commemoration project’s lay-out, which is reminiscent of the complexity of remembrance as a historical and sociological phenomenon.
2.5 Conclusion

Thus we can draw the interim conclusion that there is a long-standing tradition of peace-oriented war commemorations which have been and are being promoted by both local groups and peace movements as well as by political authorities. At the same time, it can be concluded from these historical reflections that there is a complex variety of commemoration initiatives and practices, as a result of which peace-oriented forms of commemoration are less self-evident than they may seem at first glance. Commemorations which formulate a call for peace have to position themselves in a field that is also occupied by other commemoration practices which are based on other motivations and send out other messages, in which for example militaristic or imperial elements predominate. This diversity can lead to a certain ambiguity entering commemorations. For visitors of memorial sites and commemoration ceremonies it can sometimes be unclear which messages exactly are being sent out. The Menin Gate in Ypres is a good example of how memorials can represent different kinds of messages. On the one hand, the gate speaks a military and patriotic form of language. For instance, on the arch not only the words 'pro patria' and 'pro rege' can be read, but there are also meetings at which veterans of current wars are honoured. On the other hand, the gate is also the stage for the daily Last Post, which, together with the lists of names of the many missing, conveys a confrontational, intimate message of mourning. In recent years it has also been the site where a number of spontaneous peace demonstrations have taken place. The diversity of messages, which also characterises many other memorials and commemorative sites, is inevitable when different groups in society participate in the remembrance landscape. For initiatives which want to centre the commemoration on the idea of peace, the question arises how to deal with this complex diversity. For instance, what position should peace-oriented commemorations take on rituals and memorials that are characterised by military symbolism? Should these other forms be criticised and – where possible – reshaped? Or should there be room for all kinds of commemoration practices?

Before taking a closer look in Chapter 4 at how contemporary war commemorations can be linked to a message of peace in practice, it is first necessary to examine these questions more closely. Below we shall argue that commemorations which want to focus on the idea of peace should not only spread a message of peace, but should also recognise the diversity of war commemoration through open dialogue. This way, they contribute to a peaceful culture of remembrance, in which there is room for diverse traditions of remembrance. This conceptual and normative discussion leads us to another important problem which cannot be left untreated in this context: the relationship between memory and history. As many historians state, a critical analysis of this relationship is certainly necessary when it is the government that commits itself in the field of remembrance.
3 Commemoration, history and peace

3.1 The many faces of war commemoration

As has become clear from the historical introduction, war remembrance and commemorative landscapes are characterised by diversity, sometimes even by ambiguity. Before we address the question of how peace-minded commemorations can relate to this complex diversity, it is useful to elaborate on how it can be understood and how it manifests itself today. Therefore, we first look at social memory theory. Second, we present a description of Flanders Fields’ commemorative landscape showing that the complex multitude of commemorative motives and practices is still present at present-day lieux de mémoire (sites of remembrance) – in petrified or in ritualised form.

Collective memory

It was French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who first extensively analysed collective memory.54 Halbwachs stressed that individual memory and personal memories are inevitably social in character, in the sense that they are always constituted by means of social frames – collectively held frames of interpretation – which are typical of a specific socio-cultural and temporal context. Although memories manifest themselves in the heads of individuals, they are always social because people are social beings, they share not only language, but also cultural convictions, identities, symbols and the like.55 These are the social elements which constitute memory. Although not all scholars would agree with this move56, in this report we expand the social character even further by assuming the existence of a ‘collective memory’ of societies. This does not imply that it is society itself which remembers, but rather that in a society the memory of particular historical events is transmitted by means of memorials, rituals and historical narratives, even after the last survivors or the last witnesses of these events have passed away. This ‘intergenerational transmission’ of the collective memory of a society does not occur automatically. It presupposes active ‘remembrance practices’ in order for later generations to accept the memory of a certain episode or event in the past as meaningful.57 This process also implies that memories are not static or immutable, but constantly evolving. Memories come about in specific socio-cultural and temporal contexts, and as these contexts evolve, the memories also change. Thus, the meaning of a memory of a particular event can change with time. In other words, although the substance of memories refers to events in the past, remembering (as a mental phenomenon) always takes place in the present. A memory appears when people in the present remember something that occurred in the past. In light of this observation, Halbwachs also noted that memories are to a great extent reconstructions of the past on the basis of elements borrowed from the present.58 With time, not only the meaning of memories but also the channels through which memories are transmitted change. Nowadays, they not only include commemorative rituals and memorials, but also the media, tourism, culture, and entertainment. These observations about the social character of memory lead to the conclusion that memories always write contemporary ‘scripts’ about the past.
This leads to a second observation: memory work, understood as writing contemporary scripts about the past, always involves (consciously or unconsciously) making choices. These choices are not neutral, but normative. In other words, social remembrance always has normative overtones. Collective memory, indeed, uses the past in two ways: first as a model of the present, and as a model for the present. This means that on the one hand memories articulate mentalities and social structures of the present, and that, on the other, elements from the past may be used in the effort to perpetuate or to change these mentalities and social structures.

Third, because of its social and normative character, social memory inevitably is always potentially controversial or contestable. This of course also goes for public remembrance sites, the meaning and appropriation of which can become subject to protest and conflict. It is in this sphere of potential conflict, buttressed and structured by complex power relations, that the political tug-of-war of social memory comes into play. All of this implies that often various and even conflicting interpretations and narratives about the past exist. This certainly holds for the memory of wars and political violence, where elements such as traumatic suffering, resentment, nation-construction, resistance, as well as reconciliation and peace are important.

What does all of this mean in practice? By looking at the commemorative landscape of the Westhoek (Flanders Fields), it becomes clear how the complex diversity of war commemoration still manifests itself today. The specific historical context from which commemorative practices emerged in Flanders Fields has resulted in various commemorative traditions and forms in the region.

**The many faces of the commemorative landscape in Flanders Fields**

The tradition of the British Commonwealth, which not only includes the commemorative traditions of the United Kingdom but also of its former dominions and colonies, is the most visible tradition in the region – certainly in the southern part of Flanders Fields (with Ypres as its centre). The British remembrance tradition is centred on commemorating the (individual) dead. This is in keeping with the mourning function of commemoration as described by Jay Winter. It is illustrated by the numerous British cemeteries in the region with their uniform white headstones and Stone of Remembrance, as well as the apparently endless list of names on the Menin Gate in Ypres and at Tyne Cot Cemetery. The British are traditionally rather reluctant to link remembrance of the war dead explicitly with a message of peace. The Commonwealth tradition still invokes elements of a national, imperial and military idiom, linking the death of soldiers to themes of patriotic sacrifice. Research into the way in which British visitors experience their visits to former battlefields shows that these elements are still ‘active’. Jennifer Iles, for instance, has pointed out that some British visitors experience Flanders Fields as a sort of ‘home away from home’ and that their visits to the region enable them to experience a feeling of historical association with an imagined collective past. As Iles observes, they indeed come to a landscape that is not only permeated with physical traces of their society, such as the remains of British soldiers, but also perceived British values.

A national and patriotic idiom can also be found in the ‘Belgian-patriotic’ tradition of commemoration in the Westhoek region. For example, the inscription ‘Mort pour la Belgique’ or ‘Died for Belgium’ is still found on graves in Belgian military cemeteries, while a little shield with the Belgian tricolour figures prominently on the headstones. War memorials such as that of Albert I in Nieuwpoort are also characterised by patriotic symbolism. Belgian historian Sophie De Schaepdrijver has noted that the Belgian tradition of commemoration, which she typifies as “at
its last gasp, crumbling and ambiguous”, has been reduced to silence for generations, particularly in comparison to the British tradition. Nevertheless, in recent years the Belgian Federal Government has taken new commemorative initiatives, such as the restoration of the ‘Trench of Death’ in Diksmuide, an annual four-day hike organised by the Belgian Army, and a series of remembrance projects organised by the Belgian Institute for Veterans.

The Flemish-national tradition of commemoration is strongly present in the Northern Westhoek region, with Diksmuide as its centre. This tradition weaves Flemish-nationalist symbolism with a pro-peace message. The interweaving of these various elements emerged almost immediately after the war when, during the first ‘Yser Pilgrimage’ to Diksmuide in 1920, the threefold message of the pilgrimage was announced as: “No More War, self-rule, and the truce of God”.

The Yser Tower and the Peace Gate, built by the Yser Pilgrimage Committee, also display the interweaving of these different messages. During the Second World War the Yser Tower and the Committee engaged in the collaboration with the German occupier. As a result, to this day the Yser Tower and the Flemish-national commemoration tradition remain tarnished for some groups in Flanders and Belgium. In the words of historian Bruno De Wever: “The association of the Yser Tower with fascism has cast a long shadow after 1945. To some extent, in the opinion of the French-speakers and the Flemish left, the fascist connotation will never disappear […].” During the last decade, the Yser Pilgrimage Committee has initiated a move once again to focus on the roots of the remembrance of frontline soldiers, inter alia by translating its old threefold message in the new slogan “peace, freedom and tolerance” and by organising pluralistic peace-education projects and initiatives such as the music festival For Peace.

In mapping the diversity of the Westhoek’s commemorative landscape, reference has to be made to the local culture of remembrance (see paragraph 2.3). In some places, this local memory is closely intertwined with other remembrance traditions. An example is Talbot House, a British ‘soldier’s house’ opened in 1915 by Chaplain Philip Clayton in a stately house in Poperinge (a quiet little town behind the front line commandeered by the British army to accommodate the throbbing heartbeat of its war machine, and with its many cafés and shops a contact zone for British soldiers and the local population).

In order to complete this portrait of Flanders Fields’ complex commemorative network, it is necessary to refer to locally-rooted remembrance initiatives such as the Eleven November Group, the In Flanders Fields Museum, and Ypres as a City of Peace (see above). Of course, the German and French traditions of commemoration must also be mentioned. These traditions are less prominent in the Westhoek region than the British. With regards to France, this can be explained by the fact that the French army was less involved in military operations in Flanders than the British. German remembrance of the First World War on the other hand is still not self-evident, not only because Germany lost the war, but also because the memory of the Second World War still overshadows that of the First. Furthermore, German cemeteries are not as visible as the many British graveyards because after the war, the many small cemeteries of the German Army were concentrated into four larger cemeteries: Langemark, Hoogelee, Menin and Vladslo, where the statues of the mourning parents by Käthe Kollwitz are located.

As noted above, given this complex diversity of war commemorations, the crucial question arises how peace-minded war commemorations should address the complexity and ambiguity of commemorative landscapes and social memory as outlined above. How should they position themselves in a sphere where various other forms and messages of commemoration are present? With regards to commemorative practices in Ypres, Johan Meire has remarked:
The idea that the legacy of war is a universal message of peace nourished by the local experience of war as a devastating slaughter may well be promoted by local groups and official institutions, yet it cannot simply be enforced upon everyone. Ypres is in fact not just a local entity: it is also a zone of contact for all sorts of people who find the war to be an important past, but who have very diverse relationships to that past.⁷¹

In the next paragraph we will argue that an answer to this question can be found in the meaning of the concept of peace.

### 3.2 Peace as an open dialogue

The concept of peace has a long history, from the pax Romana to the ideas of Johan Galtung concerning negative and positive peace.⁷² Definitions of peace generally start from a ‘negative’ approach, in the sense that they define peace as the absence of war, violence, disruption, conflict, hostility and the like. Many thinkers however sought to go further in conceptualising peace insofar as a purely negative definition might imply that in some situations peace might entail nothing more than a situation of tense calm, where outbreaks of violence are kept under control, but structural causes of war and violence are not addressed. Therefore, various scholars have attempted to expand the ‘negative’ definition with a ‘positive’ complement. Peace is then understood not only in terms of the absence of violence, but also as the preconditions of durable peace, such as a just society. These positive definitions of peace have in turn received their share of criticism. Specifically, it has been argued that if one expands the concept of peace too widely, the relevance of the concept for scientific analysis devalues. If a concept can mean everything (for example, also justice), its descriptive and explanatory value decreases significantly. Harald Müller therefore favours a distinction between the concept and the theory of peace. Müller limits the concept of peace to the absence of direct and discursive violence. In order to avoid isolating the concept from its social, political, economic, and cultural context, he complements this conceptualisation with a theory of peace which first of all points out the causes of peace. An analysis of the causes of peace makes it possible to determine in which socio-economic and political-cultural context peace (as the absence of violence) can best flourish. In this respect, one may, for example, point to the importance of democracy, a just socio-economic world order, avoidance of arms races and the promotion of disarmament. Second, the theory of peace points to the importance of a culture of peace, that is, a culture in which the absence of violence is advanced by an active attitude of respect, the pursuit of mutual understanding, recognition of difference and diversity in opinions and attitudes, and the importance of an open dialogue.⁷³ All this implies that peace is not promoted by denying conflicts (conflicts are endemic in every society), but instead by actively addressing these conflicts in an atmosphere of open dialogue, in willingness to negotiate and recognize difference. In other words, pacifism is not the same as passivism.⁷⁴

In the framework of this text, this theory of peace is relevant in two respects. First, it indicates how commemorative projects and practices substantively can formulate a message of peace. The theory refers to various elements that need to be addressed in every critical reflection upon war and peace, such as importance of a just world order, disarmament, an attitude of active respect, and open dialogue. Second, the theory also refers to a procedural approach to peace.
This approach indicates how the complexity, diversity, and potentially contestable nature of remembrance and commemoration can be addressed. Crucial here are the recognition of difference and diversity, an active attitude of respect and preparedness for open dialogue. This implies recognising that people and groups sometimes tell very different stories about the past and hold different interpretations of how to commemorate historical events. This approach further implies an open attitude towards dialogue with respect to these different remembrance narratives. In other words, the metaphor of the negotiation table applies to the culture of peace as well as to a peaceful culture of remembrance. As writer Erwin Mortier has observed, conversations at a negotiation table can sometimes be quite confrontational. Nevertheless, in order to contribute to a peaceful culture of remembrance, it is crucial to continue to sit at the table, and convey one’s own message in an open dialogue. It is also important that possible tensions and conflicts in collective memory are not ignored. A remembrance culture that only entails a passive calm, while sensitive or painful aspects of the past remain concealed under a cloak of reticence, is not sufficient to exorcise the ghosts of the past.

What do these insights imply with regard to the questions that gave rise to this conceptual analysis in the first place, namely how peace-minded remembrance should address the diversity and contestable nature of war commemorations in practice, and how it can reduce possible ambiguity in its own message. The idea that a universal message of peace is the most important legacy of the First World War cannot just be imposed on all forms of commemoration. At remembrance sites various people and groups come together, each bringing with them their own (sometimes very personal) motives and interpretations. In order to be truly peace-minded, pro-peace commemoration must not simply aim to convey its own message, but also recognise this diversity and complexity. It makes little sense to seek to imprint a message of peace on all remembrance sites, monuments, and commemorative rituals. As argued above, diversity is an inevitable part of social memory and commemoration. The recognition of this difference is crucial. At the same time, pro-peace commemorative projects should seek to reduce possible ambiguities in their own message. This is possible, for example, by making visitors of commemoration sites aware of the complexity of these sites, for instance by respectfully pointing to the variety of messages. Monuments, memorials and rituals convey diverse (sometimes hidden, sometimes contradictory) and multilayered messages. By making visitors aware of the complexity of commemoration, the peace messages can be framed more clearly and reflectively. At the Menin Gate in Ypres, for example, educational staff members of the In Flanders Fields Museum tell school groups visiting the battlefields that the memorial may come across as strange. On the one hand, as a sort of triumphal arch, it carries a military and patriotic message. On the other hand, the gate is not only the stage for the daily Last Post which – together with the seemingly endless lists of names of the many missing – conveys an intimate message of mourning, it is also the site where a number of peace demonstrations have taken place in recent years. Thus students are not only made aware that commemoration sites do not convey an unequivocal message, but are also presented with a pro-peace message in a reflexive manner.

An important observation must conclude this section. The recognition of difference in social memory and remembrance traditions does not inevitably lead to moral or historical relativism. Moral relativism would lead to a situation where one could no longer distinguish between moral and immoral forms of remembrance. Historical relativism would imply that all commemorative narratives would relate equally ‘correct’ or ‘valid’ stories about the past. As Roland Bleiker and Young-Ju Hoang emphasise, an ‘ethics of difference’ in social memory does not necessarily lead to relativism, nor does it open the floodgates for notions such as ‘anything goes’ or ‘all narratives are equally valid and founded’. There is no reason why recognising difference should lead to the
impossibility of morally or historically assessing the contents of commemorative narratives. At any time an open and critical debate can be initiated at the ‘negotiation table’ of remembrance about the normative assumptions underpinning different commemoration traditions. In these debates, the normative choice for peace-minded remembrance can be promoted as legitimate, arguing that it is morally preferable to frame remembrance in an open and emancipatory manner and as an impetus to critical reflection and a motivation for peace, as opposed to uses of memory which facilitate the perpetuation of physical, structural or symbolic violence. With regards to the historical validity of different remembrance narratives, these can always be critically assessed by historians. Bleiker and Hoang argue that in their critical assessments historians start from the recognition of the diversity of possible stories about the past. Historians would even claim that this diversity is a necessary precondition to arrive at informed and adequate historical judgements. Because historians open up various narratives, they decrease the danger of relativism because the number of sources and evidence at their disposal increases. Moreover, by providing space for confrontation between different narratives, historians can counter any possible manipulation of memory.

Bleiker’s and Hoang’s argument is interesting because it calls attention to the close relationship between history and memory. This relationship, however, is not unproblematic and merits due attention in this report. First, we will point out the differences between scientific historiography and public remembrance. Then we will take a closer look at the status of the past in commemorative narratives conveying a message with a present-day relevance.

### 3.3 History and memory

The relationship between history and memory, or, more precisely, between scientific historiography and various forms of public remembrance practices, is far from self-evident. Indeed, this relationship is characterized by a number of tensions and risks. On numerous occasions historians have ventilated their scepticism about the ways the memory boom has taken shape over the last few years. Not in the least, they have ousted critical remarks with regard to remembrance initiatives sponsored by the government. In January 2006, for example, a number of Belgian newspapers published a manifesto entitled “History is more than Memory”, signed by 151 Belgian historians. In the manifesto, the group of historians started out by claiming they were not out to challenge the legitimacy of commemorations as such – whether sponsored by governments or not – nor to deny that remembrance and memory can offer useful answers to certain societal needs. They did however raise serious questions about the specific ways in which history is used in these remembrance projects, as well as about some of the objectives they are to serve. The Belgian historians also pointed out that, in their view, scientific historiography was under threat of being pushed aside to the margins of society under the pressure of the public memory boom (which draws most of the government’s and the public’s attention), as well as being thematically steered by the fashions popping up in contemporary memory culture. In light of these observations, the manifesto expressed concern that scientific historiography would become the plaything of fashion trends and that certain types of research, which cannot count on official support or do not comply with current political priorities, would come under pressure. In their manifesto the historians did not question the idea that a connection indeed exists between memory and history;
rather they claimed that they serve different objectives and have to comply with quite different demands. Memory, they argued, is not a gateway to (scientific) knowledge, but frames – or uses – the past in terms of contemporary cultural or political projects. Historiography, on the contrary, claims the status of science. As such it should never have to serve the aims of politics or, for that matter, have anything to do with emotion. The manifesto concluded with raising questions about the way in which some recent remembrance initiatives in Belgium (such as a Holocaust Museum in Malines, of which one of the stated objectives was to combat extreme right wing parties) have used history as a means to serve certain societal and political objectives:

> History is not the new catechism of multiculturalism, a panacea to combat the far right and xenophobia, to promote democracy, European views or world solidarity. An exclusively negative memory, consisting of the enumeration of the Great Tragedies of history, contributes little to the formation of critical reflection. It may even create a feeling of moral complacency: an untroubled present is then indeed contrasted with a past rife with violence and brutality.80

A risk historians want to emphasise in particular is that the use of history in the light of contemporary objectives risks resulting in one-sided and politically-guided instrumentalisations of history. This warning has also already been expressed with regards to Flanders’ grand commemorative project “The Great War Centenary (2014-2018)”:  

> Due to the institutional framework and the financing structures, this is now inevitably a unequivocal Flemish project. This not only creates tensions with the Belgian historical reality of 1914-1918. It could also lead to poor forms of remembrance education. The Flemish project 2014-18 could indeed easily become guided by ideological and political objectives. The danger exists that concrete projects and initiatives will be used intentionally to strengthen Flemish identity. This will reveal itself in the selection of projects and initiatives that will be financed. This is a problem because this will mean that the past will be manipulated (explicitly) to use it for contemporary political objectives.81

The risk of one-sided and manipulative instrumentalisations of history of course also exists when the commemorations of the First World War are framed to convey a message of peace. Belgian historians have also reflected upon this issue, specifically upon the question whether pro-peace remembrance initiatives ought to leave space for the heroism, or even the spectacle of war, which were indispensable elements of the war experience of 1914-18. Sophie De Schaepdrijver addressed this question in an interview:

> Politically, I fully agree with the philosophy of the In Flanders Fields Museum, which presents a message of peace. But as a historian I have to recognise that there must remain space for the fascination with war. Without taking this fascination into account, one cannot fully understand what happened there. Those soldiers, incidentally, were certainly not only victims. There were also adventurers among them, and perpetrators. So yes, leave space in the memory of the war for the idea that some viewed the war as one big adventure.82

Furthermore, historians are sceptical with respect to the normative character of remembrance. This critical stance concerns three elements. First, historians are sceptical that the ‘cult of remembrance’ increasingly turns into a ‘duty of remembrance and not forgetting’. This duty is generally invoked by governments and other actors with an eye on present-day political objectives.83 Scholars however have pointed out that this duty to remember and not forget is not a
The Great War remembered: Commemoration and Peace in Flanders Fields

straightforward matter. Indeed, one should always pose the question what memory people are supposed to remember and how they are supposed to do that. Neuropsychologists and sociologists have, moreover, pointed out that remembering inevitably implies a form of forgetting. It is indeed impossible to represent complex events in their totality. Remembering a war has always just as much to do with forgetting as with remembering. Furthermore, this mix of remembering and forgetting is an inherently political process. Maja Zehfuss, for instance, notes that the argument ‘against forgetting’ – with the associated imperative ‘remember!’ – more often than not implies a move in the struggle about what parts of the past should be remembered and how. In a similar vein, Tzvetan Todorov has noted that the cult of the duty to remember is not always used for positive aims, as has become clear from the recent history of the Balkan wars.

Second, historians remain very suspicious when it comes to moralising forms of remembrance, in which the past is presented as something that should be rejected or praised, and from which a moral lesson must be drawn. The danger exists, for example, that when history is morally or politically activated with a view to current objectives, anachronisms always loom around the corner. Another risk is that, for the majority of people – who mainly come in contact with popular remembrance initiatives but rarely with scientific historiography –, the ‘value claims’ of remembrance obtain the status of historical ‘truth claims’.

Finally, while in their manifesto the Belgian historians recognised that organising official commemorations could be a legitimate government activity, they warned against another danger of the ‘duty to remember’. This danger consists in that an official version of history is established which expresses politically correct thinking, and which cannot be questioned. This can lead to a rigid and “sterile tyranny of the cult of remembrance”. This is certainly the case when particular interpretations of history are enacted by law. Tzvetan Todorov takes the example of a French law concerning colonial memory, which prescribed that school programmes had to recognise the positive role of the French in North Africa. Historians resist such legalistic approaches to memory because they do not recognize the rather unruly and ambiguous nature of history and because they mortgage the necessarily contestable character of historiography.

These critical remarks of historians with regards to the memory boom and the contemporary culture of remembrance are fundamental. Anyone wanting to engage with commemoration and remembrance can only ignore them at his or her own peril. As the group of Belgian historians also indicated in their manifesto, the aim certainly is not to ban or denounce all forms of commemoration and remembrance. On the contrary – as the historians themselves stated – this would only attest to “scientific purism and contempt for social needs”. Still, when setting up remembrance and commemoration projects, particularly when they are promoted and sponsored by the government, these critical remarks must be taken into account. They can roughly be summarised in two main challenges: first, the risks entailed by the normative character of memory and, second, the danger of one-sided or even manipulative instrumentalisations of the past. In the remainder of this section we shall take a closer look at the first challenge; in the final section of this paper we shall go into the second.

As indicated by the Belgian historians in their manifesto, it is indeed advisable clearly to distinguish between historiography and remembrance. For a good understanding it is even relevant to distinguish three fields: the past, scientific historiography, and social memory and remembrance. These fields are obviously closely intertwined. Both historiography and memory refer to the past, although neither has a privileged, objective access to the past. Both fields offer interpretations of the past. There are, however, major differences in how they construct these interpretations.
Historiography is bound to scientific and disciplinary rules. Critical scholarly debate takes centre stage in order to guarantee and control for the reliability of historical work. The particular characteristics of social memory and remembrance have been discussed above. We argued for instance that memory and commemorations are always social, contestable, and, important for this section, normative. Even remembrance practices claiming to enact ‘nothing more’ than commemorating and honouring the war dead intrinsically have normative and moral overtones, although these often may remain unspoken. Above we indicated the risks of this normativity, which manifest themselves most clearly when an ‘official’ or possible anachronistic reading of history is prescribed. These risks must not only be recognised as such, awareness of these risks should also incite caution on the part of authorities and organisations engaging in remembrance projects. Recognising and avoiding these risks, however, is not the end of the story. Indeed, because remembrance and commemorative practices are inevitably normative, the question always remains which normative choices should be made. Based on the historical introduction to this report, where the emancipatory and transformative potential of commemorations became clear, we suggest that from a moral perspective it is preferable to frame remembrance in an open and emancipatory manner and as an impetus to critical reflection and a motivation for peace, instead of framing it ways which facilitate the perpetuation of physical, structural or symbolic violence. Or, as Tzvetan Todorov has put it, if the past in times of the memory boom seems inescapable, and if moral choices have to be made, it is preferable to use the past in an ‘exemplary’ fashion. In other words, it is best to approach the past in such a way that “today’s injustices” can be challenged, and not in ways that perpetuate old injustices or create new ones. Of course, the necessary caution is warranted. Critical reflection and open dialogue are always necessary, not in the least to avoid ‘officially prescribed’ moralising readings of history. Furthermore, caution is required lest remembrance narratives approach the past one-sidedly, anachronistically or manipulatively. As promised, this question will be addressed in the next paragraph.

A last question that can be raised with regard to the relation between history and memory is how historians can engage with the field of remembrance and commemoration. Generally speaking there are two possible positions. A first position advocates critical detachment. According to this vision, historians should not enter the field of remembrance, but always remain “in the hedges”, like snipers or francs-tireurs. Operating on the margins, they can retain the critical potential of their discipline. A second position pleads for engaging with the public interested in remembrance and heritage. This entails for example that historians search for ways to reconcile their ‘habitus’ as scientists with the demands posed by the normative, cultural and political character of public remembrance. Historians advocating this second position recognise that they can play a public role – for instance in museums and educational projects – and not only do scientific justice to history but also defend democratic values. Both positions are important. From a position of critical detachment, historians can undertake appropriate deconstruction efforts with regards to remembrance narratives that are historically too one-sided or anachronistic. Historians opting for the second position can – always in a critical manner – provide their expertise to emancipatory or educational remembrance projects.

Let us now turn to the question how commemorations can avoid the pitfalls of one-sided and manipulative uses of the past. In the final paragraph we shall argue that this can be done by distinguishing between a logic that instrumentalises the past as a means to serve contemporary objectives, and a logic that frames the past as an impetus to critical reflection and a motivation to work for peace in the present.
3.4 War commemoration as an impetus to critical reflection and motivation for peace

War commemorations always refer to or use the past from the perspective of the present – that has already been pointed out. Two ways of referring to the past should, however, be distinguished. A first logic of remembering turns to that past from the perspective of a contemporary objective, thus using it as a means to serve present-day ends, for instance by drawing lessons from history that can be applied in a present context. A second logic of remembrance, on the contrary, starts out from the complex past itself and, by opening up various stories about that past, remembers it in such a manner that it gives audiences and participants an impetus to reflect critically upon war (and peace) and motivates them to work for peace in the present. It is evident that the former logic of remembrance more easily runs the risk of using the past in a one-sided and manipulative fashion than the latter.

The first logic of remembrance starts from contemporary societal, economic or political objectives, for instance a desire to solve current societal problems such as, for example, increased racism or xenophobia in society. Subsequently, in an attempt to draw lessons from the past that have a present-day relevance, historical facts or events are referred to in order to warn or educate about the potential destructive effects of racism. It seems inherent to this logic, however, that quite often these lessons are already drawn beforehand, that is, before looking at the past. Needless to say this instrumental logic greatly runs the risk of approaching the past one-sidedly, in the sense that only those events, developments and interpretations that neatly fit within the framework will be taken up. An example of this instrumental logic of remembrance is the patriotic or nationalistic tradition of remembrance as it developed after the end of the First World War. In order to give meaning to the massive number of fallen citizen-soldiers, the nation-state framed the frontline soldiers’ experience in terms of a sacrifice for the nation and a patriotic martyrdom. Historical events that did not square with this frame were silenced or suppressed.

Traditionally, historians are very distrustful of this instrumental logic of remembrance, not only because it runs counter to an open and reflexive posture towards history, but also because it often leads to moralistic readings of the past. This, however, does not mean that historians are completely unwilling to draw lessons from the past. Their distrust chiefly concerns the instrumentalisation of history in order to solve contemporary societal problems. There is, however, another way in which remembrance can refer to the past. In this logic, the past to be commemorated is seen as an impetus to critical reflection and as a motivation or an inspiration to work for something – for example peace – in the present. This second logic of remembrance starts out not from the present, but from the complex past itself, a past of which traces are still present in contemporary society (as in Flanders Fields) or a past of which people consider it valuable to transmit its memory to younger generations. By looking at various aspects of war history and by opening different stories about the war, the past is not only seen as a source of historical knowledge, but also as an occasion for a broader, critical reflection upon war and peace. Thus this reflection can give rise to sensitivity with respect to contemporary conflicts and wars, as well as to a motivation to work actively on the present-day practice of peace. It is this logic of remembrance that inspired the Eleven November Group and the In Flanders Fields Museum. In their approach, the many personal and local stories of civilians and soldiers lead to critical sensitivity for the suffering all wars inevitably cause, as well as an increased appreciation of the value of peace.
Although this logic of remembrance also “writes” contemporary scripts about the past in the sense that it links the past to a present-day theme, it reduces, to a great extent, the risk of approaching the past one-sidedly or manipulatively. Indeed, to make critical reflection upon the past possible in the first place, it is necessary that as many stories as possible are told about the war. Taking this approach, for example, the many stories about the multicultural and colonial aspects of the First World War which for decades were pushed aside in traditional nationalistic and patriotic narratives get the full attention they deserve. Indeed, the stories about frontline soldiers as adventurers and perpetrators (see Sophie De Schaepdrijver’s remarks above) and the experience of the war as a great adventure need to be told, as they constitute an integral part of war history.

3.5
From reflection to practice

There is a strong tradition of peace-oriented war commemorations in Flanders and Belgium which are not only rooted locally, but are also promoted by peace movements and various political authorities. The fact that the Government of Flanders wants to focus on the idea of peace in the 2014-2018 commemoration project fits into this tradition. From the foregoing discussion it has become clear that this form of commemoration is not self-evident from all perspectives. There are a few points of attention organisers of peace-oriented commemoration initiatives must take into account, especially if they want to commit themselves in the field of remembrance in a reflective and open way and want to avoid unexpected criticism, for instance from other remembrance traditions or historians.

Two issues in particular have been noted above which we consider to be the critical conditions to set up a normatively and historically well-considered remembrance project. A first point concerns the diversity and possible ambiguity of war commemorations and remembrance sites, which cannot only be explained historically, but are also the result of the nature of a society’s collective memory. We have argued that commemorations which want to focus on the idea of peace must not only spread their own message of peace, but should also ensure that they maintain an attitude of openness and dialogue vis-à-vis other or different forms of commemoration. This means that they should not only spread their own peace-oriented remembrance message, but also work towards a peaceful remembrance culture, in which there is room for different practices and views. In other words, it should not be the intention of peace-minded commemorations to impose the idea of peace as the central message and heritage of the First World War upon all traditions and currents that are present in the Flemish remembrance landscape.

A second point to which we have drawn attention is the relationship between memory and history. We have discussed at length the critical remarks of historians about the current remembrance boom. In particular, we have paid attention to two challenges: the risks involved with the normative character of remembrance and the risks of a one-sided or even manipulative use of the past by remembrance initiatives. These critical remarks are fundamental, and those who commit to remembrance projects can only ignore them at their peril. However, in both cases we have suggested possible ways for organisers to address these challenges. First of all, we have stated that the risk of an anachronistic or an officially prescribed moralising interpretation of
history should be recognised and avoided. At the same time, we have argued that the making of normative choices is inevitable where remembrance initiatives are concerned. In this context, we have suggested that from a moral perspective it is preferable that remembrance initiatives be used in an emancipatory way. This means that commemorations that encourage critical reflection and a motivation for peace have preference over commemorations which contribute to the persistence of physical, structural or symbolical violence. The Government, as an important player in the field of remembrance, can also play an important role in this. Nevertheless, caution is necessary. There is a danger that history is approached one-sidedly. That is why we have argued in favour of remembrance projects which do not instrumentalize the past for current objectives, but frame it in such a way that it is a starting point for critical reflection and a motivation to work actively towards peace today.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this conceptual discussion is that governments can fully commit themselves to peace-oriented remembrance projects, on condition that they take into account the critical conditions as described above. Based on this conclusion we can now start on a more concrete discussion of the central question of this report: how can the remembrance project ‘The Great War Centenary’ be linked to the idea of peace in practice?
4 Survey of practice experts and stakeholders

4.1 Purpose of the survey

In Belgium, and in particular in Flanders, there is quite a lot of expertise when it comes to war remembrance, for instance in the protection and opening up of war heritage, remembrance tourism and the setting up of educational projects on the Great War. For obvious reasons a large part of this expertise on the First World War is concentrated in the Westhoek. Various actors, such as authorities, heritage workers, museums, tourist boards and educational organisations are involved in commemoration and remembrance initiatives on the First World War. In order to examine how the remembrance project ‘The Great War Centenary’ can be linked to the theme of peace in practice, we have called on this expertise. We have done this by means of a qualitative written survey. In a structured questionnaire with open questions we have asked a group of stakeholders and practice experts from different sectors about their experiences with war commemorations and remembrance projects, their expectations with respect to the commemoration of the First World War and their ideas on how the theme of peace can be expressed in the remembrance project.98

Obviously, when interpreting the results, it should be taken into account that some of the respondents participating in the survey also have interests to defend. Nevertheless, the survey delivered valuable results. By collecting concrete suggestions and ideas from people who are practically involved, based on their experience in the field, we get a better idea of how the notion of peace can be expressed as the central message in the various components of the remembrance project. In addition, it provides us with a picture of the expectations present in the field with a view to the commemorations of 2014-2018. As the respondents agreed beforehand, we shall reflect their answers anonymously.99

The project of the Government of Flanders for the centenary of the First World War in 2014-2018 comprises several components which are in line with the various Flemish areas of competence, such as foreign policy, architectural and cultural heritage, tourism, education and media.100 The survey was designed so that practice experts from all these diverse areas would be heard and questions would be asked about all these areas. After a number of general introductory questions about the relevance of commemorations, respondents were subsequently asked questions about the international dimension of the project, heritage, events, education and youth, and media.101 Below, in the discussion of the survey results, we shall largely follow this structure, except for the questions about heritage and events, which will be dealt with below in a single section (‘Heritage, remembrance events and ceremonies’), and the questions about remembrance tourism, which, due to its importance and some specific challenges connected to this kind of tourism, will be treated in a separate section (in the survey, the questions related to tourism fell under the topics ‘international dimension’ and ‘heritage’).
4.2 Relevance of the commemoration of the First World War

Before we put specific questions to the respondents about the different components of the remembrance project, we first asked them some general questions about the why and how of remembrance and commemoration. Why do we keep commemorating a war which took place nearly one hundred years ago? The previous chapters have shown that there are various reasons why societies continue to commemorate their past war. First of all, that past can remain present in a very tangible and visible way, as is the case, for instance, in the Westhoek, where the landscape is still dominated by the many cemeteries and monuments. Secondly, societies can be attached to the commemoration of certain episodes from the past because these have educational value or are felt to be part of their identity. Thirdly, war remembrance can be an aspect of a broader remembrance boom (see Section 2.4). Finally, economic reasons may also be at play, in the sense that the past wars are an interesting tourist attraction. In the survey, we asked respondents to reflect upon this question.

1. In the first general question we asked respondents about their views on the relevance of First World War commemoration. Specifically, they were asked whether they considered it important for us, as a society, to keep commemorating the First World War. The answers showed that there is a consensus among the participating stakeholders on the importance of continuing to commemorate the First World War. Several respondents used the words ‘obviously’, ‘essential’ or ‘absolutely’ in their answers. The importance of commemoration can be explained by various motivations. A first group of respondents mentions the historical importance of the First World War. The war was a milestone in history and as ‘the seed of a number of other large-scale conflicts’ it had far-reaching consequences for the further course of the 20th century, the impact and traces of which can still be felt, not only in ‘our region’ and in the ‘mind and identity’ of many people, generations and communities, but also in contemporary politics. The First World War, as a ‘nationalistic conflict which – as a result of all kinds of alliances – grew into a worldwide conflict in which more than fifty nations were involved’, not only had a global character, but also a significant impact on society itself (‘in several ways, the war constituted a turning point in the history of our society’). One respondent summarises it this way:

‘It is essential to keep commemorating WWI, not only because of the deep marks it has left in our region, but also because of the world scale of the conflict and the relevance of its sources to contemporary international politics.’

Another respondent also points to the historical importance of the First World War with a view to warfare. During the war, weapons of mass destruction (e.g. gas) were used for the first time, as a result of which war became more anonymous.

A second group of respondents indicates that the history of the First World War offers interesting and relevant views for the present day; in other words, lessons can be drawn from it. In this context, a respondent noted that the commemoration of wars and violence in the past should ‘permanently remind us of the horror of this kind of conflict’. Other respondents continued this
argument. For instance, someone talked about ‘our damned duty to confront people with this story, based on the hope that...’ and another respondent emphasised that it is important that ‘the next generations know about how such conflicts are generated and their consequences, so that they will not be repeated in the future’. Respondents also referred to present-day conflicts: ‘therefore, permanent peace education is required!’. Two respondents extended the ‘lesson’ of the war. According to one of them, the Great War teaches us ‘something about the essence of a crisis of the economic system, characterised by the struggle for raw materials and markets, colonialism, etc.’; according to the other one

‘World War I is suitable to confront people with the horrors of war, mass destruction, the excesses of industrial economies and modern societies, and the dangers of international politics that are too centred on the state. All of these insights are still relevant today.’

Another respondent pointed out that the memory of the war can also result in peace education about ‘micro peace’:

‘Of course it is important to learn lessons from history. [...] To this end, education and history lessons on and commemoration (remembrance) of that turbulent period can make young people alert from the start, in order to look for solutions to problems in a tolerant manner, and always with respect for others.’

A third reason why respondents think the commemoration of the First World War is important is the impact that war had on ‘our identity’. For example, one respondent wrote that

‘In order to know where we are going as a society, it is important to know where we come from. Our roots lie in our past; in our war past their presence is even more intense. Roots must not be lost, they are a part of us.’

Another stakeholder supported this view by remarking that ‘knowledge and understanding of one’s own history is part of one’s identity’. Other respondents wrote about the First World War as ‘an important reference point because of its great “familiarity” in Flanders’. This familiarity certainly applies to ‘children of the Westhoek’, who according to one respondent can probably understand the importance of the war even better than ‘outsiders’: ‘those who grow up here are confronted with the result of that war every day. It is impossible not to see it.’ Another respondent agreed with this and wrote that both the tangible scars of the war (bunkers, craters, cemeteries, trenches) and immaterial scars (the stories that define the identity of the Westhoek and its inhabitants) are still present in the area.

Two respondents mentioned, as a fourth reason, that it is important to commemorate the war in order to keep honouring and remembering ‘the soldiers who gave their lives to restore peace and the independence of Belgium’. Commemoration means showing respect to all victims, both military and civilian, of all nationalities.

Finally, a fifth group of four respondents indicated that they think First World War Commemoration is important, but they make this relevance conditional. Two of them, for instance, say war commemoration is only relevant ‘if a contemporary peace message is linked to it’.
Another respondent wrote that it is important to keep commemorating the war ‘on condition that one recognises that the motivation to commemorate can vary, not only from one person to another, but also between communities. The reason why people want to commemorate WWI may differ from one community to another and depends on: the impact of WWI in one’s own region, the presence of WWI heritage/remembrance sites and the available expertise (e.g. in museums, experts in local history, researchers, etc.).’

2. After asking respondents about the societal importance of commemoration as such, we asked whether they thought war commemorations should be made relevant in a current context, for instance by linking them to a contemporary message. There are indeed different ways to commemorate war: commemorations can be set up in a purely historical way, striving only to pass on war history, but they can also be given a contemporary relevance. The fact that this question occupies stakeholders became apparent during a workshop on ‘Heritage, commemoration and remembrance’ which was organised by the project office of the Government of Flanders that coordinates the commemoration project, in collaboration with FARO (the Flemish Interface Centre for Cultural Heritage). There as well, the discussion concentrated on the question whether it was desirable for the commemoration project to communicate a contemporary message on the First World War and the heritage. There was disagreement on this. Some were of the opinion that the memory of the war and its victims should be kept alive without linking a (political) message to it, and that heritage should not be used to support a political story. According to this vision, the main priority should be objectivity. Other participants in the workshop pointed out that objectivity is an illusion, especially when it comes to memory, and stated that the remembrance project should tell a story.

When we asked respondents whether they thought it a good idea to link the commemoration to a contemporary message, most of them responded affirmatively. Some explicitly mentioned peace as this contemporary message, while others emphasised the importance of bringing the remembrance itself up to date, without specifying the message they think should be spread. Five respondents used rather careful and conditional terms when it comes to an update, and one respondent was very reluctant about connecting a contemporary message to the project. Some respondents who advocated a contemporary message called current relevance ‘essential’, a ‘duty’ (‘I think it is also our duty to bring the commemoration up to date, to maintain and spread the idea of ‘no more war’, taking into account the numerous conflicts going on today’), or an ‘essential’ condition. For example, one respondent wrote that

‘If this commemoration is limited to retrieving past events, a major opportunity is being missed. Because only when we learn lessons from the past for the future is commemoration worth the effort.’

The idea that a commemoration should do more than only pass on historical facts and events is shared by several respondents. One of them wrote that an update is necessary to stimulate ‘commitment’ and make the commemoration concrete and tangible. Someone else commented,

‘without an update the commemoration would merely be a history lesson. Which is also interesting, but probably not enough to generate support from a large audience.’
Several respondents explicitly mentioned that the message they think the project should communicate is 'No more war'. Some remarked that the commemoration should comprise 'permanent peace education' and that the pursuit of peace should not only be apparent from 'some declaration of principles', but also in the choice and content of the activities. Many respondents who wanted to give the project a contemporary dimension related the commemoration of the Great War to present-day conflicts. For example, one respondent wrote that the war 'certainly' needs to be explained in its political, social and economic context, with an eye for the impact on civilians and with 'links to the current conflicts in the world'. According to another respondent the history of the First World War offers many starting points to tell a contemporary story:

'It is precisely by establishing all kinds of links with current issues, such as refugees, asylum procedures, tolerance, unemployment, economic crisis, political crisis, comparing military expenditure with worldwide development efforts... that we can present this international topic of WWI in a very topical manner. The fact that it was once possible to exterminate people on a huge scale... should keep sounding like a warning.'

This respondent added that war history not only offers negative lessons, but also positive ones, such as the finding that people are capable of creating international institutions that can play a mediating role in conflict management. Someone else agreed with this:

'The study of history allows us to recognise certain mechanisms in contemporary society, both in a positive and in a negative sense. It helps us to place, understand and tackle the world we are confronted with today.'

Two respondents linked the need to update the commemoration to the question of reaching younger generations. This is not only important in order to involve young people in the commemoration ('a current reference framework must be created if we want to reach young people with the programme'), but also to make them aware of 'the whole' and 'explain the story of them and us' in order to enable them to overcome this kind of conflict.

One respondent summarised all these different arguments in his answer:

'we live in different times: it is important to interpret the events that occurred 100 years ago in a historically correct way, and to place them in their context. Remembrance must not confirm and maintain old patterns of hostility and winners and losers (e.g. continuing to look at Germany as the enemy). On the contrary, we need to transcend this by extrapolating a nation-oriented vision of WWI to an international and multicultural story. Telling history merely as it happened, without interpreting it, as if history were value-free, is insufficient. There must be room for interpretation, for explanation, by making the link with present-day events and issues. This is also important with a view to young people, new generations.'

A group of five respondents agreed that a contemporary interpretation is relevant, but they expressed themselves carefully and in conditional terms when it came to the concrete way in which this update should take place. Someone wrote that updating is relevant, but should in the first place be 'historically relevant', and not only take place for reasons related to tourism. Two respondents were of the opinion that a contemporary message is necessary, but that it is also important that the diversity of messages is recognised: 'therefore several stories from the bottom up (stemming from the various local, ethnic-cultural communities) instead of a single remembrance discourse imposed by one national or international body'. Another respondent,
who indicated that a contemporary relevance is certainly interesting but not absolutely necessary, warned about the risk of anachronisms by saying that it is not desirable – because it is a-historical – to lift events from their historical context, or reduce the relevance of history merely to the elements that can be updated. In the end, according to this respondent, the past should be understood in its historical context and not based on the lessons that can be drawn from it. Nevertheless, it was noted that insights that became popular at some point in the past (such as ‘No more war’ or not letting workers and farmers fight against each other for the honour and glory of their country) can serve as a starting point for contemporary reflection. A last respondent made the critical remark that

‘commemoration [always] takes place within the particular spirit of the time. The way in which the memory is kept alive (by whom and why?) can differ in many aspects. But connecting new messages to it often implies a rewriting of the facts... with what right?’

Finally, one respondent was very reluctant about linking the commemoration to a topical message: ‘Its strength lies in not doing this at all. On the contrary: this could lead to an incorrect picture. The issue remains topical in itself.’

3. One of the objectives of the remembrance project is to set up a broadly supported commemoration, for instance by involving a broad spectrum of organisations and stakeholders. We asked respondents which actors (such as authorities, organisations and groups) they thought should definitely be involved in the project. The majority of respondents listed mainly government services and organisations in Flanders. The authorities mentioned include, among others, Flemish services from all relevant policy areas (tourism, culture, heritage, education – for example, the Special Committee for Remembrance Education – and media), as well as the local and provincial authorities. Some respondents mentioned organisations from the cultural heritage sector, such as FARO, the heritage units, local historians’ associations and specific war museums. Somebody also mentioned local guides. Some respondents included the public broadcasting service, about which it was said that the commemoration ‘represents a real social duty’ for the VRT. Two respondents would also like to involve artists’ organisations, young bands or well-known rock artists with the project, ‘to boost awareness among the younger generation’.

Six respondents also looked to the federal level and the other regions of Belgium. One respondent is critical about the current state of affairs and says that the First World War was a

‘Belgian event; only the Government of Flanders as organiser, and limited even more to tourism, goes against the objective of the project. The Great War Centenary in Flanders aims at international harmony, while it is apparently not possible to work together on a national level.’

Someone else agreed with this, stating: ‘after all, it was Belgium that got involved in the war.’ Other respondents limited themselves to mentioning relevant federal and Walloon/French-speaking organisations which, according to them, could certainly be a part of the project, such as the federal coordinator for the centenary, the Ministry of Defence, the Army Museum, the Veterans Institute, the National Archive, the Africa Museum and the French-speaking pedagogic coordination service Démocratie ou barbarie.
A number of respondents mentioned international partners, such as Britain and the Dominions, France, the former colonies and also Germany. One respondent explicitly mentioned both the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge.

Lastly, three respondents pointed out the importance of involving professional historians and scientific research institutions. For instance, someone remarked that ‘qualified historians are best placed to give shape to a well-founded commemoration’.

4. Finally, we asked respondents what plans their organisations have with a view to the remembrance project for 2014-2018 and what message they wish to communicate through their activities and projects. The answers show that a large number of projects are underway with a view to playing a role in the 2014-2018 remembrance period, such as ceremonies at the Flemish and at the Belgian level, investment in infrastructure, exhibitions, the protection and opening up of war heritage, training for heritage workers and teachers, educational projects, local programmes in municipalities (including the ‘martyr cities’), artistic events, cycling and walking routes among others. As for the message the participating organisations want to communicate with their projects, it seems that the message of peace is popular, but other themes are mentioned as well. Nine respondents quoted peace, ‘No more war’ or ‘permanently reminding people of the horrors of war’ as messages. Some also asked for attention to be paid to ‘limiting arms production and trade, curtailing of the military-industrial complex, and large investments in conflict management’. Five respondents mentioned values such as individual and collective responsibility, tolerance, a sense of public responsibility or active respect as the central message, sometimes in combination with the idea of peace:

‘Especially the message that our country opts for a tolerant society, in which the elements that make such a worldwide conflict possible are no longer present. “Tolerance” begins in one’s personal life, spreads through the everyday social fabric at the local level, is reflected in life at the level of the communities in this country and can in this way be reflected in international events.’

Two respondents mentioned ‘insight into the historical and current aspects of WWI’ and ‘honouring and remembering’ the soldiers who fought in the First World War as the central message of their organisation.

4.3 The international component

Over fifty present-day states were involved in the warfare at the Western front. Soldiers from five continents came to Flanders to fight in the trenches and often also die and be buried there. The international component therefore plays an important role in the remembrance project of the Government of Flanders. The Government’s intention is that the Centenary of the First World War should become an event of international importance. The Government of Flanders has already committed itself to various international projects and plans. Talks have been initiated with the diplomatic representatives of different countries which will be involved in the commemoration.
One of the things that has been discussed during these talks is the Flemish proposal to sign an ‘International Declaration on Flanders Fields’, in which Flanders, together with its international partners, makes a call to keep the memory of the Great War alive. Flanders has also resolved to have the remembrance landscapes of the Somme, Marne and Yser recognised as UNESCO World Heritage, in collaboration with Wallonia and France. There is also cooperation at the interregional level, for instance in the French-Flemish-Walloon project ‘The Great War Remembered’.

1. In the survey we asked respondents about their visions of the international component of the remembrance project. First, we asked them what other possibilities they saw for international cooperation. The answers contained a series of concrete ideas for international initiatives, such as the organisation and exchange of cross-border exhibitions, an international register of casualties (from both sides), international initiatives in the area of scientific research, the production of television programmes which can also be broadcast abroad, and a common website with applications for visits to different remembrance landscapes. Respondents also emphasised that the focus should not only be on cooperation between international authorities, but also on cooperation between private organisations, such as the peace movements. Others pointed out the importance of exchanges between schools and youth associations in order to familiarise young people not only with the war heritage, but also with each other. One respondent wrote that, in addition to large projects – such as the application to Unesco – it is also important to

'value the international role of the youth camps in Messines more. Young people are the future politicians, the future voters... They must receive support and realise that international cooperation can still be improved a lot if we want to prevent international conflicts in future. Generally, one could say that learning foreign languages, exchanges between young people here and young people living in specific regions provide enormous value. Investing in those possibilities seems meaningful in order to involve young people as well, in addition to the grand declarations of heads of state and government officials.'

Two respondents stressed the importance of looking for possibilities to work together with German organisations. For example, one of them wrote: ‘I would certainly argue in favour of cooperation with Germany, as it must not only be a project of the “winners”’. It was further remarked that it is valuable to collaborate with countries that were still colonies during the First World War. One respondent added that perhaps we should not only look at the communities that were present at the Western front, but also pay attention to how the war was exported to other countries on other continents, such as the Belgian Congo or what was then German East Africa.

2. The comments about cooperation with Germany and the former colonies bring us to the next question. Due to the crucial role played by their troops during the First World War in the Westhoek as well as their constant efforts to commemorate their casualties and maintain the many cemeteries and memorials, the countries of the British Commonwealth will be visibly present during the 2014-2018 commemoration period. Respondents were asked whether they had concrete ideas on how authorities and organisations of other countries, such as Germany, France and non-European countries, could also be involved in the commemoration activities.

A number of respondents answered this question in general terms by emphasising the importance of cooperation with German authorities and organisations, such as Volksbund. One respondent wrote, for example:
The Great War remembered: Commemoration and Peace in Flanders Fields

‘Germany must not be absent from those moments of remembrance. The German cemetery, the German graves also have importance. In the ground, we are all equal, so why not above the ground as well? Why were the differences accentuated so much? Which mechanisms were at play?’

The importance of the multicultural character of remembrance events is also underlined by some respondents. Somebody points out that the ‘danger is lurking again that another “white” story will be told... what about unknown stories of soldiers from non-neighbouring countries?’ This respondent also proposes that members of these communities who live in Flanders are also involved in remembrance projects.

Other respondents mainly provided concrete ideas for projects which can further shape the international component of the remembrance project. Ideas included, for instance, a football tournament in analogy with the legendary football matches during the Christmas truces in 1914, a human chain along the entire Western front from Nieuwpoort to the French-Swiss border with people from all the countries involved in the war, exchanges between schools, international cooperation between pacifist organisations, media reports (e.g. on the radio) talking not only about the role of the more than fifty states during the war, but also the way in which the memory lives on in these countries, international thesis prizes and the stimulation of research and the dissemination of research results in different countries, for example, by organising conferences. This last idea was mentioned by several respondents and referred not only to academic conferences, but also, for instance, to workshops at which authorities and organisations exchange experiences and good practices related to their commemoration policy and their efforts in the area of remembrance and peace education.

3. The first two chapters of this report have shown very clearly that war commemorations are characterised by a great diversity of traditions, practices and messages. For instance, commemoration of the First World War is certainly not linked to the idea of peace in all countries. On the contrary, military symbols and a patriotic form of language – which celebrates the victory of one people over the other – often still occupy a prominent position, for instance in inscriptions on monuments. We wanted to let the respondents reflect on this issue, so we asked them whether they thought the diversity of war commemoration could have an impact on the Flemish remembrance project, for instance insofar as the organisation of international ceremonies and projects is concerned. The respondents had different visions and views on this matter.

>> A group of four respondents used the question mainly to criticise certain remembrance traditions. For instance, one respondent denounced the militarism in commemorations:

‘The British remembrance tradition is bathed in an atmosphere of military heroics, of service to the current deployment of the British army in interventions which are often motivated by interests rather than ideals. Mutatis mutandis, the same is often true for the Belgian tradition. Fortunately, the Flemish remembrance tradition is very different. It has no need for flattery or inflated rhetoric and focuses entirely on peace.’

A second respondent feared that the commemoration in Flanders ‘will have a disproportionate British emphasis and character’. He noted, for example, that the annual Armistice Day commemoration at the Menin Gate in Ypres, a British monument, is given more attention than the commemoration at the grave of the Unknown Soldier in Brussels. Two other respondents mainly
criticised nationalistic forms of commemoration. One of them thought this criticism also applied to the Flemish remembrance project. He wrote that the ‘First World War is currently interpreted from a “Flemish” perspective’, which, according to him, is ‘an erroneous approach’:

‘It is not because “the Westhoek” played such a central role that the entire story suddenly becomes a Flemish story. At the political level, some “Flemish” issues within the history of the war are given more attention than others, and that is regrettable. Let us not forget that “the history of the First World War” should be central and that such a nationalistic perspective does not help us in any way... It is a well-known fact that the war is approached differently in France and England. All the more reason for us to keep bearing in mind “our aim”’.

The second respondent is also critical about nationalistic remembrance narratives (‘the message should not be made political and [should] be free from a nationalistic overtone’) and links this to a plea for a European remembrance context: ‘the European Union could take the commemoration upon itself and organise a joint cross-border remembrance ceremony’.

>> The other respondents stated in their answers that the diversity of remembrance practices is inevitable. However, within this group different arguments can be distinguished. A first group of respondents recognised this diversity, but spoke in critical or conditional terms. One respondent, for example, remarked that diversity is inevitable and can be enriching, but added: ‘on condition that the militarism is eliminated’. Another respondent noted that ‘events should be organised bearing in mind the potential visitors. If the British and co. prefer a patriotic or bombastic event, then so be it.’ Someone else went a bit further, writing:

‘it is a matter of give and take, but unfortunately some things will never disappear. We have to find a way to deal with them or transform them and clearly communicate the idea of peace and reconciliation to organisations. It is our duty.’

A second group of respondents thought that different forms of commemoration could co-exist, be complementary, or even be enriching. For instance, one person was of the opinion that Flanders should define its own objectives for the commemoration and focus on these. He referred to the fact that other interpretations co-exist as ‘inevitable’ and ‘not a problem at all’. He was convinced that if the project goes into a clear general direction, this will also determine the dominant picture. He added that already museums such as the In Flanders Fields Museum and the IJzertoren are going for a message that places the madness or the horrors of war in the forefront, even though this is not always what visitors had in mind. He concluded that where formal ceremonies are concerned, in particular, the ritual aspect should be respected, but he also noted that the total remembrance project will comprise much more than ceremonies alone. Another respondent agreed with this last remark. The different forms of commemoration can co-exist: ‘the classical, official remembrance ceremonies alongside the more modern and artistic commemorative events’.

Other respondents within this second group explicitly stressed that different traditions and forms should not only be able to co-exist, but also be mutually respected. For instance, someone wrote that we need to ‘commemorate 14-18 in a way that is true to history’, and that ‘everyone, enemies then and friends now, [can] add their own conclusions. Any interference would have a negative effect.’ Along the same lines, someone else wrote that certain groups will not be reached, or may even ‘be offended’, if no account is taken of the diversity in war commemoration, and that ‘that would not only be a shame’, it could also ‘be counterproductive!’. Another respondent phrased this vision as follows:
‘Commemoration takes place in different ways and from different angles. It would seem arrogant if a joint commemoration (e.g. Flemish, British and French) did not allow the “others” to commemorate events in their own way and according to their own traditions. This reasoning can be extended to the entire remembrance cycle. It will require a lot of tact to let everyone participate in the different activities in their own way.’

A few respondents referred to this need for tact and respect in the organisation of joint remembrance ceremonies in more detail. One of them stated that it is important for the talks on this subject to take place in the correct form from the start, ‘a form everyone can accept’. Because:

‘imagine we organise a commemorative event and cause irreparable damage by failing to take into account certain sensitivities. This could cause a storm... which would achieve the opposite result. So vigilance remains very important.’

The second person stated that it goes without saying that the actual project, which will be set up together with other partners – both national and international – ‘is always a compromise between the different organisers’. A third respondent also saw opportunities in the diversity, for example the possibility of cross-fertilisation. According to him, this was positive since the centenary ‘must not be only a “Flemish” remembrance project. This is a typical matter in which the international nature should be emphasised and which [must] not fall prey to all kinds of regionalist arguments.’

Finally, two respondents saw an interesting educational starting point in the diversity of commemorative practices. One of them proposed turning ‘precisely these differences into a point of attention’, as they ‘may symbolise... [an] exercise in dealing with diversity?’ Along the same lines, the other respondent remarked that

‘from an educational perspective the different approaches to commemoration of the different countries are an interesting topic. Schools could dedicate time to this. In this context, exchanges with foreign schools also seem very useful.’

### 4.4

**Heritage, remembrance events and ceremonies**

Heritage plays a particularly important role in the Flemish remembrance project. Architectural heritage, such as cemeteries, memorials, monuments and landscapes, and cultural heritage, which includes not only museums and archives but also ceremonies and personal testimonies, form the base (both literally and figuratively) of our collective memory of the First World War. Moreover, whereas in the first decades after the war the mourning of relatives and the honouring of casualties and veterans occupied a central position in commemorative events, in recent years the legacy of the war has increasingly been transformed into ‘heritage’. The term ‘heritage’ refers to more than only what is left of the past. Heritage is what is considered meaningful and valuable by a society at a certain moment. This meaning and value do not automatically spring from what is left from the past; they need to be assigned to it – not only by ‘remembrance actors’, such as politicians, historians, artists or heritage workers, but also by the public at large. Of course then the question is what value and meaning are assigned exactly to the heritage, for
instance that of the First World War. Here as well, the diversity that characterises social memory plays a role. Different groups can assign different meanings to the past. As has become clear in the historical introduction, the history and heritage of the First World War in Flanders is linked quite closely to the idea of peace – an assigned meaning which, especially in the Westhoek, has very local roots.

Besides efforts in the area of the heritage, the remembrance project of the Government of Flanders will also comprise an events component. On the one hand, the idea is to organise ‘top events’ which have to attract an international audience, especially from countries whose soldiers fought in the Westhoek. On the other hand, projects and activities will also be organised at the local level. Each municipality has its own history and link with the Great War. In these events, especially in the local ones, the heritage will probably play an important role. The traditional annual remembrance ceremonies on 11 November, which take place in cities and villages all over the country, are also important. Now that the personal, living memory of the survivors has disappeared, several local authorities and organisations are looking for ways to find a new language for these ceremonies so that younger generations can relate to them more easily.

In light of the intention of the Government of Flanders to spread a message of peace during the centenary of the war, in this section the question was asked how a message of peace can be expressed in concrete practice, not only in the efforts related to the war heritage but also in the numerous events that will be organised in the framework of the centenary.

Architectural heritage

During recent years initiatives have been taken with respect to the heritage of the First World War. For instance, the Flemish Heritage Institute (VIOE) has made an inventory of the architectural heritage, war landscapes and archaeological remains of the war in the Westhoek, and in 2010-2011 the Government allocated means, through the ‘Great War Centenary Impulse Fund’, to a number of tourism/recreational projects, including the renovation of a number of war sites.

In the survey respondents were asked whether they had concrete ideas on how the heritage such as landscapes, monuments and cemeteries could be linked to the peace theme, for instance at visitor centres at war sites, on information panels, and in tourist brochures.

>> A first group of five respondents opted for what we call an ‘explicit’ approach. This implies that the message of peace is clearly expressed. For example, one respondent proposed that all information panels at war sites should display the slogan ‘No more war’, in different languages. Another respondent suggested that a kind of quality label could be developed, which would be awarded to organisations which adequately expressed the peace theme in their activities. This could bring clarity for the public. Someone also suggested elaborating a ‘peace thread’ that is recognisable by its specific design or icon which connects various locations. What the respondent had in mind was ‘a series of works of art, poems, photographs, quotes from letters from soldiers at the front, testimonies from mothers who lost their sons...’ that remind visitors ‘of the concrete consequences of war on common people: sorrow, sorrow, and more sorrow’. On the other hand, he stated, stories of hope can obviously also be a part of this peace thread. Another respondent suggested that new media and games offer possibilities to open up the heritage; heritage walks, for instance, can ‘be offered very adequately’ through the use of digiboards in the classroom. Finally, the importance of training guides and local volunteers in the way in which they can tackle the theme of peace and link it to the activities of their own heritage organisation is also pointed out.
A second group of respondents opted for an ‘implicit’ approach of the peace theme. This means that at sites soldiers’ and civilians’ personal stories and testimonies about the war are told. These stories, it was argued, will almost automatically inspire thoughts of peace among visitors. The reasoning is as follows: ‘bring the locations to life through testimonies and stories, let the countless names speak again, give them a face... this alone is enough to (as a result of the confrontation) spontaneously think about [the need for] peace’. Similarly, someone states that if the necessary historical context is presented at the sites (what event, why here, which actors...) in a good and well-balanced, realistic explanation, ‘automatically the absurdity and cruelty of it all’ will be emphasised and ‘the pursuit of peace’ will be fostered among visitors. Two other respondents underlined that visitor centres and information panels at sites should primarily tell human stories: about daily life on and behind the front, about the human being undergoing the war and trying to find his way despite the horrors, about the madness of the war, the destruction of the landscape and the sacrifice of troops for a few metres of territorial gain. ‘As long as the approach is not one-sidedly military and the sole emphasis is not on warfare.’ To these respondents, it was especially the attention to personal experiences of soldiers at the front, rather than the big stories (such as the reports on historical battles) that bring the architectural heritage to life. Because: ‘the more closely stories can be linked to the current reality, the bigger the impact will be on current and future generations’. One of them also provided concrete ideas for opening up the heritage to visitors, such as a heritage walk visiting sites that highlight the human aspect and the madness of the war, or a 60 km ‘death march’ along the front line in Flanders which draws attention to heritage sites and is ‘interspersed with testimonies of soldiers who lived the war at those places’.

One respondent emphasised the need for subtlety when spreading the message of peace:

‘I would like to see this done subtly; what is more, I am convinced that such an approach leads to the best results. Make it into something obvious that is present everywhere in the background.’

Another respondent was even more careful and stated:

‘The architectural heritage is what it is, and it cannot and must not be adapted. The most important thing is to encourage visitors to ‘read’ the heritage. To recognise and be aware that some images may express revenge, triumph, heroism, nationalism, imperialism, mourning... (or not). It may be more important to be aware of what a historical monument suggests than to decontextualise it by attaching an explicit peace message to it.’

**Cultural heritage and events**

1. Besides architectural heritage such as cemeteries, monuments and landscapes, the First World War has also left a substantial cultural heritage across all of Flanders and Belgium (in contrast to the architectural heritage, which is mainly – although certainly not exclusively – concentrated in the Westhoek). This is because the World War not only took place in the areas that were directly affected by military action, but in the entire country. There, it did not leave such permanent traces in the landscape or the architectural heritage, but it did in the cultural heritage, such as archives, photographs, testimonies, works of art and literature. Among other things, these sources give an idea of the political, social and economic situation and everyday life in the occupied territories, the German Flamenpolitik and activism, refugees abroad, artistic and cultural life during the war and the press (both national and refugee publications). During the 2014-2018
remembrance period a large number of projects and events will probably be organised based on this cultural heritage. This will take place both at the local and at the supra-local level. We asked the respondents what kind of projects and events are most suitable to let visitors and participants not only remember but also reflect on war and peace from a critical and contemporary perspective. In the survey, this question was divided into two questions. Because the respondents’ answers to both questions are parallel, we will combine them in the discussion of the results.

In their answers, respondents were quite unanimous. Firstly, they were of the opinion that projects that work with concrete, personal stories of ‘common people’ (civilians and soldiers from both sides), which show the ‘everyday reality in 14-18’, are best suited to encourage reflection on peace among visitors. Local projects can be set up based on local history, for example stories about local inhabitants who had to flee or who were killed. In general, it is about focusing on ‘the impact of the war on the daily lives of normal people’, about giving war victims a name and face. This way, it is argued, war history can be represented for a larger audience in a comprehensible, tangible and recognisable way, facilitating ‘empathy’. One respondent wrote that ‘people first need to “experience” and “be immersed” before they are ready for critical reflection’. Someone else summarised it this way:

“We are all children of our time. Nowadays, a message is best understood if it refers to a ‘human interest’ story, testimonies, personal involvement and perception of what a war really means for a person. Projects that include this perspective are probably most likely to be thoroughly understood and lead to further reflection.’

This approach of remembrance, based on stories ‘from the bottom up’, is widely supported. However, one respondent who highlighted the importance of human, recognisable and concrete stories (‘preferably told by people who lived the events, through testimonies and diaries’) also asks for attention to the larger framework: ‘Let us […] tell what happened: the facts & figures. With attention to the large framework, “history”.’

Secondly, the importance of art and culture is emphasised. For example, some respondents wrote:

‘Especially art and culture can play a role here. Exhibitions, musical performances, theatre and recitation… bring emotions – which are timeless – to the surface, make us reflect on war and peace and can affect the way we feel. Afterwards, there can be room for a critical approach…’

‘Music, poetry, literature, plastic art… both by contemporaries and modern interpretations (preferably even in the form of a dialogue) […] are the expressive, emotional and everyday experiences people can relate to most these days, and are most suitable to show them that people 100 years ago were exactly the same as the people living now. Testimonies or family histories can also have a place here.’

According to one respondent art forms such as drama make it possible ‘to make it real, to really experience it’. Someone suggested a large-scale international retrospective on the theme of war: ‘via different interpretations of artists people become familiar with the different views on war and peace’. Another respondent remarked that poetry, music, literature and plastic art from both sides must be shown. Music festivals with performances of committed artists, such as Ten Vrede in Diksmuide, were mentioned. Not only do they attract visitors, they also make them ‘feel that the festival is more than only having fun’. Artistic events (concerts, theatre, poetry, plastic art…),
as one last respondent noted, can be organised both at the local and at the supra-local level: ‘for a top event you can ask top artists, for a local event the local academy can set up an exhibition at a local venue’.

Thirdly, a number of respondents provided specific guidelines or tips for the organisation of projects and events. For example, two respondents emphasised that projects should be ‘intergenerational’. Someone argued in favour of ‘projects that bring generations together, that show the impact of such a conflict on everyday life’. Two other respondents, on the other hand, advocated a ‘separate approach’ for young people. According to them, the impact of projects was ‘highly dependent on the target group one has in mind (a project aimed at adults will look totally different from a project aimed at children or young people)’, although, they added, in both cases one has to look for ‘points of contact [...] in the audience’s own living environment’. One of them added that projects and events also needed to reach ‘the non-typical Flemish’. A number of respondents argue that projects should have a topical dimension. For example, someone preferred ‘projects that can be related to current political contexts which appeal to current values and norms.’ Finally, two respondents were critical when it came to the military aspect of projects. One of them certainly did not want a

‘glorification of military achievements or an unquestioning admiration of militaria. Of course a focus on the military is acceptable in certain places, but the framework should always be mentioned: the disgusting horror, the absurd death of so many’

The other respondent suggested that we should

‘be very careful when dealing with the military presence at this kind of events. Regiments with a WWI history are entitled to that history, but among them there should also be room for testimonies of soldiers who fought, suffered and were killed during the war.’

Some respondents also made suggestions as to how projects can be given more grandeur. For instance, it was noted that added value can be created by combining local projects and events into one total programme, and that by involving ‘well-known people’ in the commemorations larger groups can be reached, possibly also internationally. Other respondents argued in favour of the use of new media and techniques, such as multimedia and interactive tours for visitors. Finally, one respondent proposed setting up a symbolic action which showed that after 100 years both sides ‘grant forgiveness and work together towards a better world’.

2. Where local commemoration is concerned, we also asked a separate question about the so-called ‘martyr cities’, such as Leuven, Aarschot and Dendermonde, cities where the Germans summarily shot hundreds of civilians in the summer of 1914 and went on to engage in looting and arson, for instance at the university library in Leuven. These specific cases are interesting. As Sophie De Schaepdrijver noted, war heritage there is characterised by rather hyperbolic, anti-German symbolism and rhetoric of martyrdom. However, already quite soon after the war this local memory was marginalized by remembrance narratives that focused on the enormous number of losses at the front. In later decades as well, the memory of the martyr cities was pushed away by the ‘front memory’ in which the madness of the war rather than the question of guilt was prominent.115 This only makes the question how contemporary remembrance project in these cities can express a message of peace more interesting. Therefore, in the survey we asked how the martyr cities could deal with this issue.116
Respondents’ suggestions pointed in two directions. Firstly, it was proposed to explain the anti-German symbolism and place it in its historical context. This symbolism must not be ignored, hushed up or hidden, but should be made understandable by explaining it in the historical context of the post-war years. Some respondents suggested that it might be worthwhile explicitly to talk about this. According to them, these monuments provide interesting perspectives because they offer local organisers, educational institutions and associations of local historians the opportunity to stop and think not only about the story of the First World War, but also about the representation of that war and the genesis of commemorative monuments. One respondent remarked that explaining this kind of war symbolism was ‘even an essential part of the message of the commemoration’. Someone else pointed out that as a result of this kind of explanation people are made ‘aware again of the total mobilisation a war implies – today as well’. Someone mentioned that the profile of the perpetrators could also be a possible angle: ‘were they really all barbarians, or were they also very normal young men who were following orders?’ This could be done, for instance, by looking for extracts from their diaries and letters and relating the events in the martyr cities to events such as the Christmas truce in the winter of 1914. One respondent, who emphasised that commemorations must not be set up from a one-sided perspective, thought there was also a task for local governments when it came to the need for explanation: ‘the coordination and quality control of activities organised by third parties, such as local associations, should be the task of the local government’.

Secondly, several respondents were in favour of making reconciliation the central theme of the commemoration in the martyr cities. In this sense, it was said that

‘starting from the [anti-German] symbolism clearly steps can be taken towards reconciliation and forgiveness (without forgetting). The centenary offers the opportunity to ‘eliminate what is left of the thought of Germany as the enemy where this has not been done yet’.

Another respondent suggests organising a commemoration in the presence of the German authorities ‘under the motto *Nie wieder Krieg* or No more war’. Someone stated that this matter could be a starting point for a closer look at how reconciliation and forgiveness can take place without forgetting – a topic which according to him is also relevant today, because it plays a central role in restorative justice. Finally, a number of respondents proposed consulting with German organisations in the framework of the commemorations, and setting up exchanges between schools with German cities. Thanks to this kind of cooperation the commemoration can then be connected to an idea of fraternisation that promotes the European idea. One respondent summarised it by writing that during the commemorations ‘the historical truth […] [should be] maintained’, but that it can be explained ‘in the context of “enemies then, friends now in a united Europe”’.

Finally, some respondents proposed modernising the commemorations in the martyr cities, for instance by setting up projects that study how the representation of the (former) ‘enemy’ is dealt with in other contexts (examples that are mentioned are the Balkans and Israel-Gaza).

**Ceremonies**

Every year on Armistice Day ceremonies are held in cities and villages across the country to remember the 1918 armistice. These ceremonies usually follow a fixed structure which has hardly changed throughout the decades. Traditionally, the focus of these ceremonies has been on war veterans. Now that the personal, living memory of First World War survivors has disap-
peared, various local authorities and organisations have raised the question whether it is time for a renewal of this form of commemoration. This was the starting point for asking respondents whether they thought there is indeed a need for an adaptation of the traditional forms and symbols of the Armistice Day ceremonies and, in addition, whether they had any concrete ideas on how these ceremonies could appeal to a young, broad and culturally diverse audience in future.

Roughly speaking, three approaches can be distinguished. A majority is of the opinion that the ceremonies should indeed be modernised. However, some respondents give a more neutral answer and advocate a balance between old and new. Some are reluctant about change.

...Those in favour (some of whom start their answers with ‘certainly’, ‘absolutely’ or ‘without a doubt’) quoted several reasons why it is time to revise the ceremonies. A first reason was that ‘now that the last WWI veteran has left us, we can start putting the ‘remembrance’ in a broader perspective’. In other words, a modernisation of the traditional forms was necessary ‘given that everything revolved around the war veterans, who are now no longer there...’ and it is ‘no longer the people who lived then who remember Armistice Day’. Secondly, there were respondents for whom the traditional forms themselves are no longer adequate. For instance, one person states that ‘if Armistice Day ceremonies only involve “leaving flowers” at the local war monument’, the commemorations are useless. Another person remarked that the official part especially (where ‘the emphasis is on the display of military greatness’) could certainly be renewed. As a third reason the steadily declining attendance was mentioned. According to one respondent, the fact that attendance is dropping in many places was a logical result of the fact that the distance in time from the First World War was inevitably growing. This did not apply so much to the Westhoek, where ceremonies continue to be attended by a lot of people due to the ‘spatial vicinity’ to the history of the war. Someone else pointed out that ceremonies today ‘only reach a fraction of the population’. A fourth reason quoted is in line with the previous statement and says that the ceremonies in their current form do not appeal to young people:

‘The current ceremonies do not appeal to young people at all. Flags and uniforms mainly create a military image that deters young people.’

This statement was supported by other respondents. One of them wrote that ‘the bombastic ceremonies with military music and the corresponding rhetoric [will] not easily appeal to people, especially younger generations’. Someone else stated that a more ‘modern approach’ would be necessary ‘if we want to keep motivating younger generations to continue this commemoration’.

If these respondents were of the opinion that a renewal of traditional commemoration ceremonies was necessary, the question obviously arises of how this can take place, and how these ceremonies could appeal to a broad, young and culturally diverse audience. The respondents provided several ideas. Firstly, they suggested involving young people more in the ceremonies. It was proposed, for example, to use forms and media that appeal to young people, such as music (e.g. performed by well-known artists) and new social media. Another idea was to put young people into contact with other young people, for instance from current areas of conflict, which would make the issue ‘real and tangible’. Someone proposed asking young people themselves how they would feel more involved: ‘let them – after sufficient information and explanation – modernise and work it out [themselves]’. Secondly, some respondents suggested opting for a more artistic approach, such as concerts or ceremonies which revolve ‘around reflection and the reading of testimonies’. Someone also argues in favour of modernising ceremonies by ‘presenting individual stories in a contemporary way: stories of people who were then 15, 20, 30 years old (because we often forget
that this war was lived by YOUNG people). Thirdly, some respondents suggested establishing links to present-day conflicts in the ceremonies. One of them proposed the following:

‘put current affairs on the agenda of those commemorations. Invite witnesses from specific areas of conflict on that day and let them, as witnesses, argue in favour of a peaceful solution to problems’.

Fourthly, some respondents gave possible tips for appealing to a culturally diverse audience, for example, the suggestion to make room for stories of ‘a culturally diverse group of witnesses of the Great War’ and to pay attention ‘to the struggle of those various communities (e.g. Algerians, Indians) during the Great War’. It was also suggested to

‘Give those 50 nationalities a real face: actively involve them in the ceremonies, in the story-telling, let a South African tell the story of his great-grandfather... (and play the music that South African soldier listened to when he thought about his country of origin).’

Finally, two respondents pointed out that there are already existing alternatives to the traditional ceremonies such as the annual 11.11.11 action and the ceremony of the unknown war wife in Hasselt and Leuven.

>> Besides the group of supporters there were also respondents who had a more balanced view or were reluctant when it comes to renewal. One of them found the traditional ceremonies problematic, but was also of the opinion that the organisations that have been involved in setting up those ceremonies, following a long tradition, should be taken into account:

‘One problem of the Armistice Day ceremonies is that they commemorate not only WWI, but also WWII and all other wars in which Belgians have been involved (e.g. Korea). Here as well, revanchism, triumphalism, heroisation, patriotism etc. are/can be problematic, but the ownership of certain survivors (usual of WWII) cannot and must not be ignored.’

Other respondents held the view that ‘there should be attention to both tradition and renewal’ and that, even though renewal might be necessary, ‘that does not mean traditional symbolism [should] be lost’. In this context someone remarked that

‘The official remembrance ceremonies should be preserved out of respect for this long-standing tradition, but parallel artistic, contemporary alternatives should be possible. In other words, the day/date 11/11 must no longer be claimed (only) by official, solemn remembrance ceremonies.’

Another respondent doubted whether renewal was a good idea. According to him, ceremonies were aimed ‘purely at remembrance’, which did ‘not provide any immediate added value’ for a young audience. His proposal seemed to boil down to the fact that ceremonies can continue to exist in their current form, while at the same time ‘projects (in the broad sense) with a larger educational and didactic value’ can be developed.

>> One respondent clearly rejected a reform or modernisation of the traditional ceremonies. He referred to the Last Post in Ypres, a ritual which clearly ‘continues to appeal to people, including to the young generation’.
4.5
Remembrance tourism

Tourism plays an important role in the remembrance project of the Government of Flanders. In fact, one of the objectives of the project is to turn it into a ‘special event’ which ‘puts Flanders on the map as an international top destination’. In 2010 15 million euros were allocated to subsidise 44 tourist and recreational projects. In a second round another 5 million euros will be set aside for tourism events. The economic importance of tourism for the Westhoek is considerable. In 2007 the number of First World War tourists in the area was estimated at 368,000, while the total turnover of WWI tourism was estimated at 35.2 million euros, which means 30.1% of the total turnover of tourism and recreation in the Westhoek. Nevertheless, the relationship between tourism and the memory of the war is not always obvious. Due to the many victims and the political, social and cultural significance of the First World War, the memory of that war needs to be treated with caution. If Gilles Lipovetsky’s statement that market thinking and commercial logic are increasingly dominating heritage and memory holds true, it seems that an excessive ‘commercialisation’ of remembrance tourism may come in for criticism from certain groups, such as historians, heritage workers and educational organisations.

In order to know the stakeholders’ views on this problem, the survey included two questions on the relationship between tourism and war memory.

1. In light of the efforts further to develop and market the war heritage in a tourism context with a view to 2014-2018, we asked respondents whether there were certain sensitivities connected to remembrance tourism which they thought should receive special attention. The answers show that there were indeed sensitivities among the participating stakeholders when it comes to remembrance tourism. These sensitivities are expressed in varying degrees. While a first group of respondents were critical about the marketing processes and the commercial logic in war remembrance, a second group wanted to ensure that, even in the framework of remembrance tourism, the stories about the war remain sufficiently complex and peaceful, and a third group took a fairly neutral position advocating a balance between ethical and historical requirements of war remembrance on the one hand, and tourism (which according to them also offered opportunities for the heritage element) on the other.

In the first group there were two respondents who already question the use of some terms in the framework of war commemoration: one was of the opinion that ‘words like “marketing” and “events” [are] inappropriate here’, while the other started his answer by saying ‘insofar as one can or should talk about marketing in this kind of context’. Overall, respondents in this group thought that the commercial aspect should always be subordinate to the ethical dimension of commemoration, to the message of peace or to historical accuracy. For instance, someone stated that ‘it must not turn into a vulgar commercial affair’, because: ‘it is about hundreds of thousands who lost their lives’. This is supported by two respondents who argued that attention should be given to the ‘right’ or ‘appropriate’ ethical framework, ‘with respect for events and people’, and in such a way that ‘the event in itself [is treated with] the necessary respect’. One of them concluded that ‘the marketing is clearly subordinate [to this]’, while the other extended this reasoning to the message of peace. According to this respondent, this message must not be approached in a purely utilitarian way, as a means to “sell” or “promote” a certain image. The concepts of remembrance and a peace message still serve ‘in the first place to learn something, to keep certain crucial events alive’. Two respondents said that the historical should always have preference over tourism or commercial aspects. One of them wrote that the commemoration
must not become ‘a vulgar commercial affair, a circus’, in order for ‘the historical value’ not to be degraded (because, he added, ‘we know from experience that this is a very sensitive issue’). The other respondent wrote that we should ensure that ‘the tourism objective does not suppress the historical aspect’ (otherwise, he concluded, ‘we will suffer the consequences after 2018’). One respondent summarised the scepticism about the commercial logic as follows:

‘Not everything can be ‘marketed’. We easily fall into exaggeration if we do not treat the “associated economic aspects” with the necessary caution. If the commercial aspect takes the upper hand, the whole event will turn against the organisers, causing the opposite effect of what was intended. So beware of helmet-shaped chocolates, \textit{In Flanders Fields} pâté, front beer and similar extravagancies which will do the undertaking no good. Not everything in that sense can be stopped, but the commercial market should be aware that nobody benefits from ‘making money at the expense of those who were killed’.

A second group of respondents asked that, in the development and marketing of the war heritage for tourism, sufficient attention should be paid to the relevance of the content of the stories that will be told in the framework of remembrance tourism. Some respondents asked that ‘traditional’ ways of representing the conflict be avoided. They emphasised, for instance, that the differences between the parties during the war must be overcome and that it must not merely be about the conflict between nations. Rather, as someone wrote, we should ‘ask ourselves how we can make sure – together – that those 9 million people did not die in vain’. Another respondent stated: ‘No heroism! Put the emphasis on the marketing of positive peace!’ Someone also asked that in the marketing ‘our own Yser front’ is not forgotten as a result of ‘the purely commercial decision to only target the international market’. Two respondents had doubts regarding some forms of war remembrance. Their criticism was directed especially at the re-enactment of historical events by participants dressed in historical uniforms. For example, one of them wrote: ‘with some things, there is doubt as to whether the remembrance or commemoration takes place in the correct form, with respect for those killed, for instance with re-enactment’. The other respondent is of the opinion that anyone who wants to organise or visit a tourism project, must do this with deep respect for the suffering and the horror of the events: ‘sensationalism, playing army (re-enactment without context) or spectacles merely aimed at causing sensation are out of the question!’.

One respondent thought that the heritage sector was on the right track where the diversity and complexity of the content of the stories are concerned:

‘Where the heritage sector is concerned, I do not think that a black-and-white story will be told anymore. Recently, a lot of attention has been given to the diversity in the composition of the armies (e.g. exhibition on Chinese road workers, film and documentary on Moroccan skirmishers).’

Finally, a third group of respondents were of the opinion that a respectful balance between remembrance and tourism could be found and that, if such a balance was found, each could enhance the other. In this context, two respondents mentioned the idea of ‘tourism+’, as promoted by Westtoer (the provincial office of tourism and recreation in West Flanders).\textsuperscript{122} One of them explained what the concept implies:

‘Of course the whole commemoration of the First World War must be approached and marketed in a respectful and serene way. This is largely the definition of tourism+: WWI tourism is not merely the opening up and marketing of the war heritage to the public, it is a way to
maintain the war heritage and the corresponding history with room for meaning and reflection. Heritage and tourism mutually enhance each other in this sense.’

This group of respondents thought that in principle there is nothing wrong with tourism or marketing processes, if certain conditions are observed. For instance, two respondents stated that there is ‘nothing wrong with tourism’ and that “marketing” cannot be a mistake’ as long as ‘historical correctness has priority’ and ‘as long as one bears in mind the main aim of the commemoration’. One respondent asked for attention to local memory as well in the framework of the search for a balance between the requirements of tourism and those of the war’s past:

‘Nowadays, the experience component plays an important role in the leisure sector. It will be a challenge to create an experience of WWI that is a relevant and recognisable [story] for tourists, and: 1) at the same time maintains respect for the countless victims of that war; 2) tells a balanced, many-sided story that is also recognisable in the way in which the local population deals with the First World War.’

2. Secondly, the issue of the tourist promotion of the remembrance project abroad was tackled. By no means all countries link the commemoration of the First World War to the idea of ‘No more war’, as often happens in Flanders. We asked respondents whether the Government of Flanders, when working out the promotion campaigns for the different foreign markets, should take into account the diversity in remembrance traditions, or whether, on the contrary, it should also include the peace message in its international promotion campaigns. The answers show that respondents’ views on the matter vary.

A first group of respondents were of the opinion that if peace is the central message of the project, this should also be expressed in the international promotion and marketing. In some respondents’ answers the sensitivities regarding remembrance tourism appear again. For instance, someone asked:

‘let the message of peace please be dominant in the tourism marketing (are they compatible?); will a huge event be organised in which there is insufficient attention to the essence...?’

Others stated very clearly that according to them the idea of peace should ‘play a prominent role in the promotion campaigns’, not only to provide ‘an attractive general message of peace for a large market’ but also in the hope that people will reflect on that thought and ‘will hopefully become more aware’. A second respondent wrote:

‘The message of peace is the only reason for the commemoration. As soon as this dimension is taken out of it, we are left with a folkloric, carnivalesque parade and the quote of Julian Grenfell (24.10.1914) comes back to life again: “I adore War. It’s just like a big picnic without the objectlessness of a picnic.”’

Another respondent agreed and asked the following question: ‘Without a message of peace, isn’t this whole project useless?’ Based on the thought that ‘personalised confrontations with suffering, death and misery offer a recognisable starting point for appealing to nearly everyone’s desire for peace’, someone else proposed that the link should also be made in the marketing between the personal stories of soldiers at the front and the idea of peace. Two respondents realised that
tourism is ‘a market event’ and that ‘it is a fact that the current cultural and tourism sector are the object of marketing and [that] if one wants to draw attention one needs to create an image’, but they do advocate caution. The first respondent stated that he had nothing against setting up tourism promotion, as long as it was done ‘with tact’. Because, he said, in the economic world the same rules for tolerance applied as in the pedagogical world (although, he added, not ‘all project supervisors realise this’). The second respondent remarked that despite the marketing of the current cultural and tourism sector,

‘[It must] always be borne in mind that we are talking about the commemoration of a huge tragedy in world history which cost a lot of lives. [...] Attention must be drawn to the uselessness of war violence! In this way, the commemoration will spread a universal message of peace and tolerance.’

Secondly, there were two respondents who, precisely because of their mistrust of commercial logic in the context of war remembrance, were rather reluctant to integrate the idea of peace into the promotion campaigns. For instance, one of them wrote:

‘I am not sure whether publicity campaigns are appropriate to talk about peace. It seems to me a difficult balance to achieve. In my opinion, it would be a real pity if the value of the message of peace were eroded because it was linked too closely to commercial objectives. I would opt for spreading the peace message mainly at the sites themselves; I also think it would reach people more easily there.’

The second respondent has already been quoted above; he warned against approaching the message of peace in a ‘utilitarian’ way, ‘as a means to “sell” or “promote” a certain image’.

Thirdly, there were five respondents who thought that promotion abroad should be attuned to the specific characteristics of each individual market. The idea behind this was that promotion campaigns should be aimed mainly at attracting foreign tourists and visitors to Flanders and Belgium. Once they were here, they could then see in what way Flanders gives meaning to war commemoration. Someone wrote:

‘Let us […] not complicate things at the marketing level by including big promises, statements or messages. The aim is that people come here, via the reality of “war”, and are confronted here with the wish for peace.’

Along the same lines, another respondent wrote that although it was good to spread a message of peace, ‘we do need to realise that Flanders occupies a unique position in this: in other countries, the idea of peace is not always self-evident’. Therefore, as another respondent noted, ‘the role of the peace message […] will depend on the aim of the campaign and on the target audience’. Or, in the words of a third respondent: although the maxim ‘No more war’ cannot be questioned, the different markets – as in other campaigns – will need to be approached in different ways. One respondent, on the other hand, thought the peace message should be ‘one of the underlying principles’ of the tourism marketing, but ‘not the message in itself’. For ‘tourists mainly seek leisure’ and ‘are less guided by educational or moral motivations when choosing a destination for a trip’. A last respondent agreed with the reasoning that promotion campaigns should take into account the diversity of remembrance traditions, but he added a specific call:
'We need to take into account the sensitivities and collective memories existing in the different public opinions, but all images that contribute to triumphalism, heroisation or stereotypes of the enemy must be avoided, even if those elements are part of a dominant view among the respective target group. In short, the explicit message of peace can be elaborated in Flanders (once the tourists are here), whereas in the tourism promotion it can be present, but it is more important that the opposite (glorification, heroisation, misplaced pride...) is avoided.'

4.6 Education and youth

Most organisers of remembrance initiatives recognise that involving young people is an important aspect of their work and that education has a crucial role in this. In the Flemish educational system a lot of attention is already being paid to the remembrance of historical milestones such as the First World War. For instance, in addition to the specific attainment targets for the subject History, two of the cross-curricular attainment targets in secondary education are aimed at tolerance and insight into the ‘potentially constructive and destructive role of conflicts’. These attainment targets, which contribute to remembrance education and peace education, are also considered relevant with a view to the Flemish remembrance project for 2014-2018. It is the intention of the Government of Flanders that the Special Committee for Remembrance Education, which coordinates the efforts related to remembrance education within the Flemish education system, will play a central role in the commemoration of the First World War. In the framework of the centenary all manner of projects and educational packages will be set up and developed for all types of education within the Flemish educational system. In the survey we asked about the visions of stakeholders and practice experts of how remembrance efforts in education can be connected to the idea of peace.

1. Two questions were aimed at finding out what kind of educational remembrance projects the stakeholders thought adequate to encourage pupils to critical reflection on war and peace, and which forms and techniques they thought were most suitable to guarantee the involvement of young people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds in remembrance activities.

Firstly, there were two respondents who pointed out, in general terms, that projects that make links with current conflicts or pay attention to the problem of ‘making choices’ (‘in a context of uncertainty in which the larger context is not always clear’) are suitable for stimulating further reflection among young people. Secondly, there were several respondents who referred to exchange programmes as a suitable type of project. Such programmes could, for example, consist in ‘bringing young people from conflict areas together’, but also in exchanges between schools in the Westhoek and schools in Germany. In this context, one respondent noted that he thought it might be useful to set up a dialogue between politicians and young people, ‘for instance heads of government who make time to enter into discussion with young people on war and peace, on living together...’, which according to him could be inspiring for both groups.
He added that this could grow into an annual initiative. Thirdly, there were some respondents who emphasised active forms and techniques. For instance, it was suggested that pupils should definitely be actively involved and projects should be more than ‘only telling stories’ or talking about war ‘in the traditional way through language’. As an example, respondents recommended ‘working with visual aspects, participative activities, site visits’. They argued in favour of ‘playful’ and ‘creative’ projects and group projects and the importance of ‘experience activities’ was underlined. One respondent described it this way: ‘walks and cycling tours encourage young people to make time in this hectic life to stop and think about this important episode in world history’. Other respondents stressed the importance of forms and techniques that fitted in with young people’s worlds. In this context, they suggested ‘fast & short projects’ and making use of visual and digital techniques, multimedia and social networks like Netlog and Facebook. In this framework, there were several respondents who stressed that ‘personal involvement and empathy’ had to be created among young people. This could be done, for instance, by working with personal stories and testimonies which referred to young people’s local or family histories. One respondent, for example, made the following recommendation:

‘Take WWI to young people’s (and of course also adults’) living environment: launch projects on street names, as in nearly all towns there are some that refer to WWI soldiers. Are there family relationships with people we know? Did those people attend ‘our’ school? The Flemish/Belgian soldiers came from all over the country: show a picture at the place where they left for the war.’

Other respondents advocated working with images and personal documents which ‘reconstruct life at the front’ and make it possible to ‘relive’ war situations ‘together’. One respondent wrote in more detail about a specific type of project which is often criticised – re-enactment. This respondent was critical about the educational value of re-enactment. Although he noted that he did not have a definitive answer on what forms and techniques were best suited to stimulate critical reflection on war and peace, he was of the opinion that the solution certainly did not lie in the so-called re-enactment activities. The supposed ‘experiencing of the situation at the time’ paints an inaccurate picture of e.g. life in the trenches. It is not by dressing people in the uniforms of the time and giving them a messtin and a tent, that the sorrow and, especially, the psychological suffering of the soldiers is re-experienced. A false image of the war is created (‘oh, what a lovely war!’) and those who really suffered in the trenches in the Westhoek are wronged.’

Another point for discussion mentioned by a respondent was the educational value of showing the gruesome images of the war, for example of the mutilated bodies of those killed, of gueules cassées or victims of torture or the camps. The respondent in question warned against exposing children and young people to some things and made

‘remarks about the visits of small groups of young schoolchildren to e.g. Fort Breendonk, where the horrors are explained explicitly. Children must be ready to handle the horror. If a teacher is not sure that the child can safely come to terms with this madness, it is important to provide guidance. If this is not possible, then do not go through with it!’

Some respondents specifically answered the question related to the forms and techniques that are suitable to involve a culturally and socially diverse audience of schoolchildren in the remem-
brance projects. A first respondent recommended focusing attention on the multicultural nature of the war:

‘WWI was a collaboration between French, Moroccan and other foreign cultures. Young people in Flanders are often surprised to hear that Indian and Chinese people also took part in WWI.’

In particular, this aspect can be developed by taking young people to the places ‘where you literally find yourself in the middle of “the Great War” and you [can] tell the story of that great war against different social and cultural backgrounds’, for example, by visiting cemeteries where North African soldiers are buried, such as the French military cemetery in Ypres. Another respondent was of the opinion that ‘projects in which pupils are encouraged to actively take initiatives and where they preferably also come into contact with pupils from other schools and types of education (in a non-competitive way)’ are pedagogically most recommendable, although they are ‘also the hardest to carry out’. A last respondent remarked that this question could not be answered in general terms, but that it depended on the specific target group one has in mind:

‘a project for primary school pupils requires a different approach and angle than a project for secondary education or teacher training. In the latter, attention must also be paid to the difference between general, technical, vocational and art secondary education, as these have different curricula. Additionally, the specific cultural and social backgrounds in the group also play a role. Teachers (in my opinion) should bear this in mind as much as possible and look for links with the young people’s own world and surroundings.’

Finally, there was a group of respondents who answered the questions above by mentioning existing projects.
age reflection. Someone else thought that through fiction series or documentary projects that are based on ‘personal stories, told by the people who actually lived it’ a good balance can be achieved between knowledge and empathy. A last respondent held the view that a museum like In Flanders Fields provided young people with both the historical and human reality, by which he seemed to suggest that the transfer of knowledge and experience can take place simultaneously and enhance each other. Even so, this respondent added:

‘But knowledge must not only come from museums or tourist attractions. Knowledge must in the first place be passed on through education (which includes a plea for the conservation and possibly reinforcement of history education, especially of contemporary history, which establishes links with the present day).

A second group of respondents suggested that young people who are presented with stories that make them feel empathy will often also develop an interest in the broader historical framework. For instance, someone remarked:

‘In Great Britain (and Australia) young people are assigned the identity of a certain soldier, on whom they are to find information. This personal link seems to contribute to a greater interest in world events.’

The respondent then compared this method to the project ‘Name list’ of the In Flanders Fields Museum, in which schools take part in a search for names of victims of the First World War. Along the same lines, a second respondent pointed out that ‘if you take young people along and confront them with the fact that the place where they are standing, the names they are reading carry the story of the war in them’, they will ‘have sufficient empathy to comprehend all this’. (The respondent added that ‘dressing up as soldiers only leads to “distraction”’). Finally, a last respondent noted that music that refers to war can ‘stimulate [young people] to discuss the history of WWI’. This respondent also thought that some forms of experience made a stronger impression on pupils than the transfer of knowledge during a class: ‘film and being present at the site add an important aspect to remember the event for longer than with a standard lesson’. That is why he was in favour of letting young people set up projects themselves, and stimulating them by means of assignments.

Finally, two respondents seemed to be somewhat sceptical when it came to some forms of empathy as an educational method. Whereas for one of them ‘perception from a more neutral perspective (e.g. that of an investigator) [seems] a more suitable method than perception from a soldier’s perspective’, the other was of the opinion that ‘the boundary between knowledge and perception is often too close to too much perception of life then, to the military aspect’. This last respondent ended his answer with the remark that ‘it [seems to me] a challenge to develop this for young people (we are talking about 5th-6th year of secondary school)...’.

4.7 Media

Over recent decades, the audiovisual media have become an important channel for the transfer of collective memory. Documentaries, films and drama series about the First World War increas-
ingly define the image people have of war history. During the remembrance period the media will, without a doubt, play an important role. This is also clear from the plans of the Flemish public broadcasting service (VRT) for the centenary. In the period leading up to 2014 the VRT will pay extra attention to the First World War each November, both on the radio and on TV. For instance, the commemoration of the Armistice will be broadcast live from Ypres and during this period documentaries on the First World War will be aired. The broadcasting service will also pay special attention to the digital archiving and opening up of historical interviews with veterans and other witnesses. In addition to the existing interviews, the project ‘The Very Last Witnesses’ has been set up, grouping over 100 new interviews with centenarians who lived the World War as children. During the actual remembrance period 2014-18 as well, the VRT will dedicate thematic radio and TV programmes to the commemoration of the First World War. One of the main projects is a ten-part fiction series with the title ‘In Flanders Fields’.

Two questions were asked about the project of the VRT in the survey. In the first one we asked which themes and stories they thought the VRT should definitely pay attention to in its reporting on the First World War and its choice of documentaries to produce or purchase. The answers contained two principal suggestions. One the one hand, respondents asked for attention to everyday stories ‘from the bottom up’, personal stories that show the reality of the war for regular soldiers and citizens, or, in one of the respondents’ words, ‘the small stories of the great war’. It was important, someone noted, that ‘not only the story of bombs and grenades’ was told, and that we did not opt for an ‘exclusive focus on the Westhoek’. Stories which the respondents thought should be given attention were those of daily life, smuggling, the electrified barbed wire fence at the Belgian-Dutch border, migration to the Netherlands and France, and the role of women (with respect to the latter, someone asked: ‘did the war really have such an emancipatory effect on the role of women or do we need to adjust this story as well?’). One respondent remarked that documentaries on ‘the war of the common man’ have already been made, and was in favour of re-broadcasting these. On the other hand, there were respondents who expected the public broadcasting service also to discuss and interpret the broader historical framework or specific aspects of war history. For instance, one respondent stated that the remembrance period 2014-2018 was, in the first place, a good opportunity

‘to shed light on the historical facts which led to this worldwide conflict. One assault in Sarajevo, in the context of an ethnic conflict, was the spark that set off a worldwide conflict. The public broadcasting service can make people aware that not much is needed to spark such a conflict and that we must therefore be very careful about “provoking” or “intensifying” conflicts.’

Other respondents pointed out that it would be ‘a real added value’ if the VRT paid attention to ‘less-discussed aspects or “forgotten groups”’. In this context, several respondents suggested topics such as the history of conscientious objectors, the colonial soldiers at the Western front and the impact of the war in the colonies themselves, the migration flows, the anti-war movements and war fatigue during the war (for example, the soldiers suffering from ‘shell shock’), the reconstruction and front tourism. Someone also specifically argued in favour of telling stories that broke with the long-standing myths (someone wrote: ‘why not, say, tell the story of a Walloon farmer who did not understand his superiors’ orders because he only spoke the dialect of his region?’). It is also suggested that the German perspective should be shown. Furthermore, some respondents mentioned that sufficient attention must be paid to the Belgian front, because: ‘the VRT should
especially show things that other channels ‘cannot’. Make use of our assets: they are all around us.’ One of these respondents, for instance, argued in favour of a focus on ‘the Flemish discrimination at the Yser front, a key element in the Flemish radicalisation’. Someone else remarked that the history of the Great War must not be reduced to a purely West Flemish issue, as ‘Flanders as a whole’ was involved in the war. In addition, this respondent was of the opinion that the history of the First World War in Flanders/Belgium is ‘hardly known’. He also offered some practical tips:

‘Tell history using contemporary images and techniques, not only through a black and white archive! Establish the link with the present. Pay attention to the military story, but also to civilians’ stories (both behind the front and in the occupied territory). And do not limit yourself to the – easy – option of buying primarily British documentaries!’

It is also important, another respondent noted, for there to be sufficient variation, so that some things appeal to a broad audience and others appeal to certain target groups.

2. The second question referring to the media was about concrete ideas or expectations of stakeholders with respect to the role the VRT could play during the remembrance period. Several respondents saw the role of the VRT in the framework of the broader remembrance project as an ‘information platform’. For instance, someone wrote that it could be in charge of the ‘promotion of the events calendar for 2014-2018’. Someone else developed this suggestion in more detail:

‘The VRT must certainly play a role in presenting the WWI theme to the general public from a broad perspective. As the public broadcasting service, the VRT must pay extra attention to this on all platforms (radio, TV, the Internet...) and in a variety of genres (fiction, documentaries, reports...) – via a carefully thought out purchasing policy, but especially via their own productions or co-productions, which are a guarantee of reliability and quality. The VRT archive must be used actively in their own programmes and opened up to other users (museums, schools...). The VRT must fully support relevant initiatives of other organisations and be actively involved by communicating these to a large audience.’

Another respondent referred to the rumours about the VRT wanting to reduce its plans for the centenary of the First World War. He noted that the total package the VRT had planned (interviews, fiction series, documentaries...) was ambitious and that it should now ‘be our joint task to make this project succeed (which is far from obvious at this moment). Before launching new ideas, we must save the existing ones. This alone will be quite a challenge.’

Other respondents gave concrete ideas in their answers for themes the VRT could discuss. For example, someone asked for attention ‘to the way in which the memory of the First World War has been kept alive throughout the decades’; in other words not only the war itself, but also its remembrance. In this framework several questions were relevant:

‘who has kept which story of the Great War alive? And why? And is there also an evolution? Has the growing distance to the First World War led to a different view?’

Other respondents asked that some commemorations, such as the international ceremonies under the Menin Gate, be broadcast live. Once more, there were also respondents who asked for
attention to the events in the Belgian sector of the front or ‘to the less well-known stories and not only the big stories in the Westhoek’.

4.8 Conclusion

The results of the questionnaire among stakeholders and practice experts lead to insights that are interesting in various ways. First of all, it became clear why the participating stakeholders consider it important that our society continues to commemorate the First World War. Respondents quoted several reasons why we should continue to commemorate the war, such as the historical importance and the impact of the conflict, the interesting and relevant contemporary insights the history of the First World War offers with a view to peace-educational projects, the importance of the war for the way in which society has shaped its identity, and the duty to keep honouring and remembering soldiers and civilians who were killed. In addition, there seems to be support among the participating stakeholders and practice experts for the objective of the Government of Flanders of transmitting a contemporary message, in which the idea of peace is prominent. In this framework, some respondents advised caution in order for the war memory not to fall into the trap of becoming an anachronism.

Secondly, the survey shows that there are various opinions on how the (peace) message must be positioned within the complex and diverse remembrance landscape of the First World War. Some respondents criticised other remembrance traditions and argued in favour of a powerful message of peace, while other stakeholders made a plea for the recognition of and respect for the diversity of war commemoration.

Thirdly, it seems that there are two approaches when it comes to the method for commemoration and spreading the idea of peace. An ‘explicit’ approach is in favour of explicitly interweaving the message of peace as a thread through the entire remembrance project, for instance by putting slogans like ‘No more war’ on information panels at sites and in brochures. The other approach opts for a subtle, ‘implicit’ method, in which the telling of stories of common soldiers and citizens who suffered the horror and the impact of the war in their daily lives will almost automatically lead to more general critical reflection on war and peace among visitors, tourists and schoolchildren, and motivate them to work on peace today as well. This implicit approach, which is quite strongly present across the entire survey, fits closely with the local tradition that originated in the Westhoek in the 1970s (see Section 2.3) and with the remembrance logic presented in Section 3.4, which does not see war history as a means but as an impulse for reflection and motivation.

Fourthly, the respondents provided all kinds of concrete ideas on how the focus of the heritage, remembrance projects and events, and educational projects can, in practice, be aimed at the idea of peace. Where educational projects for schools are concerned, respondents suggested, for example, organising international exchanges, opting for ‘active’ forms and techniques that fit in with young people’s worlds and stimulate personal empathy and involvement, and using stories with as much diversity as possible in the projects.

Fifthly, the survey shows the importance of the media – in this case of the VRT – for the Flemish remembrance project. Respondents mention that the VRT could act as an information and com-
munication platform, so that a broad audience can be addressed on the themes that will be discussed during the remembrance period.

Finally, it became clear that there are sensitivities among quite a few stakeholders and practice experts when it comes to the logic of commercialisation and marketing in the context of remembrance tourism. On the other hand, it is also noted that tourism and remembrance can enhance each other if a respectful balance is found between both fields.
Conclusions: war commemoration with a focus on peace

5.1 Tradition and support

The pacifist tradition in the commemoration of the First World War has a long and complex history. During the inter-war period in Belgium, as in France, it was both veteran organisations and political movements which gave an important impetus to the origin of peace-oriented remembrance rituals and memorials. In Flanders the peace oriented remembrance culture of soldiers at the front had a specific interpretation and impact as it was largely institutionalised by the broader Flemish movement, as a result of which the pacifist remembrance narrative within this movement became intertwined with radical Flemish and Christian discourse. However, it was not only the Flemish movement which interpreted war commemoration in a pacifist way. Within the socialist, communist and liberal movements as well, there were groups who saw the horrors of the past war as a reason to associate themselves with the internationalist and pacifist ideas that had developed in the 19th century, but which had come under pressure from patriotism at the start of the war.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, after several decades of relative calm, peace-oriented remembrance of the First World War regained prominence. In the Westhoek a local remembrance culture developed, the approach of which (which is based on war stories and testimonies of common citizens and soldiers at the front) greatly influenced the memory of the First World War in Flanders. Other important actors in the revival of pacifist war remembrance were the different peace movements in Flanders, which have always spread the message ‘No more war’ as the main legacy of the First World War. A peace-minded interpretation of the legacy of the war was also promoted by local and provincial authorities, such as the city of Ypres, which started calling itself ‘city of peace’ and the province of West Flanders, which set up the network ‘War and Peace in the Westhoek’.

The fact that the Flemish Parliament and the Government of Flanders have made the spreading of the idea of peace one of the most important aims of the remembrance project for 2014-2018 fits in with the peace-oriented remembrance tradition of the First World War. The survey carried out in the framework of this investigation shows that most stakeholders and practice experts support this aim. Moreover, research of the Flemish Peace Institute has shown that a large majority of the Flemish people (84%) consider it the duty of the Government to ensure that ‘current and future generations remain informed about the madness and the horror of the war’ – a task the Government can carry out, for example, by setting up educational projects in the framework of the war commemorations. In conclusion, it could therefore be said that a peace-oriented commemoration of the First World War cannot only pride itself on a long tradition, but also that there is ample support for it in Flanders.
5.2 Critical conditions

War remembrance and commemoration are complex phenomena, which are not only characterised by a great diversity of forms and traditions, but inevitably always have a normative and political dimension. Obviously this is also true for peace-oriented commemorations. This finding implies that war commemorations – and, by extension, all remembrance initiatives that are organised, promoted or supported by the authorities – are in fact much more complex than they may seem at first glance. Given the diversity and complexity of commemorations, there are a number of problem areas that require thorough reflection. Those who enter the field of social remembrance without giving it much thought run the risk of encountering all kinds of problems and criticism to which they may not immediately have a ready answer. Therefore, in the second chapter of this report, as a part of our search for the critical conditions under which peace-oriented war commemorations can be normatively and historically justified, we have carried out a more detailed analysis of a number of fundamental questions concerning commemoration policy. In particular, we have taken a closer look at two crucial issues: firstly, the question how we should deal with the diversity of remembrance traditions and, secondly, the relationship between memory and history. In both cases we have suggested approaches that take into account and respect moral and historical sensitivities.

The great diversity and even ambiguity which characterises war commemorations and which – as we have argued – cannot only be understood from a historical perspective, but also in terms of the nature of social memory, raises the question of how war commemorations that want to spread a message of peace should relate to commemoration practices that give history an entirely different meaning. For instance, what position should be taken on rituals and memorials that are characterised by military symbolism? Should the messages and narratives of these remembrance practices be criticised, or should we even attempt to reform such other practices? Or should there continue to be room for different forms of commemoration? In Section 3.2 we have presented a theory of peace which not only focused on the best socio-economic and political-cultural context for peace to thrive, but also gives attention to a ‘culture of peace’, a culture in which an active attitude of respect, the pursuit of mutual understanding, the recognition of diversity and always being prepared to enter into an open dialogue are central. In this context, we have represented peace metaphorically as a negotiation table. Based on this theory we have suggested in this report that, in order to be peaceful, peace-oriented commemorations must recognise the diversity in remembrance traditions. In this light, we have distinguished between peace-oriented commemoration (a commemoration practice which wants to send out a message of peace) and a peaceful remembrance culture (in which there is room for different traditions and forms). Incidentally, such recognition of diversity does not mean that groups cannot spread their own message of peace with conviction, nor that a moral, pedagogical or historical debate on the content and form of certain commemoration practices becomes impossible.

A second matter that has been discussed at length is the relationship between memory and history. This relationship is all but self-evident, which is also clear from the criticism that is regularly expressed by historians and other academics about the current remembrance boom. The critical remarks made by historians about the commemoration policy are fundamental. They should therefore be addressed in any reflection on the conditions under which remembrance initiatives can be historically justified. Actors who are active in the field of war commemoration should therefore take this criticism seriously. For the purposes of this report, we have bundled histori-
ans’ critical remarks into two points of attention. The first is about the risks involved in the normative nature of the commemoration policy, which become apparent, for instance, when, based on a political agenda, an ‘official’ moralising interpretation of the past is prescribed. We have argued that these risks must be recognised and that awareness of these risks should lead to caution. At the same time, we have also stated that this is not the end of the story of the normative character of memory and remembrance. Taking into account the inevitable normative dimension of remembrance practices, the question always arises which normative choices need to be made. Next, we have argued, from a moral point of view, that an open, emancipatory approach based on dialogue, which encourages critical reflection on war and a motivation for peace, is preferred over an approach of the past which contributes to the continuation of physical, structural or symbolic violence. This does not alter the fact that extreme caution is in order. In particular, a second risk pointed out by historians must be taken into account, namely that of an anachronistic, one-sided or manipulative use of history. This risk appears clearly when, in light of a contemporary objective or problem definition, one reaches for the past as a means to approach or solve a current objective or problem. With respect to this problem we have made the distinction between two ‘remembrance logics’, arguing that a motivational logic (which shapes commemorations in such a way that history is a starting point for critical reflection and a motivation for peace) offers a better guarantee for an historically justified way of dealing with the past than a ‘means logic’ (which uses the past as a means to achieve a contemporary objective). Moreover, in this way the normative objective does not precede the interpretation of the past, with all the risks of anachronisms involved, but the moral message of the commemoration rather stems from the way in which as many stories as possible, as diverse as possible, are told about the past.

The distinction between the two remembrance logics is not only interesting with a view to the setting up of concrete remembrance initiatives; it also enables a critical examination of the other objectives of the commemoration project ‘2014-2018: the Great War Centenary’. These objectives – besides the transmitting of the message of peace – also comprise the enhancing of Flanders’ international visibility and the boosting of remembrance tourism. Critical examination of these objectives shows that the necessary caution is in order. While community development, identity strengthening and the promotion of tourism may be valuable results of commemoration projects, care should be taken to ensure that the reasoning is not reversed. Remembrance tourism may thus be an interesting medium for strengthening peaceful remembrance (see also below), but inversely, using the history of war as a means to promote tourism carries risks, such as a one-sided use of the past guided by commercial logic (for instance, there is a risk that organisers will only tell stories that will ‘be successful’ among the public). The same reasoning applies to the objective of increasing Flanders’ international visibility.

Finally, the discussion about the relationship between history and memory is also important for the remembrance project of the Government of Flanders for 2014-2018 in another way, in particular where the role of historians and other academics is concerned. Their role in the commemoration policy must not be underestimated, whether it concerns historians who are rather reluctant when it comes to commitment in the field of remembrance, or historians who do want to commit to ‘public history’. It is the historians who must ensure, based on their scientific expertise, that remembrance projects are historically justified. It is therefore advisable that historians are given a significant role, for instance in guidance or selection committees. In addition, the centenary also offers opportunities to encourage scientific research into the First World War and its aftermath. This is also recognised by the Government of Flanders, which has defined the encouragement of scientific research as one of the objectives of the remembrance project and included it in the ‘International Declaration on Flanders Fields’. Nevertheless, historians have noted that, for
now, it is not clear how this objective will be put into practice and what means will be allocated to it. As, in spite of the large amount of scientific research that has already been done about the First World War, there are still gaps in our knowledge of that war, historians strongly insist on a project which includes a component of fundamental scientific research about the Great War, in addition to the projects which are purely aimed at tourism or commemoration.  

5.3  
Peace-oriented war commemoration in practice  

5.3.1  Commemoration methodology  

There is a considerable expertise and experience in Flanders when it comes to war commemoration, for instance with respect to heritage and remembrance tourism. In the framework of this study we have called on this expertise by means of a written survey. One of the most interesting results from this survey of stakeholders and practice experts refers to the methodology of commemoration, not only when it comes to the method how the commemoration of the First World War can appeal to a broad audience, but also how the focus of remembrance projects can be put on peace. Respondents give preference to war commemorations that are based on the stories and testimonies of common soldiers and people, citizens and children, who experienced the destructive impact of war in their daily lives. These stories, it is argued, do not only, through their concreteness and proximity, increase the public’s involvement, they also encourage a more general critical reflection on war, appreciation of peace and a motivation to work on peace in one’s own time and place. This way of linking war commemoration to the idea of peace is closely related to the local remembrance culture that originated in the Westhoek (see Section 2.3) and fits in with the remembrance logic in which history is seen as a starting point for reflection and as a motivation (and not as a means to achieve a contemporary objective – see Section 3.4).

This method, which we have called ‘implicit’ because it lets the idea of peace grow from the bottom up instead of assigning it to war history beforehand from a contemporary perspective, seems suitable for setting up peace-oriented remembrance projects and initiatives in the framework of the centenary. First of all, it offers a rich spectrum of possibilities to spread the idea of peace based on the history of war. (In section 5.3.2 we will discuss in more detail how this can be done in practice in the different components of the remembrance project.) Secondly, as this method is aimed at telling as many stories as possible, as diversely as possible, about the war, it not only appeals to a broad audience, but it also considerably reduces the risk of a one-sided or manipulative approach of the war past. Even so, a few remarks need to be made about this method, which can be points for attention when developing projects. There is a risk that projects which focus too much on personal and everyday stories of soldiers and citizens neglect the larger historical framework and the structural mechanisms and dynamics that are at the basis of wars. This could lead, for instance, to remembrance projects that pay too much attention to the consequences of the war (the suffering of soldiers and citizens) and too little to its causes. However, this attention to broader historical processes and mechanisms is essential to a critical
reflection on war and peace. This point of attention is relevant especially with respect to educational projects for schools, because it cannot be assumed that knowledge about the First World War is readily available to all young people. The theory of peace, which we have presented in Section 3.2, can be useful here. Firstly, this theory looks into the causes of peace and examines in which socio-economic and political-cultural context peace (as the absence of violence) can best flourish. In this respect, one may, for example, point to the importance of democracy, a fair socio-economic world order, opposition to arms races and the promotion of disarmament. Secondly, the theory refers to the importance of a culture of peace, that is, a culture in which the absence of violence is advanced by an active attitude of respect, the pursuit of mutual understanding, the recognition of differences and diversity in opinions and attitudes, and always being prepared for open dialogue.

In conclusion, we could therefore say that remembrance projects should not only be aimed at empathy with personal stories, but also put the focus on transmitting knowledge of and insight into the broader historical framework. In addition, remembrance practices which are only aimed at the experience of and empathy with war stories often run the risk of confirming popular and commonplace (but possibly historically inaccurate) knowledge rather than offering insight with a historical basis into the war. In other words, we shall always need to find a balance between knowledge and empathy.

In its search, the Committee has proposed, for instance, that good remembrance-educational projects should pay attention to three dimensions: knowledge and insight, involvement and empathy and, finally, reflection and action (in one’s own time and living environment).

5.3.2 The different components of the remembrance project

The results of the survey of stakeholders and practice experts offer a number of concrete ideas on how the notion of peace can be expressed in the different components of the Flemish remembrance project. The survey shows that this varies from one component to another. In this section we will not only look at how the commemoration can be linked to the idea of peace in practice in the different components of the project, but also what the specific points of attention and problems are.

The international component

The international sphere is the ideal context within which to look for a balance between the transmission of a peace message, on the one hand, and respect for and recognition of the diversity of remembrance traditions, on the other. As has been indicated repeatedly in this report, there are significant differences in the ways in which the First World War is commemorated. In Flanders and Belgium there is a strong tradition of seeing the idea of peace as the most important legacy of the war. In countries such as New Zealand and Ireland initiatives have also been set up to place the memory of the war in the context of a contemporary message of peace. In France, the commemoration of the First World War has been given meaning for several decades now in
the context of the French-German reconciliation, representing the war as a shared past that is at the basis of the European identity. Some authors even describe this process in terms of the creation of a ‘post-national’ memory and the beginning of remembrance in a European framework. However, by no means all countries participate in this kind of discourse. The classic mainstream in the British and Canadian remembrance traditions, for instance, views the war from a different perspective. In these traditions, the First World War is seen as a ‘just’ war, which had to be fought in order to protect freedom and enforce peace. Commemoration is therefore aimed at remembering and honouring those who were killed for this noble cause. Moreover, the commemoration is brought up to date in a different way than in the pacifist commemoration. British commemorations, for instance, regularly include tributes to British soldiers killed in contemporary conflicts. In this framework, linking war commemoration to pacifist activism is perceived as inappropriate.

In this report we have also asked how we can deal with this diversity. The survey has made clear that stakeholders perceive of two approaches to this problem. A first group criticises certain forms of commemoration, while a second group thinks this diversity must be respected. The latter group is of the opinion that – especially in joint international ceremonies – other traditions should be given the opportunity to commemorate the war in their own way. At the same time, respondents are aware that this will require a lot of tact and willingness to compromise. Two respondents also point out that the diversity in forms of commemoration is an interesting educational starting point, because it can act as a symbol for an exercise in dealing with diversity. These last observations fit in with the conclusions of the conceptual part of this report. There, it was argued that peace-oriented commemorations should not only convey a message of peace, but also strive for a peaceful remembrance culture, which implies that differences in remembrance traditions are recognised.

Concretely, in the international component of the remembrance project the Flemish government shall continually need to look for a balance between transmitting its own message of peace and cooperating with other partners, who assign a different meaning to the commemoration. This is an exercise in diplomacy, which could in itself also be a symbol for a peace-oriented approach of commemoration. This does not only apply to the organisation of joint formal ceremonies. In the survey the respondents also give a number of concrete suggestions for other forms of cooperation, in which the exchange of ideas and experiences is central. In particular, respondents mention cooperation with German organisations and authorities and international exchange programmes for students.

Heritage, remembrance events and ceremonies

Architectural heritage

After the disappearance of living memory, the architectural heritage (cemeteries, memorials and landscapes) remains as the last witness of the First World War. Therefore, the architectural heritage plays a crucial role in passing on the memory of that war. Contemporary visitors, who experience a gap between their knowledge of the war and that of direct eyewitnesses, make use of the material remains of that war, such as sites and objects, to bridge that gap, and to ‘experience the reality of the war’. For the new generations, who cannot call on direct eyewitnesses and survivors, the architectural heritage, as a material and emotional witness, plays an important role in passing on the memory of the First World War.
The architectural heritage must therefore occupy centre stage in the remembrance project of the Government of Flanders. Moreover, the economic importance of this architectural heritage, which attracts large numbers of visitors and tourists, is not insignificant. Hence, in recent years the authorities have made great efforts to valorise the war heritage. Inventories have been drawn up, monuments and memorials have been restored, and new visitor centres have been built at the sites. In this way, one of the objectives of the remembrance project, boosting remembrance tourism, has been achieved. In this report we have asked the question how the architectural heritage can be linked to the theme of peace. This is not self-evident since we are referring to existing sites and memorials, which were built in a specific historical and socio-political context, and are therefore characterised by a great diversity in messages and meanings, which is an inevitable aspect of war commemoration. The form, language and symbolism of the existing heritage cannot be changed in the twinkling of an eye, even if they sometimes express anything but peaceful messages. Not only is this heritage often protected, monuments and sites also have an historical meaning which cannot just be ‘rewritten’. This raises the question how the architectural heritage can be linked relevantly to a message of peace – in other words, which methods and media can be used for this. In the survey we consulted stakeholders and practice experts on this matter. In particular, we asked them whether they had concrete ideas on how the architectural heritage could be linked to the peace theme, for instance at visitor centres, on information panels and in tourist brochures.

Two approaches, which we have already discussed in the section on commemoration methodology, can be derived from the answers. A first approach, which we have called ‘explicit’, advocates bringing the theme of peace into the foreground at these sites, especially by writing the slogan ‘No more war’ on information panels and in brochures. In this framework, attention is drawn to the importance of advice for guides and local heritage volunteers, who in their tours must not only provide information on the historical context of the heritage, but also be able to give it a broader meaning, especially by explicitly mentioning the peace theme. A second view, which is strongly represented among the respondents (especially if we link the answers to this question to their answers to other questions), advocates a more subtle, ‘implicit’ approach. This implies that soldiers’ and civilians’ personal stories and testimonies about the war are told at war sites and monuments. This can take place not only at visitor centres, on information panels, in brochures and during guided tours, but also in the selection of photographs and visual materials for information panels and brochures (where photographs that show the lives of citizens and soldiers – of diverse social and cultural backgrounds – can be selected instead of only images showing military aspects of the war). The reasoning behind this implicit approach is that through these stories and testimonies visitors are confronted with the brutal reality of the war and are thus encouraged to reflect on the value of peace. Finally, where the architectural heritage is concerned, it is relevant to make a distinction between heritage that has already been valorised and heritage that has yet to be included in the inventory, opened up and possibly protected. If choices need to be made between sites when it comes to opening up and protection, it could be argued that those sites should be selected where stories can be told which go further than the purely technical and military and show the impact of the war on the lives of soldiers at the front and civilians.

It is clear that the architectural heritage should be treated with care. As one respondent expressed it: ‘the architectural heritage is what it is’, and it ‘cannot and must not be adapted’. What is especially important is that visitors are encouraged to ‘read’ and interpret the heritage, so that they understand what message is conveyed by a monument or memorial. This can then
spur them to critical reflection on the meaning of war and peace. Additionally, visitor centres, information panels and brochures obviously offer the possibility of telling stories which not only help to interpret the monument in its historical context, but also show the reality of the war and its impact on citizens and soldiers, so that the heroism that characterises many war memorials is not repeated in their interpretation and explanation.

**Cultural heritage and events**

Besides the architectural heritage, which is relatively more concentrated in the Westhoek than in the rest of the country, there is also quite an extensive cultural heritage of the First World War, such as archives, photographs and film material, music, literature and eyewitness reports in Flanders and Belgium. Based on this cultural heritage, a large number of remembrance projects and events will be set up during the remembrance period, some aimed at a local and others aimed at an international audience. Possible themes that can be treated in these projects are the refugee flows caused by the war, daily life in occupied Belgium, the organisation of food and medical help, the German Flamenpolitik and the origins of activism, reconstruction and remembrance once the war was over. In the framework of the cultural heritage and remembrance projects and events we also asked about their broader meaning.

Remembrance projects and events can be set up with the intention of providing the public mainly with historical insight into the First World War. This type of project is not only legitimate and relevant, but the cultural heritage is an ideal field in which scientific historiography and public memory can come into close contact. However, in light of the objective of the Government of Flanders to spread the idea of peace, in this study we have also asked the question how heritage projects and events can be linked to the peace theme. In the survey, we asked respondents what kind of projects and events are most suitable to let visitors and participants not only remember but also reflect on war and peace from a critical and contemporary perspective. In their answers, respondents once again referred to the idea that it is best to work with concrete, personal stories of citizens and soldiers from diverse backgrounds and from both sides. According to the respondents, projects that use this perspective not only show the reality of the war in an understandable, recognisable and tangible way, thus enhancing audience perception, but they also encourage deeper reflection. Respondents further emphasised the importance of art and culture. The many works of art made during and immediately after the First World War offer countless opportunities to set up exhibitions, concerts, theatrical performances and lectures which enable the public to experience the war in an emotional and human way. Based on these, they are then encouraged to reflect in a more general way on war, death, suffering and peace. In addition, this kind of projects offers opportunities to transcend old ways of thinking based on a ‘them and us’ perspective, by setting up a dialogue between allied, German and colonial artists, composers and writers.

Remembrance events which are regularly criticised are re-enactments, during which historical events from the First World War are re-presented or re-enacted, usually at the place where they originally took place, by participants in military uniforms. Although many visitors like re-enactment, not only as a way to familiarise themselves in a tangible way with war history, but also as a tribute to soldiers who fought at the front, re-enactors are often criticised. This criticism is also present in the survey. Some respondents were sceptical about re-enactment, which, according to them, sometimes took the form of ‘playing soldier’ which will never be able to really give an idea of life in the trenches and the suffering soldiers endured at the front. What is more, they fear that re-enactment will create a false image of the war, wronging the soldiers who suffered in the trenches. In some re-enactment projects the boundaries between commemoration, an interest in history and a fascination for military culture do indeed seem to be blurring, but this is not neces-
sarily true for all forms of re-enactment. In any case, the discussion on this phenomenon is not about to be closed.

**Ceremonies**

Although remembrance initiatives and projects have in recent decades been increasingly characterised by a great diversity of forms, formal and official ceremonies continue to play a special role in the commemoration of the First World War. Each year on 11 November Armistice Day is celebrated in many cities and municipalities. Traditional rituals and symbols still play an important part in these celebrations. In recent years, the question has been raised by town councils and educational organisations, among others, whether these ceremonies should not be revised. It is argued that formal ceremonies are outdated and no longer appeal to a broad and young audience. Sometimes there is also criticism that the military elements in commemorations conflict with the idea of peace which people want to link to them. The survey results show that the participating stakeholders had different visions of a possible modernisation of the traditional symbolism of Armistice Day ceremonies. These visions show that there are two options when it comes to these ceremonies. A first option is to translate the ceremonies to a contemporary context, by making even more efforts to involve young people, letting art play a more central role, and incorporating a contemporary message of peace into the ceremonies in a more explicit way. The second option is largely to maintain the traditional forms, given that the ceremonies still fulfil a need. Moreover, the traditional role of veteran associations and servicemen must be respected. According to this option, big changes and efforts to reach a broad, young and diverse audience can take place in other forms of commemoration, as the field of commemoration is much more than formal ceremonies alone. In light of the critical conditions we have indicated above, in particular the idea that diversity in forms and traditions of remembrance should be recognised, the second option can be advocated. This does not exclude a certain measure of revision of formal ceremonies, as long as such a renewal takes into account the balance between old and new elements. In other words, these ceremonies are not condemned to a standstill, but can evolve in future in accordance with the changing social context.

**Remembrance tourism**

Battlefield tourism is not a new phenomenon. The first tourists appeared in the front area while the war was still in full swing. After the end of the war visitor flows to France and Flanders to visit the battlefields increased. Both veterans and surviving relatives who, like pilgrims, wanted to honour those killed and tourists who wanted to see the theatre of war with their own eyes travelled to the former battlefields. After the Second World War the number of travellers to the front dropped significantly for several decades, but since the 1980s front tourism has become bigger. For instance, in 2007 over 350,000 tourists visited the Westhoek. This shows that the economic importance of remembrance tourism is considerable. This is also apparent from the investment policy of the Government of Flanders with a view to the remembrance period 2014-2018. However, as we have indicated in this report, the relationship between tourism and memory is not entirely unproblematic. Although tourism offers opportunities and possibilities for passing on the memory of war, it also involves risks and dangers. Generally speaking, two kinds of risks can be distinguished. Firstly, the absence of commitment which is often associated with ‘tourists’ (and which may conflict with the social value of the war past and its commemoration) and, secondly, the commercial logic (which is often linked to tourism as an economic activity and may be at odds with the serenity and respect the remembrance of those who were killed requires). In order to understand the possibilities remembrance tourism offers, insight into these risks is essential.
What exactly is meant by the ‘absence of commitment’ of tourism can be understood from the stereotypical image of the tourist who travels around in unfamiliar regions (which, due to the short duration of his stay, will remain unfamiliar), who observes local culture in an uninvolved, detached way (the ‘tourist’s gaze’), and who shapes his memories mainly by means of souvenirs he buys along the way. If this image were also true for tourists visiting the former front areas, this would give rise to a number of problems. Not only does the ‘absence of commitment’ imply a possible lack of respect for the suffering that is commemorated at the sites, it could also mean that tourists remain deaf to the social messages commemorations want to transmit. However, a number of studies on First World War tourism have shown that the image of the uninvolved tourist must be corrected. For instance, Jennifer Illes and Anthony Seaton state that remembrance tourism is a multifaceted practice which involves much more than ‘gazing’. From their research they conclude that tourists who visit the battlefields in France and Flanders do not just want to see a few sites, but primarily look for identification and empathy with the symbolical meaning of remembrance sites. In other words, visitors of remembrance sites actively look for the meaning of these sites. Caroline Winter states that tourists also play a role in the (re)production and passing on of the memory of the war. Because they take part in remembrance rituals and visit cemeteries, tourists play an important part in the continuation of the collective memory of the war. Of course, the question remains which meaning exactly tourists assign to the remembrance sites they visit. The little research that has been done into this matter suggests that, here as well, there is a diversity of messages and meanings which – as we have already repeatedly pointed out in this report – characterises all war commemoration. This implies that some visitors identify themselves with the patriotic martyrdom symbolism contained in many memorials or experience a nostalgic connection with a (national) sense of community which is perceived as having disappeared, while for other visitors the central meaning of the battlefields can be found in the absurdity of the war and the importance of peace. Nevertheless, further and deeper study is required in order systematically to map the meaning tourists give to the commemorations and draw up profiles.

A second risk to the serenity of war commemoration is the commercial and economic logic that is characteristic of current tourism. According to some observers and practice experts, a trend towards commercialisation is also becoming visible in the field of public memory. For instance, Gilles Lipovetsky is of the opinion that market thinking is increasingly dominating the field of heritage and remembrance, while T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper remark that ‘cultural entrepreneurs of the global free market’ play an increasingly significant role in what they call the ‘battle over memory’. The increasing impact of commercial logic poses a few specific dangers to the commemoration of the First World War. For instance, the pressure on ‘sensitive’ sites, such as cemeteries, could increase if visitor flows exceed the capacity of the site (which is not only infrastructural but also psychological). A second danger is that commercial interests may end up dictating which war stories are told and which are not. This could create a temptation to stick to ‘easy’ stories which guarantee success among a large audience, while ‘more difficult’, ‘thorny’ or ‘problematic’ aspects of the war risk being ignored. (In Section 5.2 we also mentioned this problem. There, we warned against the danger of a one-sided approach of history if the past is used as a means to boost remembrance tourism without giving it much thought. Of course, setting up a commemoration aimed at a broad audience may result in a boost for tourism – where both quality and quantity are concerned.) The survey shows that there are also concerns among the participating stakeholders and practice experts about an excessive impact of commercial logic. For instance, there are respondents who consider a term like ‘marketing’ inappropriate in the context of remembrance. On the other hand, there are also respondents who are of the opinion that a respectful balance is possible between the requirements of
remembrance and those of tourism. In any case, it can be concluded that respondents are fairly unanimous in asking tourism to pay attention to the ethical framework in which war commemoration takes place.

In fact, the government organisations that are in charge of the coordination of remembrance tourism in Flanders have recognised the risks of over-commercialisation for some time. That is why the concept of ‘tourism+’ has been developed. This concept implies that WWI-tourism entails more than merely making accessible and marketing the heritage to the public; attention must also be paid to the ethical framework in order to encourage reflection as well as spread a contemporary message (such as ‘No more war’). At the same time the positive influence of tourism on the heritage and remembrance is emphasised. For instance, tourism increases interest and the support necessary to preserve and open up the heritage.

Hence, both the authorities and the stakeholders look for a respectful balance between remembrance and tourism. Practice in the coming years will have to show whether this balance can be found and achieved.

Education and youth

Education is an important component in the remembrance project of the Government of Flanders. The idea is to set up all kinds of educational projects and packages for all levels and forms of education on occasion of the centenary of the First World War. This fits in with the efforts that have been made over the past few years to promote remembrance and peace education in Flemish schools. For the centenary of the Great War use will be made of the expertise developed in recent years. For instance, the Special Committee for Remembrance Education will play an important part in the remembrance project. Among other things, the Committee is preparing a text explaining its vision of high-quality remembrance education which defines remembrance education as ‘working towards an attitude of active respect in the current society based on the collective memory of human suffering caused by human activities such as war, intolerance or exploitation and which must not be forgotten’ At the provincial level too, efforts are being made to build up expertise in the field of remembrance and peace education. For example, ‘learning from the war’ is one of the central policy themes of the West Flemish provincial network ‘War and Peace in the Westhoek’, which aims at setting up educational projects that transmit a message of peace. The network uses its own definition of remembrance education and peace education, considering the former a step in the process towards the latter, which is the ultimate goal. In particular, the network assumes that remembrance education ‘starts from the history of the First World War, on the one hand from real human stories (tested against historical criticism), and on the other hand from sites and museums in the Westhoek, establishing links with concepts such as ‘war’ and ‘peace’ in order to place contemporary conflicts (and their solution) in an interpretable context. What happened during the four years of war in this region is taught along with how people, inhabitants of the region, politicians and visitors have dealt with the consequences since the end of the war, until today. In this way, a connection is established between the past and the present, enabling us to give meaning to the past in a contemporary, critical fashion.

Peace education is then defined as providing ‘insight, knowledge, skills and attitudes [...] with which one can actively collaborate in building a peaceful society’. Furthermore, the network has made a list of quality criteria for educational projects. In the meantime, the Flemish Peace
In the discussions on the place of war memory in education a number of themes recur frequently. For instance, a common question concerns how helpful it is to use certain (often traumatic) episodes from the past to draw lessons for the present, and to let these historical events serve as a ‘moral compass’ for the choices of today. This approach, which assigns a high contemporary moral and political value to the past, has been criticised by historians. According to them, this approach easily leads to a one-sided, manipulative and moralising reading of the past. In Section 3.4 we therefore argued in favour of educational projects that do not use the past as a means to achieve a current objective, but as a motivation for critical reflection and peace. This motivational logic starts from the past itself, about which as many stories as possible, as diverse as possible, are told. The reflection spurred by these stories can take different shapes. A comparison of past and present can help interpret differences between then and now, but it can also uncover structural mechanisms and processes that offer insight into both the past and the present. Obviously, such comparative reflection – especially if it presents the past as an ‘example’ for the present – must take place with the necessary caution and sense of historical criticism. In the words of Tzvetan Todorov, we can say that there is indeed ‘a danger that the exemplary approach is watered down by a universal analogy, where all cats are grey’. Therefore, Todorov advocates limiting generalisations: these must not make the historical facts themselves disappear, but serve to interconnect events and enable comparisons which allow us to interpret similarities and differences. Specifically, although extreme events from the past, such as the First World War, may be hard to compare with what is going on in contemporary society, this does not mean that no connections can be discovered. Indeed: ‘the extreme is present in the everyday in the form of a seed. Even so, we must always distinguish between the seed and the fruit.’

The survey of stakeholders and practice experts resulted in a number of concrete ideas on the type of educational projects and specific forms and techniques which, according to the respondents, are successful in encouraging pupils to reflect critically on war and peace. Among other things, respondents emphasised the importance of active forms, such as exchange programmes (e.g. between Flemish and German pupils), site visits and creative tasks. They stressed that projects should be adapted to young people’s worlds by using multimedia techniques and they stated that projects must create personal involvement and empathy. Projects also needed to reach a socially and culturally diverse audience of young people.

Despite the great importance respondents clearly attach to the educational component of the remembrance project, it can also be concluded from the survey that there is still a lack of expertise in certain specific educational matters. This is true, in particular, for the question of how educational projects can achieve a balance between transferring knowledge and stimulating empathy. As we have indicated above (5.3.1), empathy, for example with the personal stories of soldiers at the front and citizens, plays an important role, but insight into the greater historical framework must not be neglected. We therefore concluded that when developing educational remembrance projects we constantly need to look for a balance between knowledge and empathy. For example, it seems advisable to develop projects which are both prepared in the classroom and take place at remembrance sites (cemeteries, monuments, war museums), which make use of different methods and sources, such as eyewitness reports and visual materials and which work with both knowledge transfer and creative assignments which stimulate empathy and reflection. The fact that this aspect deserves further and deeper reflection is also recognised by the Special Committee for Remembrance Education, which has taken a leading role in this
matter and, among other things, is preparing a touchstone document containing guidelines for high-quality remembrance education. In these guidelines, the balance between knowledge and insight, involvement and empathy and, finally, reflection and action (in one’s own time and living environment) is central.159

Media
As has become clear from the historical introduction to this report, war commemorations are anything but a static phenomenon since the forms, meanings and messages of the commemoration of the First World War have changed substantially throughout the decades. This is also true for the channels through which the memory of the war is passed on. Whereas ceremonies and memorials used to play a central role, the importance of other channels, such as tourism and museums, has steadily increased. The media – the printed press, the audiovisual media and the new media – also play an increasingly important role in the passing on of war memory. The image people have of the First World War is largely defined by press articles, documentaries, films, drama series and websites about the war. A few years ago, the importance of the media for remembrance projects was also recognised by the VRT. Bearing in mind the centenary of the First World War the public broadcasting service has set up a project that includes, among other things, a series of fiction, documentaries and live broadcasts of remembrance ceremonies. What the project will look like exactly in 2014-2018 is still uncertain due to economy measures which may also have an impact on the project.

In any case, it is clear that the audiovisual media will play an important role in 2014-2018. Many Flemish people will learn about the remembrance project, or about specific projects or initiatives, through television and radio. To a significant extent, the social scope of the commemoration will be determined by the manner in which the media act as an information platform. This is also confirmed by the results of the survey. According to the stakeholders and practice experts, the public broadcasting service has an important social role. The VRT could be the pivot of the broader communication of the project and increase cohesion between the different initiatives and events. Moreover, the fiction series about the First World War will probably bring about a wave of interest among the general public, thus drawing attention to other, smaller-scale remembrance projects and initiatives. Additionally, the VRT can provide historical information through documentaries and reports. These can not only illustrate the broader historical framework and map the impact of the war on everyday life, they can also take a look at less-discussed aspects of the war.

5.4 The authorities’ commitment to commemoration

With the versatile remembrance project ‘The Great War Centenary’ the Government of Flanders has made a considerable commitment in the field of collective memory. At the very beginning of this report, we pointed out that this commitment is not self-evident, not even if the Government is in fact answering a social need or if it wants to spread a socially relevant message during the commemoration. Not only does the question arise how one of the central objectives of the project – spreading the idea of peace – can be put into practice, we have also asked for attention to be paid to a number of tricky normative and historical questions. This study was intended to
analyse these issues more closely, with the ultimate aim of making suggestions about the way in which the Government of Flanders can shape its commemoration policy in a normatively and historically well-considered way. Without entering into detail again about the critical conditions and the methodology of commemoration (which have been discussed at length in Chapter 3 and in Sections 5.2 and 5.3), it can be concluded that the authorities, in their commemoration commitment for 2014-2018, should, first of all, respect the diversity of traditions and forms of remembrance and, secondly, pay the necessary attention to historical accuracy, nuance, context-sensitivity and openness in order to avoid a one-sided approach of the past. Where the practice of a peace-oriented commemoration is concerned, this report has presented a series of concrete ideas based on a survey of stakeholders and practice experts.

Now, how can the Government of Flanders give shape to a peace-oriented commemoration policy? In conclusion to this report, we suggest three steps. First, the Government can draw up a vision document in which it explains the premises, priorities and objectives of its remembrance philosophy. In this report we have tried to indicate the priorities and objectives and the conditions of such a remembrance philosophy, as well as provide concrete ideas on how this philosophy can be put into practice. This vision document can then be translated into different forms of communication (on its own website, in brochures, policy notes) and be disseminated among the public by the political leaders (e.g. in speeches and interviews). Secondly, this remembrance philosophy needs to be implemented, wherever possible and insofar as this falls under the competences and radius of operation of the Government of Flanders. This can be done, for instance, by means of subsidies allocated to remembrance projects by the Government, but it can also – not unimportantly – be about looking for collaboration with other actors, not only in Flanders, but also within the Belgian federation and in the international domain. In the broader field of remembrance, which obviously reaches much further than the radius of operation of the Government of Flanders, the Government can spread its own remembrance philosophy in an open, respectful manner based on dialogue and increase awareness among other actors at the Flemish, the Belgian and the international level about the way in which it wants to commemorate the First World War.

This way, the centenary of the First World War is an excellent opportunity not only serenely to commemorate the tragedy which has defined the course of world history until today, but also convincingly to spread the idea of peace by telling stories about the brutal impact of the war on the lives of citizens and soldiers and by reminding people of the structures and mechanisms that made the war possible.
End Notes


2. See, for example, the manifesto ‘Geschiedenis is meer dan herinneren’ (‘History is more than remembering’), written by 151 Belgian historians and published in De Standaard on 25 January 2006. In Section 3.3 we will discuss the criticism from historians in more detail.

3. We shall take a detailed look at this complexity and its impact in Chapter 3.


13. For the standard work about Belgium during the First World War, see De Schaepdrijver, S. (1999), De Groote Oorlog. Het Koninkrijk België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog, Amsterdam: Olympus.


17. Meire, J (2003), De stilte van de Salient, p. 202 (see also the visitor’s centre of Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke).


25. In 1921, this commitment even led to the fall of the government. After the Minister of Public Works, Edward Anseele, had participated in a demonstration by the Socialist Young Guard in which a banner bearing the broken gun was carried around, his resignation was demanded and subsequently all socialist ministers resigned from office (Vermandere, M. (2001), ‘Door gelijke drang bewogen? De socialistische partij en haar jeugdbeweging, 1886-1944’, Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis, no. 8, p. 231).


This paragraph relies heavily on Meire, J. (2003), *De stilte van de Salient*, p. 239-247.


Cited in J. Meire (2003), *De stilte van de Salient*, p. 277 (author’s translation).


Cited in J. Meire (2003), *De stilte van de Salient*, p. 262 (author’s translation).


Verbal communication with Jan Breyne, Brussels, 20 May 2011.

See [www.vredesprijs-ieper.be](http://www.vredesprijs-ieper.be).

War and Peace in Flanders Fields, *Policy memorandum 2008-2013* (Westhoek and province of West-Flanders), p. 4-5.


Decree of 6 July 2011 concerning the recognition of and the grant scheme for the Memorial of Flemish Emancipation and Peace.


In continuation of the initiative of the Irish Peace Tower, in September 2001 a peace school was opened in Messines; it brings together youth from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to build bridges between the two communities. (Meire, J. (2003), *De stilte van de Salient*, p. 286-287). See also [www.peacevillage.be](http://www.peacevillage.be).

Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.


Notwithstanding his emphasis on the social character of memory, Halfwachs himself always clung to the individual basis of collective memory, implying that when the last survivors, the last witnesses of a particular event disappear, the memory of this event also disappears beyond the horizon of collective memory, becoming instead history (Halfwachs, M. (1991), *Het collectief geheugen*, Leuven: Acco, p. 29). Some scholars concur. Daniel Todman, for example, poses the question: “Does it make sense to talk about what a society ‘remembers’, when there is no physical location for those memories except the brains of individuals?” (Todman, D. (2009), “The Nineteenth Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme”, p. 26-26). According to these authors, it is therefore better not to refer to (collective) memory but rather to contemporary ‘perceptions’ of the past when there is no direct experiential link with that past, instead preferring the terms remembrance and commemoration. In Dutch, however, this is more difficult, because there is no adequate word distinguishing between ‘memory’ and ‘remembrance’. Other authors, such as Jeffrey Olick, follow the same path as this...
Avoid keeping them locked there.” (Brewer, J.D. (2010), Peace Processes. A Sociological Approach)

In the Westhoek region is offered in F. Migneaut, I. la O’ and M. Van Alstein (2010), War commemoration reconsidered, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, p. 26-30.


See www.taibothouse.be/en/
and World Politics”, in: D. Bell (ed.), Memory, Trauma and World Politics, p. 20). Bleiker and Hoang emphasise in this connection the importance of an “ethics of difference”. They suggest that “a more tolerant and peaceful future can be constructed only once the notion of a single historical narrative gives way to multiple visions of the past and the future. [...] Recognising the existence of historical differences is a crucial element in the effort to promote a culture of reconciliation. Ricoeur stresses that by ‘acknowledging that the history of an event involves a conflict of several interpretations and memories, we in turn open up the future’. Promoting and protecting such an ethics of difference is an ongoing and inevitably incomplete process.” (Bleiker, R. & Hoang, Y-J. (2006), “Remembering and Forgetting the Korean War: From Trauma to Reconciliation”, in: D. Bell (ed.), Memory, Trauma and World Politics, p. 205-212). See also Berber Bevernage, who raises the question whether the pursuit of truth commissions like in South Africa and Sierra Leone to pacify the past and bring about national unity does not come at the price of remembrance and justice (Bevernage, B. (2011), Geschiedenis en herinnering aan gewelddadig conflict. Over het onomkeerbare, het onherroepelijke en de productie van ‘afstand’, in: Vlaams Marxistisch Tijdschrift, 45(2), p. 54-65.


79 In their critical assessment historians, like non-scientific remembrance agents, do not have an objective (positivist) access to the past, but they are strictly bound to intersubjective rules (see e.g. Lorenz, C. (1998), “Can Histories be True? Narrativism, Positivism, and the ‘Metaphorical Turn’”, in: History and Theory 37(3), p. 309-329).

80 Geschiedenis is meer dan herinneren, De Standaard, 25 January 2006.


88 Geert Castryck, telephone conversation, 23 June 2011.


94 See also Duncan Bell who – concerning the study of international affairs – argues in favour of finding a balance between empirical and ethical questions in the study of remembrance and collective memory (Bell, D. (2006), “Introduction: Memory, Trauma and World Politics”, in D. Bell (ed.), Memory, Trauma and World Politics, p. 24).


97 Castryck, G. (2009), Remembrance education in Flanders, p. 21.

98 The structured questionnaire was drawn up by the Peace Institute in consultation with the Project Office for the Great War Centenary. The survey was carried out through the online survey system Monkeysurvey (www.monkeysurvey.com) in the months of June and July 2011. 51 organisations and people were invited to participate in the survey. 28 of them did. The following people and organisations were invited to participate: the Agency of Arts and Heritage, the Agency of Spatial Planning and Heritage; the Department of Education and Training; the Special Committee for Remembrance Education; GOI Education of the Flemish Community; the Education Secretariat of the Cities and Municipalities of the
The question was: ‘For a few years, the Government of Flanders has been working on a large-scale project called ‘The Great War Centenary (2014-18)’. In various areas, such as international relations, heritage valorisation and educational projects, the preparations have now started. In 2014-2018 the First World War will, without a doubt, occupy a prominent place in the media and the public space. Do you think it is important for us, as a society, to keep commemorating the Great War Centenary (2014-18)’, in various areas, such as international relations, heritage valorisation and educational projects, the preparations have now started. In 2014-2018 the First World War will, without a doubt, occupy a prominent place in the media and the public space. Do you think it is important for us, as a society, to keep commemorating the First World War? Please motivate your answer.’

The question was: ‘In all of Flanders, especially in the Westhoek, a lot of architectural heritage from the First World War – which celebrates the victory of one people over the other – often still occupy a prominent position, for instance in the Westhoek. Al-though these three currents have certain things in common, there are also significant differences between them, which leads to a remembrance landscape that can be complex at times. This complexity also means that war commemoration events do not always transmit a uniform message of peace and reconciliation. Military symbols and a patriotic discourse – which celebrates the victory of one people over the other – often still occupy a prominent position, for instance in inscriptions on monuments. Do you think that the different ways in which countries commemorate the First World War will have an influence on the Flemish remembrance project, for instance where the joint organisation of ceremonies is concerned? Please motivate your answer.’


has been preserved. Do you have any concrete ideas on how this heritage can be linked to the peace theme (for instance at visitor centres at war sites, on information panels, and in tourist brochures)?

The questions were: ‘In 2014-2018 a large number of projects will be set up based on this cultural heritage in the framework of the commemoration. What kind of projects do you think are most suitable to encourage visitors and participants to critical reflection on war and peace? Please motivate your answer.’ and ‘What kind of events do you think are most suitable to let visitors and participants not only remember but also reflect on war and peace from a contemporary perspective? Please motivate your answer and distinguish between top events that attract an international audience and local events.’


The question was: ‘Special cases are the martyr cities, such as Leuven, Aarschot and Dendermonde, where the German army engaged in terrible actions against the civilian population in the summer of 1914. There, monuments and memorials are sometimes characterised by anti-German symbolism and rhetoric. How can local organisers handle this?’

The questions were: ‘Is there a need for a renewal of the Armistice Day ceremonies and an adaptation of the traditional symbolism?’ and ‘Do you have any concrete ideas on how these ceremonies could appeal to a young, broad and culturally diverse audience in future?’ The answers to these questions are discussed together in the analysis.


The question was: ‘The different remembrance sites and commemorative activities will attract large numbers of visitors and tourists during the remembrance period 2014-2018. Considerable efforts will also be made to valorise and market the war heritage with a view to tourism. Are there any specific sensitivities connected to war memory and commemoration to critical reflection on war and peace?’ The answers to these questions are discussed together in the analysis.


The question was: ‘The remembrance ceremony sites and commemorative activities will attract large numbers of visitors and tourists during the remembrance period 2014-2018. Considerable efforts will also be made to valorise and market the war heritage with a view to tourism. Are there any specific sensitivities connected to war memory and commemoration to critical reflection on war and peace?’ This question was one of the questions in the questionnaire referring to heritage.


The question was: ‘The Flemish government is going to work out a strategy for the marketing and promotion of the commemoration with a view to tourism. What role should a peace message play in the setting up of promotional campaigns for different foreign markets?’

See also F. Migneault, I. la O’ and M. Van Alstine (2010), War Commemoration Reconsidered, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.

The Special Committee for Remembrance Education was established at the request of the Flemish Minister of Education to coordinate remembrance education within the Flemish educational system. The priorities of the Committee are the dialogue between suppliers, the development of quality criteria and the mapping of the offer. Members of this Committee include representatives of the Ministry of Education, the pedagogical guidance services of the four Flemish educational umbrella organisations and persons in charge of pedagogical matters at a few representative institutions that work in the field of remembrance education in Belgium (vzw Kazerne Dossin, the Auschwitz Foundation, Fort Breendonk, the Veterans’ Institute, Jeugd & Vrede vzw, the In Flanders Fields Museum and the network ‘War and Peace in the Westhoek’). See www.herinneringseducatie.be/IS/tabid/93/Default.aspx.

Project office ‘Centenary of the Great War in Flanders’ (s.d.), The Great War Centenary (brochure), p. 45.

The two separate questions, the answers to which were combined in the discussion, were: ‘Can you give examples of educational remembrance projects that are successful at encouraging pupils to critical reflection on war and peace?’ and ‘What forms and techniques are most suitable for setting up educational projects in which pupils from diverse social and cultural backgrounds feel involved?’

The question was: ‘Knowledge about the First World War is not always readily available among young people. At the same time, new educational forms emphasise experience and empathy to involve young people in stories about the war. Do you know any examples of projects that have managed to find a good balance between knowledge and empathy?’


J. Debackere, ‘VRT worstelt met herdenking WOI’, De Morgen, 10 June 2011.

See S. Sintobin, W. Vandaele, B. Tommelein & C. Decaluwé, Requests for explanation to Ms Ingrid Lieten, Flemish Minister of Media, nos. 2542, 2536, 2447 and 2516, Flemish Parliament 2010-2011.

The question was: ‘In the period 2014-2018 the VRT wants to pay extra attention on radio, TV and Internet to the Armistice and the First World War. In the period up to 2014 it wants to commemorate the war every year in November. Furthermore, an interview project – ‘The Very Last Witnesses’ – has been set up, in which more than one hundred over 100s tell their personal stories about the war. The VRT is currently also making a fiction series about the war, which will
be broadcast in 2014. Which themes and stories should the VRT definitely pay attention to in its reporting on the First World War and its choice of documentaries to produce or purchase?

The question was: ‘Do you have any other concrete ideas or expectations with respect to the role the VRT could play during the commemoration?’


Se also F. Migneault, I. la O’ and M. Van Alstein (2010), War Commemoration Reconsidered, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, pp. 10 and 17-18.


See endnote 145.

G. Lipovetsky (2004), Les temps hypermodernes, p. 84 and 87.


War and Peace in the Westhoek, Policy memorandum 2008-2013 (Westhoek and province of West-Flanders), p. 29.

These criteria are: ‘starting from the child’s living environment; establishing the link between the present time and the war in the framework of relational thinking and the interpretation of mechanisms; working on historical awareness; a cross-disciplinary approach; attention to a multicultural society; developing a critical, constructive attitude; acquiring a number of basic skills; working in an exemplary way; making the importance of abstraction clear; seeing an educational project as an exchange between museums/site/institution and the teacher and the class as a group; maintaining the balance in the didactic framework; indicating the added value of stories; setting the teaching of an attitude as an objective; emphasising the importance of the sites and the landscape; and developing a sense of civic responsibility’. Ibid., p. 30.


See e.g. Report of panel discussion 3, ‘Lessen uit het verleden’, Study day ‘100 jaar Groote Oorlog. Erfgoed, herdenking

The Flemish Peace Institute was founded by decree of the Flemish Parliament as an independent institute for research on peace issues. The Peace Institute conducts scientific research, documents relevant information sources, and informs and advises the Flemish Parliament and the public at large on questions of peace.