

FAQs

...about the project:

Why the name STOLPERSTEINE?

Gunter Demnig no longer remembers exactly how the name came about. But what is certain is that he chose the name before knowing that there would be more than one installation. He liked the double meaning of the German word because he wanted to provoke people into “stumbling” mentally. Contrary to what certain online sources claim, Gunter Demnig did NOT want to create a link to a certain anti-Semitic expression apparently used in Nazi Germany that he did not even know. When asked about the name these days, Gunter Demnig tends to cite a schoolchild who once answered a journalist’s enquiry as to whether people could actually stumble on a STOLPERSTEIN and trip thus: “You don’t trip on a STOLPERSTEIN, you stumble with your head and your heart.”

Why is there always one STOLPERSTEIN per victim?

Gunter Demnig commemorates individuals. The National Socialists wanted to exterminate people, turn them into numbers and erase their memory. Demnig wants to reverse this process and return individual names to places where people once lived.

There are cases when hundreds or even thousands of Stolpersteine would have to be installed in a single place. This being effectively impossible and almost unimaginable, Gunter Demnig has come up with an alternative, the STOLPERSCHWELLE (which can be roughly translated as a “Stumbling Threshold”). A STOLPERSCHWELLE can record the fate of a group of victims in a few lines. Like a STOLPERSTEIN, a STOLPERSCHWELLE is 96 mm wide but can be up to one meter in length.

Can anybody have a STOLPERSTEIN installed?

Yes, anybody can have a STOLPERSTEIN installed. The project functions much like a grassroots movement in which anyone can get involved. Requests for STOLPERSTEINE come from private individuals, associations, historical societies, schools, relatives and many others. If you would like to install a STOLPERSTEIN in Germany, please get in touch with the appropriate association (see CONTACT US at www.stolpersteine.eu). If there is

not yet an association, please contact project coordinator Anna Warda at termine@stolpersteine.eu after reading our Steps to find out how to obtain permission from the local authorities. If you would like to place a STOLPERSTEIN outside of Germany, please contact international coordinator Dr. Anne Thomas at international@stolpersteine.eu.

Who is behind the STOLPERSTEINE?

The artist Gunter Demnig is behind the STOLPERSTEINE. He came up with the idea of this art monument in the early 1990s and has installed almost every STOLPERSTEIN himself. To ensure that the project continues, he set up the foundation “Stiftung - Spuren - Gunter Demnig”.

Gunter Demnig works with a team of six:

Katja Demnig (Education & Database),

Michael Friedrichs-Friedlaender (Sculptor),

Jérôme Heuper (Website),

Karin Richert (Inscriptions, invoices, press photos),

Dr. Anne Thomas (International coordinator and non-German inscriptions)

Anna Warda (Project coordination (for Germany) & PR).

How did Gunter Demnig come up with the idea?

In 1991, Gunter Demnig used white paint to mark the path that 1000 Sinti and Roma had been forced to take when they were deported 50 years earlier. After the paint had faded, he made the artwork permanent by engraving brass-plates and fixing them into the ground. As he was doing this, an elderly lady praised his project but at the same time expressed doubt that “gypsies” had lived in her neighbourhood. Thus, Gunter Demnig understood that many people no longer knew who had lived in their areas, that many stories had disappeared. So he came up with a project that, on the one hand, would bring commemoration to the streets and to the villages, towns and cities of Germany and at the same time would mark the places where the victims of the Nazis had lived and where the crimes against them had begun. The conceptual STOLPERSTEINE were originally intended only for a one-off exhibition. After they were well-received by

the relatives of victims, Gunter Demnig decided to expand his project and continue making STOLPERSTEINE, which now exist all over Europe.

Why are the STOLPERSTEINE art?

Each stone is an artwork in itself, which meets aesthetic standards; the stones together and the people involved in their installation as a whole form a social sculpture (inspired by Joseph Beuys). Gunter Demnig first had his idea for the Stolpersteine in 1993, but it has been in development ever since and remains a work in progress.

Why does Gunter Demnig install most of the STOLPERSTEINE himself?

Gunter Demnig's artistic project is not only about the victims and their fates but about the installation of the stones which commemorate them. Demnig wants to ensure that the installation of STOLPERSTEINE is respectful: This means making sure that the location of the stone makes sense, as well as ensuring that there is contact with the relatives of those commemorated and others attending the installation. In direct opposition to the Nazis' mass extermination policies, Gunter Demnig insists that each Stolperstein be made by hand. He no longer has time to make them himself but the sculptor Michael Friedrichs-Friedlaender makes each stone by hand in his Berlin studio.

Where can STOLPERSTEINE be installed?

In theory, STOLPERSTEINE can be installed everywhere where the National Socialists committed their crimes between 1933 and 1945, persecuting, humiliating and murdering people. However, because Stolpersteine are (almost always) installed on public ground there does have to be permission from the local authorities. Stolpersteine are usually installed in front of a victim's last home of choice but can also be placed in front of schools, universities, synagogues or places of work, where people also spent much of their lives.

Whom do the STOLPERSTEINE commemorate?

This project commemorates anyone persecuted and/or murdered by the Nazi regime: Jews; Sinti and Roma; Jehovah's Witnesses; homosexuals; mentally and/or physically disabled people; people persecuted for their political views, their religion, their sexual orientation or the colour of their skin; forced labourers; men considered deserters;

people who were persecuted on grounds that they were “asocial” such as homeless people or prostitutes.

NB: STOLPERSTEINE are not only placed for people who died, but also for “survivors”. For example, in front of a house in Amsterdam, a STOLPERSTEIN might be placed for a woman who survived Auschwitz alongside two STOLPERSTEINE for her parents who did not. This “reunites” families. Stolpersteine can also be placed for people who were able to escape to Palestine or South America or survivors of concentration camps. The project also commemorates those forced by the circumstances to commit suicide.

Why STOLPERSTEINE?

Stolpersteine have different functions. They bring names and fates of individuals back to where they lived and can thus help relatives to remember and to cope with their trauma. They can also help local communities to explore the past and anchor commemoration locally. They promote public debate and involve young generations in commemoration by getting them to conduct research and explore the past. Ideally, they should help to counter similar developments in society today, making people aware of human rights violations and reminding them of how important an open, broad-minded society is.

Why are STOLPERSTEINE installed in the ground?

Originally, Gunter Demnig had thought of putting plaques on the walls of former homes. However, he soon realised that he would need permission from today’s homeowners and that this would probably only be granted by an exceptional few. To place a Stolperstein in the sidewalk, “only” the permission of the local authorities is necessary. Stolpersteine thus become part of the local landscape. They can be discovered by passers-by but are not dominant. Gunter Demnig opted for brass-plate because he thought that this would be polished by people’s soles. However, in practice most passers-by do not actually walk on the STOLPERSTEINE.

The stones are at the mercy of the elements and subject to damage. In many parts of Germany and elsewhere, groups which regularly clean and polish the Stolpersteine have formed.

One argument against the Stolpersteine is that people could once again trample on gravestones. Stolpersteine are NOT gravestones: No remains lie below them. But even if

they were gravestones, it would not be a sign of disrespect to walk on them. Gunter Demnig often recalls visiting St Peter's in Rome on a school trip and walking on the horizontal gravestones without thinking twice. At the Museum of Sepulchral Culture in Kassel, he later discovered that this can actually be seen as a sign of honour: The more people walk on a grave, the more respect for the person who lies buried.

Why do some cities decide against STOLPERSTEINE?

There are some cities or individuals that do not approve of the STOLPERSTEINE for various reasons. One of the most common is that the names of victims can be trampled upon. In Germany, some cities (such as Munich) that do not approve the Stolpersteine have opted for alternative forms of commemoration. This is absolutely fine for the STOLPERSTEIN team, which supports all forms of commemoration. Furthermore, Gunter Demnig insists that STOLPERSTEINE should never be placed against the will of relatives. Generally, however, the STOLPERSTEINE are supported by victims' associations. Josef Schuster, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, also supports the project.

Why are the inscriptions on the STOLPERSTEINE sometimes controversial?

STOLPERSTEINE are placed for people who were persecuted during the Nazi era. The inscriptions briefly outline the most important stages of persecution. At times, expressions used by the Nazis to persecute, arrest and murder innocent people might be engraved on a Stolpersteine to make it clear - especially to younger generations born well after the Nazi era - how absurd and untenable the reasons for persecution were.

The clear language used on Stolpersteine documents history. The stigmatisation of people was intrinsically linked to their fate. The project aims to encourage passers-by to reflect on terminology used in the Nazi era. To trivialise or conceal certain fates could in our opinion contribute to supporting far-right ideas.

In certain cases, inverted commas might be used to create a distance between certain controversial expressions used during the Nazi era or an abbreviated version of "so-called". Please click here for more details on this issue (in German).

Why are Stolpersteine installed for survivors?

Stolpersteine are commemorative stones and not gravestones. They are supposed to provoke people into thinking about what happened to individuals and families during the

Nazi era. Families were torn apart and STOLPERSTEINE can at least bring them back together symbolically. We prefer not to pass judgement on who was a victim of National Socialism or not: We cannot begin to measure the suffering of a person who had to hide and/or leave their home or survived one or several concentration camps and do not want to have to.

...about the Organisation:

How can I have a STOLPERSTEIN placed?

If you would like to have one or more STOLPERSTEINE placed in Germany, please contact the project coordinator Anna Warda (termine@stolpersteine.eu). If you would like to place Stolperstein(e) outside of Germany please contact international coordinator Dr. Anne Thomas (international@stopersteine.eu). There are also many organisations in Germany and abroad which organise the installation of STOLPERSTEINE which can often provide help and support.

When STOLPERSTEINE are to be installed in a new place, it is important that there be permission from the local authorities. Furthermore, relatives of victims have to be informed of the intention to place a STOLPERSTEINE. We also recommend that you do everything possible to find out as much information about a victim before sending us your proposed inscriptions. Please do not rely solely on information from family members but carry out further research.

Why does it take so long to have a STOLPERSTEIN placed?

At the moment, there is a waiting period of at least nine months - sometimes more. In countries such as Poland or France, it is not always easy to obtain permission and therefore the wait can be much longer. The earlier we receive your requests, the earlier an appointment will be given. We (Gunter Demnig and his team) can produce and install about 440 STOLPERSTEINE per month. Each STOLPERSTEIN is made and stamped by hand by Michael Friedrichs-Friedlaender. Gunter Demnig installs almost all of the STOLPERSTEINE himself. This individual approach will be maintained in future. The Nazis conducted mass extermination programs. The STOLPERSTEINE bring back names and commemorate individual fates. No installation is a routine event. Each fate was different and each STOLPERSTEIN is supposed to move passers-by. There should be no mass installations - in direct opposition to the mass extermination.

How can I find out if a Stolperstein has already been placed for a particular person?

It's easiest to simply contact a local Stolperstein group (please see the Contacts page) or a town to ask for an overview. There are several online databases. We do not yet have our own digital database but are currently working on one that should go online by early 2020.

How can I obtain permission to place a STOLPERSTEIN?

Before a STOLPERSTEIN can be laid in public space, permission must be obtained. Please contact the mayor or the local authorities and request permission - your success will vary according to country and the political climate, sometimes it will be a painstaking process, please be warned that there may not always be an answer.

Who does the research?

Anybody who wants to have a STOLPERSTEIN installed has to conduct the necessary research. We recommend that you contact archives and historical societies to find out exactly what happened to the victims and their families as far as possible. The Union of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime is a good source of information, as is Yad Vashem. Trade unions, churches, groups and associations for Sinti & Roma, for homosexuals and for Jehovah's Witnesses are also good sources. Hospitals and clinics can provide information on the Nazis' euthanasia programs. You can find more information at the International Tracing Service (<https://www.its-arolsen.org/english/>), the Federal Archives of Germany (<http://www.bundesarchiv.de/index.html.en>) and the Memorial Book (<http://www.bundesarchiv.de/gedenkbuch/directory.html>)

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people who escaped the Nazis or survived camps as well as those who were deported and murdered.

Do you check the STOLPERSTEINE inscriptions?

Before STOLPERSTEINE for Germany are made, we cross-check the information with the The Memorial Book of the Federal Archives for the Victims of the Persecution of Jews in Germany (1933-1945), which is a reliable source. If data is found to not tally, it can be corrected at a later date. When it comes to STOLPERSTEINE placed outside of Germany, we work with family members and historians to ensure that information is complete as possible. We cannot prevent mistakes from being made, but we try to rectify any that are pointed out to us.

How to clean a STOLPERSTEIN?

As the brass-plate oxidises, a protective layer forms on the surface of the STOLPERSTEIN, which are made of concrete and topped with engraved brass plates. These plates can become dull, darken and even change colour, with the inscriptions perhaps becoming less legible. We recommend various methods for cleaning the STOLPERSTEINE: You can use regular metal polish or brass polish with just a bit of water and a sponge. Do not pour the polish directly onto the stone to avoid damaging the surface around the stone. Let the product dry for about a minute before polishing the stone. You should not use wire brushes or hard items to clean the brass-plate as this could cause permanent damage. Many thanks to all those who devote their time to cleaning and polishing Stolpersteine.

...about the costs:

How much does a Stolperstein cost?

Each Stolperstein costs 120 euros. If Gunter Demnig is timetabled to spend a night in the place where you are laying STOLPERSTEINE, we also expect you to reserve and cover the costs of hotel accommodation. This is only necessary if Gunter Demnig stays the night before or after in “your” village, town or city and this is only clear once the timetable has been fixed (usually six months before).

Why does a STOLPERSTEIN cost 120 euros?

We've calculated the costs of the STOLPERSTEINE to ensure that we can continue making and installing them and that the project lasts. The price of 120 euros covers the material, making and installation, the organisation, advice, research, accompanying of school classes, delivery, as well as the maintenance of a database which stores information about the people the STOLPERSTEINE commemorate, where they have been laid etc. The costs go to Gunter Demnig's non-profit foundation "Stiftung - Spuren - Gunter Demnig", which also finances Demnig's travel, legal support, IT and web support, as well as salaries.

Who pays for the STOLPERSTEINE?

STOLPERSTEINE are mainly financed by private donations. Private individuals, institutions, educational establishments, companies, associations or political parties can choose to "sponsor" a STOLPERSTEIN. In Germany, relatives are usually not expected to pay for Stolpersteine placed to commemorate their family members unless they want to. If you are organising a STOLPERSTEIN installation in Germany and are not yourself a relative, please do NOT ask any relatives of victims for money. Outside of Germany, there are not yet enough private donations to cover the demand for STOLPERSTEINE. Therefore, it is the person or organisation who asks for the installation of a STOLPERSTEIN, who has to cover the costs, even if this is a relative. This may change in future.

We work on a principle of trust. You will only receive an invoice once the STOLPERSTEINE have been laid. Please do not transfer any money before receiving an invoice. Please indicate the invoice number when transferring money.

Karin Richert is responsible for issuing invoices. These are issued after STOLPERSTEINE have been laid.

Are the STOLPERSTEINE made of gold?

No! The STOLPERSTEINE are made of concrete and are covered in brass-plate.

Is Gunter Demnig a millionaire?

No. Gunter Demnig is employed by the foundation "Stiftung - Spuren - Gunter Demnig" and receives a fixed salary. The 120 euros for each STOLPERSTEIN go to the foundation, as do all donations. The non-profit foundation is audited each year.

How can I support the STOLPERSTEIN art project financially?

In Germany, STOLPERSTEINE are usually financed by private donations. If you would like to sponsor a STOLPERSTEIN, please contact the STOLPERSTEIN association in the town or city that you are interested in. You will find an overview of all the organisations on our homepage (See Contacts). It is of course also possible to support our project and foundation by making a donation, for which we are always very grateful.

NB: We can only issue receipts for non-binding donations.

Bank details for the foundation “Stiftung-Spuren-Gunter Demnig”:

Recipient: STIFTUNG-SPUREN-Gunter Demnig

Bank: Volksbank Köln Bonn eG

IBAN: DE91 3806 0186 4518 0470 14

BIC: GENODED1BRS

Reason for payment: Donation for Stiftung-Spuren-Gunter Demnig

15th March 2021