Estonia's Victims of Communism 1940–1991

Christoph Johns, christoph.johns@aalto.fi

Abstract—To commemorate the victims of communist terror between 1940 and 1991, the city of Tallinn built a memorial and established a database preserving the records of the names and data of those victims. Among the artworks created as part of this memorial is a large black stone wall with silver bees sticking together in spite of hostile surroundings representing the strong spirit of the Estonian people and their return to their home country. The goal of this project will be to recreate this artwork using digital information visualization and to make it interactive using the data stored in the memorial's database.

I. MOTIVATION

During a recent trip to the city of Tallinn, Estonia, I visited the memorial entitled "Estonia's Victims of Communism 1940-1991" (see https://www.memoriaal.ee/en/). It is a powerful landmark just outside the city center which disrupts the otherwise beautiful landscape present around the city. Two tall black walls lead from the waterfront inside towards a park and cemetery where many Estonian soldiers are buried. As part of this memorial, a section of park called the "Home Garden" was created which features a ceremonial square with a large-scale artwork of silver honeybees sitting on a black wall adapted from an Estonian poem (see Fig. 1). This artwork serves as a powerful reminder of the terrors of political conflict bringing together themes of death, loss and sorrow with hope and beauty. Relating the artwork to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), it primarily contributes to Goal 16 "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" as it promotes peace through commemoration of the victims of political violence.

Fig. 1. An image of the honeybees artwork at the Home Garden of the memorial on a national holiday in Estonia.

II. APPROACH

My goal for this visualization project would be to recreate the visual aesthetic of the artwork in a digital format and supplementing it with information from the memorial's database about the Estonian victims of communism to create an interactive digital version of the artwork. The memorial's online database contains, among other things, information about the victims' names, year of birth and year of death.

III. EXPECTED RESULTS

The resulting visualization should be an interactive scatter plot recreating the visual aesthetic of the physical memorial but supplementing it with information from the memorial database. Each point of the scatter plot should, in reference to the original artwork, invoke the image of a silver bee (either via a graphic or just via color and general shape). The axes should represent the year of birth and year of death for each victim, giving a strong intuition for the development of the communist terror in Estonia over time (see Fig 2). The data points should further be interactive, perhaps even animated, supporting the general beehive metaphor. On click, each point should reveal its underlying data from the database including the victim's name and year of death. This should bring an additional layer of personal touch to the visualization and add to the overall theme of sorrow.
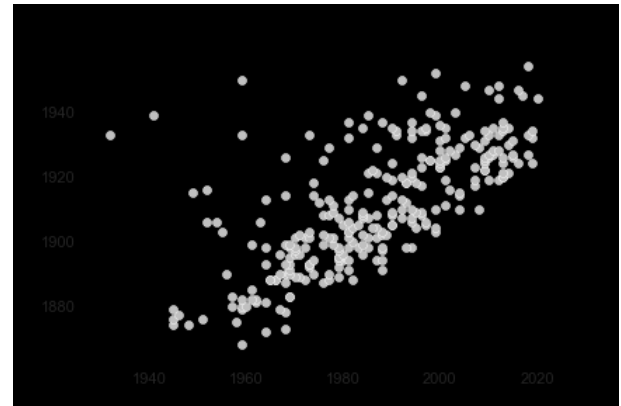

Fig. 2. A pre-visualization of the expected results. Each point in the scatter plot represents a victim from the memorial's database.