

## Kreuzberg Exhibition

**Exhibition:** *“Jeder nach seiner Façon? 300 Jahre Migrationsgeschichte in Kreuzberg”*

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**Abstract in English:** Being part of the Kreuzberg Museum’s steady exhibition, *“Jeder nach seiner Façon? 300 Jahre Migrationsgeschichte in Kreuzberg”* focuses on the history of migration in this very diverse neighbourhood of Berlin.

**Abstrat in Italiano:** La mostra *“Jeder nach seiner Façon? 300 Jahre Migrationsgeschichte in Kreuzberg”*, parte dell’esposizione stabile del Museo di Kreuzberg, mette a fuoco la storia della migrazione in questo quartiere di Berlino dove convivono molte culture diverse.

**Area:** Art

**Kind-category of project:** Exhibition

**Kind-category of actor:** Public body

**Country:** Germany

**Year:** Since 2005

**5 key-words:** immigration history, local history, exhibition, THE PRACTICE

## 1. The practise

### 1.1 Description of the project

***Project Initiator:***

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The city-run institution is the “Heimatmuseum” (Museum of Local History) of the borough of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg came into existence in 2000, when the Western borough Kreuzberg was merged with the Eastern borough of Friedrichshain. As a consequence of this development, the scope of the museum is no longer limited to Kreuzberg, yet includes the formerly independent Friedrichshain borough.

***Objectives:***

- To inform about the local history of migration.
- To show the long tradition of migration history.

### ***Activities and Results:***

- Creation of an exhibition on migration, which is part of the museum's steady exhibition on local history.
- The exhibition can be visited during the regular opening hours of the Kreuzberg Museum.

### **1.2 When and how long: Structure and Steps of the Project**

*“Jeder nach seiner Façon? 300 Jahre Migrationsgeschichte in Kreuzberg”* is already the third Kreuzberg Museum exhibition that deals with the local history of immigration. The new migration exhibition differs, however, in two regards from the earlier shows. First, it is not a temporary display, but part of the museum's steady exhibition. Second, it is not limited to a specific group of migrants or time period. Instead, the exhibition attempts to show migration as a process, which has influenced the districts of Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain since the time of the founding of these inner city districts.

### **1.3 Social Context**

Only a short walk from the subway terminal “Kottbusser Tor”, the “Kreuzberg Museum” is located in the midst of “Kreuzberg SO 36”, one of Berlin's most multicultural neighbourhoods. Kreuzberg, which used to belong to West-Berlin when the city was divided, is ethnically very diverse. By far the largest and most visible minority group are the Turkish, who are even the majority in some of the neighbourhoods.

The multicultural reality in the district leads to different reactions on the side of the majority population. On the one side, there are many areas in Kreuzberg that attract students and other young people who enjoy the international climate. The area's colourful streets, its ethnic shops and the interesting nightlife are known throughout Germany. Many local residents take pride in the fact they live in an area that is different, as shows the enthusiastic participation in events such as the “Carnival of Cultures”.

On the other hand, the district is seen by many people as being “overtaken” by foreigners and troubled by problems such as poverty and crime. The feeling of resentment towards the visible migrant cultures was famously illustrated in the election slogan of one conservative party, which tried to attract voters in Kreuzberg with the promise to make Kreuzbergians feel again “that they are in Germany”. However, even beyond this level of resentment there are other developments that seem worrisome. Since the early 1990s, a large part of the Turkish population has suffered from unemployment. Confronted with increasingly high levels of poverty and a tendency to withdraw from society on the side of the migrant communities, more and more German families left the area. The consequences of this development are most visible in the schools, where the number of students from German families declines continually. Today, there are already some schools where all students have a foreign family background.

### **1.4 Target**

The main purpose of the Kreuzberg Museum is to inform local residents and people living in other districts about the district's history. However, due to area's fame, the museum is also visited by many tourists. The museum has about 50 to 100 visitors a day.

## 1.5 Project Methodology

The exhibition is displayed in one fairly large hall of the museum building, which was originally a factory. The curators decided to present the local migration history in a chronological way.

Hence the exhibition starts with the **Huguenots** (members of the Protestant Reformed Church of France), who fled in 17<sup>th</sup> century from the intolerant rule of the French King Louis XIV. A large number of Huguenots found asylum in the Prussia of Emperor Frederick Wilhelm. In Berlin, they settled among others in the Northern district of Kreuzberg called Luisenstadt. As in case of the other groups presented, the exhibition combines large displays of pictures with related objects. In addition to this the visitor has the possibility to listen to the life story of one selected migrant.

The chronological narrative continues with the **Poles and Germans from Silesia**, who came after the creation of the German Reich in large numbers to the booming capital. To this day, there are entire areas in Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain where the streets are named after places in Silesia.

It is interesting to note that the exhibition reduces migration not to the influx of foreign nationals but also includes **domestic migration streams**. The most important one is the arrival of refugees from Eastern Prussia and other formerly German territories, who had to leave their home after 1945. To remember this part of German history within the framework of migration is a very new approach; usually, it has been mostly museums specially dedicated to the cultural heritage of these groups that dealt with these issues. The exhibition also includes forced workers, who lived and worked in Kreuzberg during the Second World War. Since this migration was both temporary and involuntary, the curators decided to not include it directly in the chronological exhibition but present it in a small extra space.

The second half of the exhibition deals with post-war migration to Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg. Due to the very large number of groups who immigrated through the post-war period to Kreuzberg, the exhibition makers had to select a number of examples. In view of the large numbers of Turks living in Kreuzberg, it seems reasonable that the **story of the Turkish migration** is the first one selected. So that there was representation of the immigration-history of the current district's eastern half, the second display included information about the **Vietnamese contract workers** who worked in the 1970s and 1980s in Friedrichshain and other eastern districts of Berlin. The exhibition concludes with the **refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina**, who came to the city in consequence of the Balkan wars.

The **exhibition concept allows an easy modification of content** through the changing of certain parts or adding of supplementary objects and information. In the case of the display on post-war immigration, the museum plans to use this possibility to change from time to time the selected examples of post-war migrants (e.g. Mozambican or Cuban contract workers instead of Vietnamese contract workers; Kurdish refugees instead of Bosnian).

## 1.6 Collaborations and Networks

Despite of its status as a public institution, the Kreuzberg Museum depends on the support of external donors to realise projects like the creation of a new exhibition. Aside from the district's cultural fund and the city of Berlin, the project was also supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation ([www.bosch-stiftung.de](http://www.bosch-stiftung.de)) and the Hauptstadtkulturfonds (<http://www.berlin.de/hauptstadtkulturfonds/typo/index.php>).

Many of the objects displayed in the exhibition (e.g. family pictures) came from migrants living in the area. According to the museum's pedagogue Nadja Spanholz, the museum did not seek to establish "official contacts" to the official representatives of each minority, yet relied

on the “village-like” social networks in the district: “We are from Kreuzberg and we know the people here.”

The museum also established a number of productive alliances with other local institutions in the area. The museum co-operates with local schools for example, which can benefit from special pedagogical programmes that help children to comprehend the content of the exhibition.

Another of the alliances led to the creation of the “X-Berg-Day”, a package offer that targeted mainly tourists from outside of Berlin and groups from certain institutions (e.g. members of the military). Guided by one of four young women from the district, the tourists are not only shown the exhibitions of the museum but also invited to see a mosque and other typical, yet often unknown places, in this multicultural district. The popular package offer is meant to overcome negative impressions about the area, which is sometimes falsely portrayed as a “Turkish ghetto”.

## 2. Experiences

The presented practice is only one of many current initiatives in Germany which seek to present the topic of migration in form of exhibitions and museums. This tendency can be interpreted as recognition of the fact that the migration which took place during the post-war period has fundamentally changed society.

In the opinion of the author of this study, the migration exhibition of the Kreuzberg Museum is interesting for the following reasons:

- **Chronological Approach:** In the public perception, migration is often perceived as a new development that threatens the “natural” homogeneity of society. However, this perception does not correspond with the historical truth. The European cities have always functioned as “machines of integration”, which received and gradually assimilated people from different cultural backgrounds. Since it is very common to see migration as something new and threatening, it seems a very reasonable strategy to refute this perception by deploying a historical/chronological perspective. Starting their narrative with the example of the Huguenots, the exhibition curators succeeded to show that the very foundation of Kreuzberg is linked to the phenomenon of migration.
- **Local Approach:** Complicated social developments invite to exaggerate problems and to oversee the human dimension. It seems therefore a positive aspect of the exhibition’s conception that the exhibition is limited to a certain area (reflecting the geographically restricted mission of the museum). Especially if most of the visitors are local, one can assume that the local focus increases the interest and acceptance of potential visitors.
- **Flexible Approach:** The exhibition concept allows an easy modification of the content through changing certain parts or adding additional objects and information. Due to this flexible interpretation of the word “steady exhibition”, the museum is able to reflect the district’s highly diverse character despite of the constraints imposed by the limited space.