

Children paint a wall at Hirschhof, September 14, 1985/Photo: Uwe Dähn



A permanent exhibit at the Museum Pankow

Kultur- und Bildungszentrum
Sebastian Haffner
(Sebastian Haffner Cultural and Education Center)

Prenzlauer Allee 227/228
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Opening hours
Tuesday – Sunday
10:00 am – 6:00 pm
Tours and extra opening hours upon request

It would be difficult to find a better place than Berlin's borough of Prenzlauer Berg to exemplify the process of transformation resulting from Germany's reunification. Since the 1970s, the borough has been something of a refuge for a multifaceted counterculture filling with dissidents and nonconformists, in thought and deed, as well as individuals trying to live, create, and build an alternative to life under »Real Socialism.« Prenzlauer Berg was home to many of the GDR's notable figures and important dissident groups. It was here that they developed their alternative vision of the future, and here lie central sites of the »Peaceful Revolution« in 1989: Gethsemane church and the Bornholmer Straße border crossing.

Many of the conflicts surrounding the movement's goals of political self-determination, environmental protection, education, urban renewal, replacing a failed economic system and increasing social responsibility – subjects that were also passionately debated prior to the fall of the wall – triggered fierce controversies and debate after its fall. The exhibit follows many of the themes mentioned above both before and after the historical fall of the wall. In doing so it explores some of the continuities and discontinuities in East Germany following reunification with the help of concrete examples of changes at seven locations in Prenzlauer Berg.



Creating new free spaces | Oderberger Straße

The inhabitants of Oderberger Straße and the surrounding neighborhood openly opposed the East Berlin Magistrate's plans in 1987/1988 to demolish several buildings in the area. The locals presented their own vision of urban development as an alternative. One example was the nearby Hirschhof, a series of courtyards, which was used by artists and locals since the middle of the 1980s. The locals had gardened and altered the space for use as an alternative venue for various events.

Party at Hirschhof, summer 1986/Photographer: Harald Hauswald

Power and powerlessness | The borough council and administration at Fröbelstraße

The site exemplifies the SED's use and abuse of power at the communal level, the local Prenzlauer Berg Round Table and the elections in 1990, as well as the reorganization of the borough administration and civic activism in the 1990s.

Entry Prenzlauer Allee, 1989/Photo: Museum Pankow





Opposition within Socialism | Gethsemane Church

With the Gethsemane Church at its center, the Protestant Church in the GDR served as an important free space. Here groups could pursue various causes such as the fight for environmental protection, peace and human rights, which would later become a catalyst for East Germany's »Peaceful Revolution«.

Even Children visited the Gethsemane Church during the fall of 1989./Photo: Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft Berlin, photographer: Frank Ebert

Using free spaces | Rykestraße and Kollwitzplatz

These sites portray the borough's vibrant, often »insubordinate« artistic and literary scene, as well as the various movements whose members were monitored by the ever-suspicious state security apparatus.

Children at Kollwitzplatz, 1979/Photo: Bundesarchiv, 183-U0514-020, photographer: Horst Sturm



Economic activity and daily life | VEB Treffmodelle at Greifswalder Straße 212

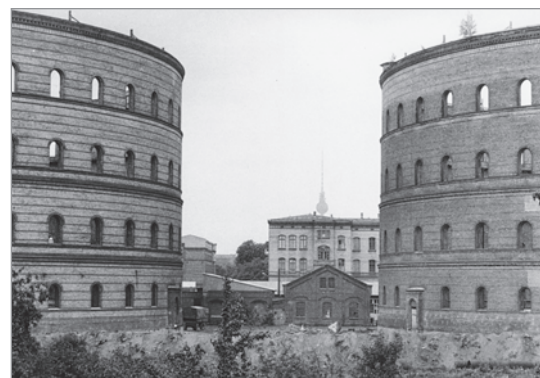
The headquarters of VEB Treffmodelle, a complex of buildings located at Greifswalder Straße 212, represents the everyday working life in the GDR, and the dramatic changes in the workplace and economy following reunification.

Mass production of women's clothing by VEB Treffmodelle at Greifswalder Straße 212/213 in the second half of the 1980s/ Photo: photographer unknown, loan from a private collection

Socialist city planning | Ernst-Thälmann-Park

Ernst-Thälmann-Park was built against the background of what was the worsening decay of an entire residential area within Prenzlauer Berg. The park demonstrates how the rulers of the GDR tried to shape the landscape in line with their worldview. Once the SED party and state leadership's showpiece project, today Thälmann-Park seems rather disconnected from how the rest of the borough has developed.

The Gasometer on the day of its demolition, July 28, 1984/Photo: Landesarchiv Berlin, photographer: Günter Schneider



A populace and buildings transformed | Helmholtzplatz

The neighborhood surrounding Helmholtzplatz is an excellent example of the changes to urban life and buildings in Prenzlauer Berg. It demonstrates how the lives of the inhabitants changed, as well as the impact of various policy and city administration decisions during the 1980s. Developments in this neighborhood also exemplify the complexity of the urban renewal process post-reunification, and how the locals chose to oppose the wave of gentrification and real estate speculation.

Courtyards in Prenzlauer Berg, July 1987/Photographer: Jürgen Hohmuth

An exhibition by the Amtes für Kultur und Bildung (Office for Culture and Education)/Museum Pankow in cooperation with the Berliner Geschichtsverein Nord-Ost e. V. (Berlin Historical Society North-East) and exhibition agency *exhibeo*

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