

INSTITUTIONALIZATION
AND CONSOLIDATION OF
COORDINATION CENTRES
Opportunities and Hurdles
in Reappraisal Processes

Workshop by
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More and more German cities are engaging with their colonial past. A key approach in this process is the establishment of coordination offices that guide and manage these efforts both organizationally and in terms of content. These offices facilitate the long-term consolidation of decolonizing processes in public administration and society. They promote the visibility of marginalized perspectives, especially those of people of colour, and make important contributions to remembrance culture. Furthermore, they serve as a point of contact for protagonists from civil society, public administration, and academia.

This workshop provided space to share experiences, discuss challenges, and develop guidelines and courses of action for the realization of coordination offices. Participants in the workshop included representatives from advisory committees, coordination offices, civil-society initiatives, museums, and public administration—such as Decolonize Berlin, Afrotopia, Arbeitskreis Postkolonial, Salon International e. V., MARKK, the German Federal Cultural Foundation, and ARCA (Afrikanisches Bildungszentrum).

Background in Hannover: Coordination Office for Colonial Heritage

The coordination office Colonial Heritage in Hannover was established following a public hearing in 2022 and a motion submitted by the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party in 2023. The office is situated within the city administration's Department for Remembrance Culture and is conceived as a permanent agency. Its primary goal is to develop a comprehensive remembrance concept for the decolonization of Hannover. Since last year, the office has coordinated an advisory committee composed of representatives from civil society, politics, and public administration. The work of the coordination office can be broken down into three main areas: African history, empowerment, and museums and public space. A central focus lies in knowledge transfer within Hannover's civil society to raise awareness of the work of the coordination office and actively involve communities. At the same time, efforts are underway to establish a network connecting initiatives from urban and rural regions within Lower Saxony, thus generating

synergies. In Berlin, the coordination office is anchored in civil society, while in Hannover it is situated within the city administration. Challenges arising from the embedding of the office within the administration include concerns within civil society that demands will be watered down or not implemented, and that difficulties will arise via complex administrative language and lengthy processes. Those responsible within the administration must be conscious of their mandate and demonstrate sensitivity to these themes. At the same time, a greater understanding of the complexity of administrative processes is required within civil society.

Addressing Target Groups

The decolonization work of coordination offices requires the selective identification and engagement of various target groups from communities, diasporas, companies, institutions, museums, memorial sites, politics, public administration, and German majority society. It also calls for a greater emphasis on memorials as cooperation partners, the promotion of a multiperspectival culture of remembrance, and collective reflection on how anti-Semitism and racism can be jointly combatted. In particular, young people from African countries who come to Germany to study or work often take a critical view to engagements with German colonial history, as it is considered to have little relevance to their lived realities, and they are faced with completely different challenges and hurdles within the German system. Establishing a greater connection between colonial history and contemporary lived reality is necessary in order to reach these groups.

Influence of the Coordination Offices

Responsibilities and limits of authority must be clearly defined in order to establish the extent to which political decision-making processes and laws can be influenced, and to ensure that discussions lead to concrete changes. It is only in this way that coordination offices can effectively realize their goals and initiate lasting change. An additional central challenge concerns the delegation of tasks between public administration and civil society. Responsibility is frequently shifted to civil society under the assumption that this completes the process. Here, efficient and sustainable cooperation among civil-society initiatives, coordination offices, and the administration must be established. Transparency and the visualization of advancements and processes are necessary to meet the expectations of

political actors and civil society, to build trust within communities, and to make the processes comprehensible to all participants. Formation of a national coordination network is needed to develop uniform guidelines and strengthen communication at the national level.

Knowledge Transfer and Networking

A further important point is knowledge transfer and networking among universities, civil society, and public administration in order to deepen engagement with colonial history and to include the perspectives of people of colour in the transfer of knowledge. Regarding the promotion of changes in perspective and participative approaches, the creation of discursive spaces to actively involve different communities and the majority society in the decolonization processes was discussed. This is particularly relevant for institutions such as museums and memorials. Examples include municipal ‘speed-dating’ formats that bring together initiatives and protagonists from civil society to encourage dialogue and networking. Furthermore, the development of target-group-specific formats for decolonization in areas such as administration, politics, and business is important in order to close knowledge gaps and adjust content to specific contexts. Initiatives to decolonize academia that focus on making colonial and racist structures and attitudes visible in order to research and dismantle them are already active within the academic community.

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Decolonization of Town Twinning

The development of joint approaches to engaging with history in former colonies and the design of reciprocal learning processes can be achieved through knowledge exchange and the sharing of expertise instead of traditional development aid and symbolic gestures, which do nothing to change structural asymmetries.

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