

The "KdF-seaside resort" Rügen and the German "Volksgemeinschaft"

Exhibition tour

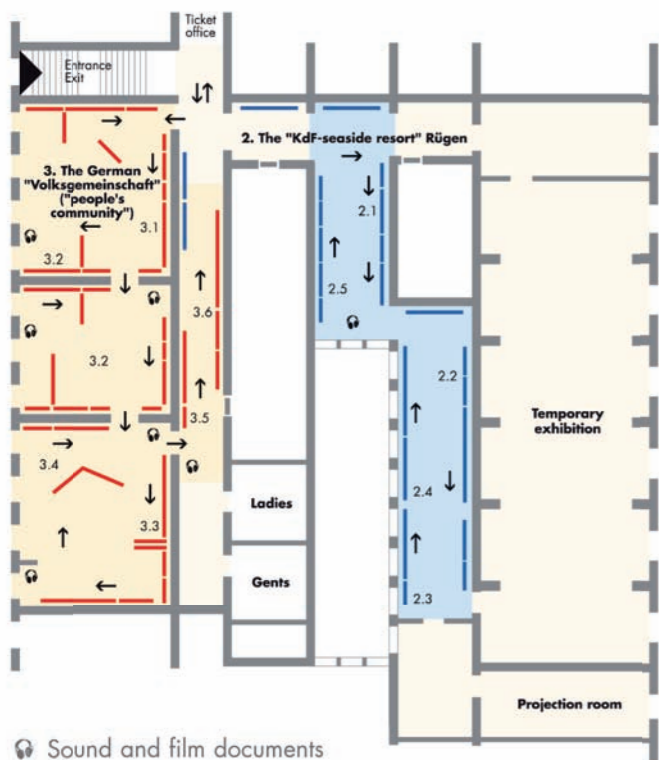
2. The "KdF-seaside resort" Rügen

- 2.1 Rügen during the National Socialist period
- 2.2 Idea and Conception
- 2.3 The "KdF-seaside resort" Rügen in the propaganda
- 2.4 Building history and use until 1945
- 2.5 Post war period

3. The German "Volksgemeinschaft" ("people's community")

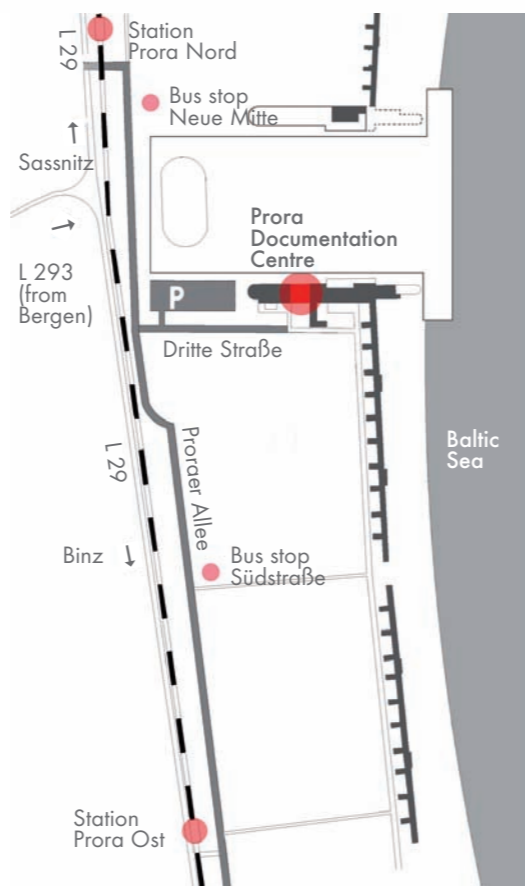
- 3.1 The model of the German "Volksgemeinschaft"
- 3.2 Formation of the "Volksgemeinschaft"
- 3.3 Social realities of the "Volksgemeinschaft"
- 3.4 Propaganda and mass culture
- 3.5 Instrumentalization of culture
- 3.6 The "modernity" of the NS state

Projection room: Documentary film, 35 minutes



Sound and film documents

The exhibition will be gradually extended. That's why it currently starts with number 2.



dokumentationszentrum prora

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Opening hours

March · April · September · October: daily 10 a.m - 6 p.m.
May · June · July · August: daily 9.30 a.m - 7 p.m.
November · Januar: daily 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
February: daily 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
December to 25. closed, 26.12. - 31.12 daily 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

For guided tours in English language

please contact the Documentation Centre some days in advance

Berlin office

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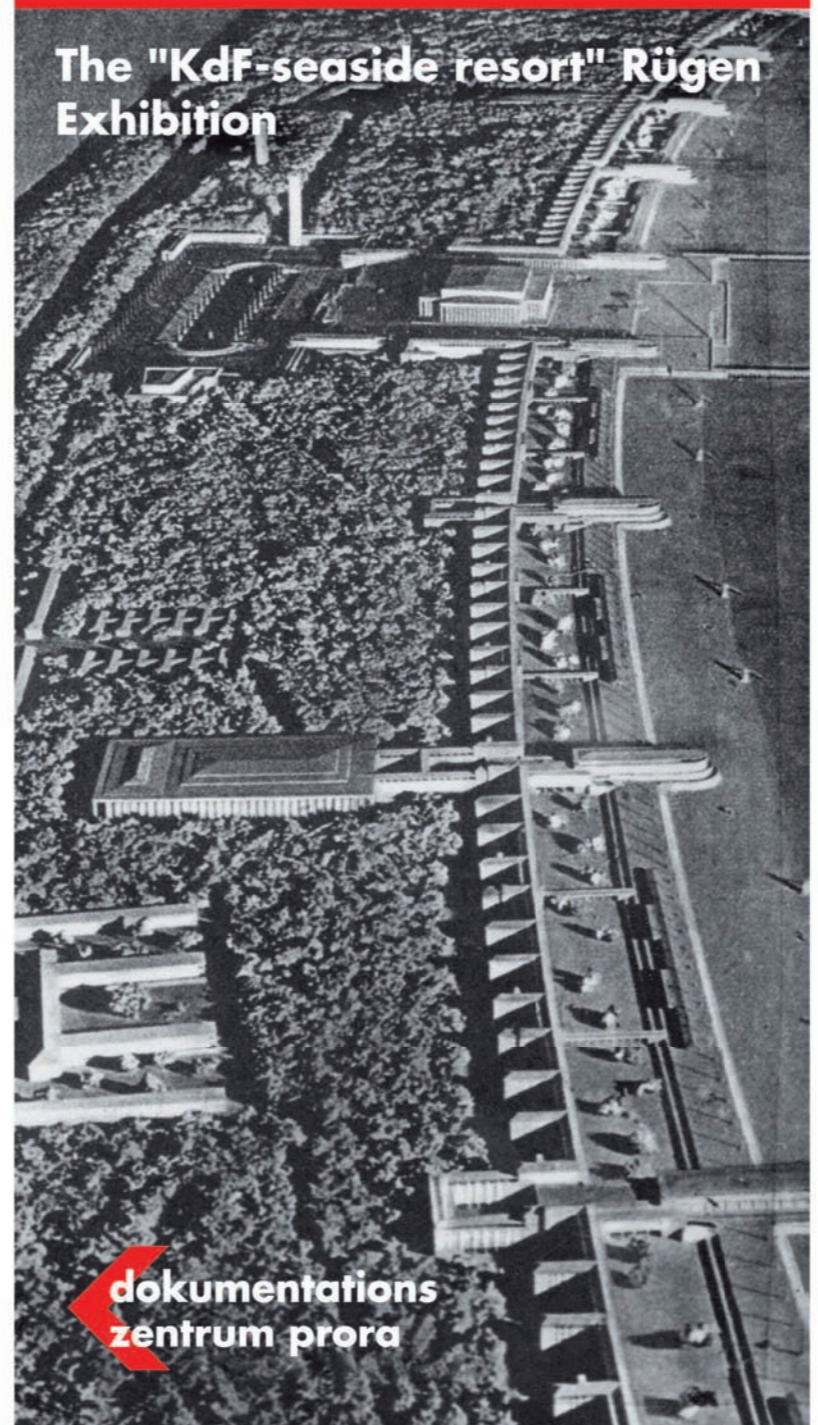


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MACHTUrlaub

The "KdF-seaside resort" Rügen Exhibition



The Prora Documentation Centre

The centre currently houses the permanent exhibition MACHT-Urlaub (MACHTUrlaub is a word play meaning both "make holiday" and "power holiday") which was updated in 2004: the first part documents the history of the construction work and the use of the building. It describes the background to the project, its absorption through Nazi propaganda, and the region around Prora at that time.

The second part of the exhibition embeds the history of the building in the working and social history of National Socialism. Taking the National Socialist society model of the "Volksgemeinschaft" as a starting point, it shows a unique picture of what living and working under the Nazi dictatorship was like.

The exhibition defines the various National Socialist organisations and sets the prevailing social reality of the time in stark contrast to the regime's propaganda which so often failed to bring



Prora Documentation Centre

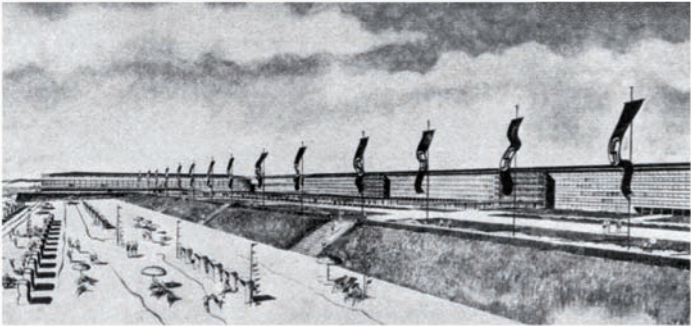
about what it agitated towards. The truth is simply that society was characterized by social inequality and discrimination of certain social groups. In contrast the ideology of the "Volksgemeinschaft" expressed the vision of a community that was homogeneous both politically and racially. Further, its members were not able to avail themselves of the benefits of this society, such as a holiday in the Prora resort unless they submitted total obedience and duty to the "Führer".

The wide collection of texts and photographs is completed by sound and motion picture documents which give an idea about what the "Volksgemeinschaft" ideal should have been, from the perspective of the Nazi regime.

The Documentation Centre's exhibition, impressively situated on site, represents the only permanent exhibition on the "Third Reich's" working and social history in Germany. Changing exhibitions on history, architecture, art, nature and politics replenish the documentation.

The "KdF seaside resort for 20,000" in Prora/Rügen

The construction of the seaside resort took place between 1936 and 1939 on the authority of the Nazi association "KdF" – "Kraft durch Freude" ("Strength Through Joy"). This enormous building is almost three miles long and was designed to house 20,000 holiday makers. It is interesting as an example for the use of modern architecture during the Nazi period and in a social history sense it also testifies to the totalitarian government's attempts to assuage and win over the working class – whose political parties and organisations had been smashed soon after Hitler had come to power in 1933 – to its policy of militarism, racial supremacy and "Lebensraum" (the need for a war in the east in order to furnish the German people with "necessary living space"). The nerve of the people could be strengthened in the Prora seaside resort in order to prepare them for the upcoming war.



"KdF-seaside resort" Rügen, architectural perspective, craft by Clemens Klotz, 1936

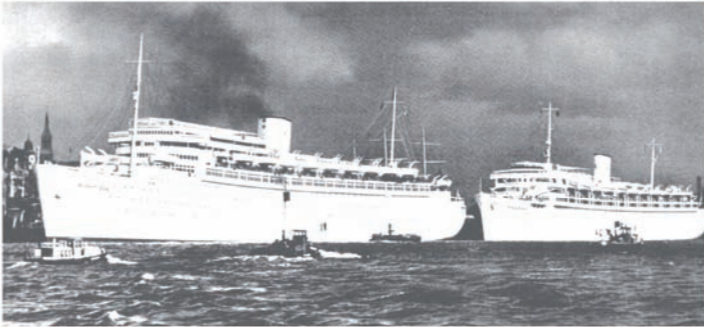
In 1936, Hitler had already considered using the Prora resort as a military hospital. When World War II started, in 1939, all construction work stopped and the workers withdrawn; the building was never completed and would never serve its intended purpose. Between 1939 and the end of the war some parts of the construction were used as an education camp for police officers and the German navy's female radio operators. Any further work was carried out by people sentenced to forced labour and prisoners of war. And, thus, this place of "joy" and "retreat" gives yet further grounds for lamenting victims of dictatorship.

In 1943, citizens of Hamburg, who had been left homeless by the allies' saturation bombing of their city, were housed at Prora and later it served German refugees from the eastern territories. From 1944 it did, indeed, serve as a military hospital. The "KdF-seaside resort" is also linked to the nearby Peenemünde rocket testing area where builders from Prora had been sent and the V1 and V2 flying weapons were developed. During the era of the German Democratic Republic Prora was declared a military prohibited area and was not open to the public until 1991. Nowadays, Prora is well known as an architectural monument and a part of the social history of "The Third Reich" and is visited by hundreds of thousands each year. Along with the "Reichsparteitagsgelände" (site of the "Nuremberg Rallies"), Prora claims to be the largest closed architectural residue of the Nazi era and is, today, a listed building.

The "Deutsche Arbeitsfront" – "DAF" ("German Work Front") and "Kraft durch Freude" – "KdF" ("Strength Through Joy")

The "Deutsche Arbeitsfront" took the place of the trade unions – which had been violently outlawed on the 2nd of March 1933 – and explicitly did not represent the economical or social interests of the working class: "The ultimate goal of the 'Arbeitsfront' is the education of all working Germans to a National Socialist attitude", as the "Arbeitsfront"-leader Robert Ley put it. It took over both the confiscated property and the workers who had made up the membership of the trade unions and became the largest and wealthiest mass organisation at the time. In November 1933, the "Kraft durch Freude movement" was founded within the framework of the "DAF" and its task was to take care of the workers' leisure time activities. Large projects were started; a fleet of holiday ships, the "KdF-wagon" ("Volkswagen") and, of course, the "KdF-seaside resort" which was intended to serve as a prototype for four further resorts of its kind. Due to its 'leisure time offers' this organisation was the most popular and successful of the "DAF". Until 1939 the seaside resort, like the "KdF-wagon" was an essential element of the "Third Reich's" social propaganda. Typically, the laying of the foundation stone

in Prora took place on the 2nd of May 1936, the 3rd anniversary of the so called "Sturm auf die Gewerkschaften" ("storming of the trade unions"). The seaside resort and "Volkswagen" were only for reasons of propaganda, never in the name of social welfare. As soon as the war started, the whole "KdF"-organisation and its departments were utilized for militaristic purposes. The death of thousands of refugees aboard the "KdF"-ship "Wilhelm Gustloff", capsizing in the Baltic, in January 1945, is also part of that history.



Holiday ships built for the "KdF"-organisation: "Robert Ley" and "Wilhelm Gustloff", 1939

A monument of contemporary history

Within the memorial landscape of Germany it is common to refer only to the harsh crimes of the Nazi era but for a deeper understanding of that era it is vital to also deal with the regime's promises and offers: the alleged classless "Volksgemeinschaft" ("people's community"), the participation in culture, travelling, consumption, technology and motorization should be taken into account in order to start to understand those times. This shiny façade, covering violent mass crime and modern age barbarity, merges with those facts to form a picture of the "Third Reich" that should be understandable to future generations. Half a century later the myth of the apparently good aspects of the "Third Reich" is still alive and the "KdF-seaside resort" is the place where it crystallizes architecturally. In Prora we can uncover the political background, describe the system of National Socialist society in its complexity and finally destroy the myth linked to it.

The Prora resort with its endless rows of buildings, the planned central festival hall for mass events and its lack of private retreat areas denotes some kind of structural violence that, not arbitrarily, reminds us of barracks. Conversations with visitors show that there is a lively interest in the historical and social background to this building. The complex is not just a monumental structure – one of the largest of the Nazi era – it is also a place where the pernicious fascination for Nazi ideology can be clarified and deprived of its mystique. Prora never was used as the intended seaside resort but this does not affect the monument's authenticity and is merely a logical consequence of the expansionistic and racist policy of the "Third Reich", which had developed a much wider scope of dynamics than the endeavour towards a "Volksgemeinschaft" and inner peace.

Additionally, the unfinished construction speaks eloquently of the failure of the Nazi's social policy, a symptom of their policies in totality; the price to be paid for the "Schöner Schein" (beautiful façade) was genocide, mass graves and an utter break with the civilized world.



"KdF"- advertisement from 1939. In the background the building of Prora

