

## **Christoph Herkströter - Geschichtsräume im Wandel. Die museale Vermittlung der deutschen Zeitgeschichte in Ost- und Westdeutschland seit 1958**

**(History Spaces in Transition. The Museum Mediation of Contemporary German History in East and West Germany since 1958)**

### **Abstract of my PhD Project:**

The founding of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic in 1949 not only created two German states, but also different German historical cultures ("Geschichtskulturen"), which shared a common past, but interpreted and communicated it differently. Not only did the basic understanding of the common past before 1949 and especially of the position on National Socialism differ; the historical cultures also developed differently - but not independently of each other over the span of 40 years, until they were - at least on paper - reunited by the German unification in 1989/90.

During the division of Germany, the two German states used history and the public presentation of it in museums to distance themselves from their own past, but also to differentiate themselves from the German state on the other side of the Wall. But how did the museum mediation change during the German division and after the transformation period in 1989/90? Did these converge in parallel to the rapprochement of states in the course of time? Can we speak of a complete alignment with the Federal Republic's image of history in East German museums and memorial sites after 1989/90, resulting in one dominant representation of the German history of National Socialism? How did the transformation affect the groups of experts in East German museums and memorials? Do the ways in which the past is dealt with still differ in East and West Germany or did they converge?

Based on these questions, the dissertation project intends to examine the two (competing) German cultures of history and remembrance of the past by analysing the mediation of contemporary German history in museums and memorials. Museums play a central role in historical culture, as they collect, preserve, process and present the testimonies of the past. As public institutions, museums serve to shape political opinion and influence the way people think about the(ir) past.

The study begins with the opening of the Buchenwald Memorial in 1958 and concludes with the present. Through this time frame, the study is not only able to describe the developments of museum mediation during the German division, but also the immediate and long-term effects of the transformation period of 1989/90 on the museum sector as well as the way in which the museum expert groups were dealt with. As examples, the project examines three East and West German museums and one memorial site each since 1958 or their founding/re-opening in the period under investigation, in order to be able to illustrate any changes that may have taken place. The focus is on both regional and national museums to identify any differences in the way contemporary German History is presented and to provide a differentiated picture of the changes in the museum sector during the German division and the individual developments during and after the transformation period in 1989/90.