



Kuf Kaufmann: Jewish life, an inseparable part of the city of Leipzig

When I was asked to write an essay on the current state of Jewish life in Leipzig I thought to myself, "What could be easier!" I would be able to write about how I arrived in Leipzig at the start of the nineties and found myself in a city, standing in front of a house bearing the star of David. I rang the doorbell and was admitted to Leipzig's Jewish community – accompanied by the sceptical look of old Aaron Adlerstein, the chairman of the community at the time, who had by a miracle survived the Holocaust. This is how I made contact with Leipzig's Jewish past and fell in love with it.

I would also be able to report that at the time the Jewish community consisted of something like 25 members, a number which grew steadily after German reunification with the Jews who migrated here from the former Soviet Union.

I would also mention how the young David Schandalow from Witebsk discovered for himself the depth of Jewish religious philosophy. After studying in the yeshivas of Berlin, London, New York and Jerusalem he became a rabbi, returned to the Leipzig which had become his own and now is the director of a Torah school.

I would like to talk about the Jewish kindergarten,

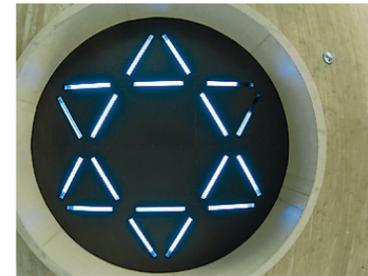
in which young trainee teachers and Rabbi Havlin work. Or about Leipzig's synagogue, which since 1995 has been restored to its former glory thanks to numerous donations and subsidies.

I can write about the vice-president of the Lauder Foundation, Rabber Spinner, whose programmes have ensured that today daily services take place in the synagogue. Or about Dr Salomon Amelikas-Siegel, who was born in Israel and is today Saxony's state rabbi. And about the Jewish community in Leipzig as the largest community of its kind in Saxony, with more than 1,300 members.

I will be happy to tell you about a further project by the Jewish community, the city of Leipzig and the Free State of Saxony: the "Ariowitsch Haus", a new Jewish cultural centre. The diverse programme of the "Ariowitsch Haus" aims to bring together people from different cultures and providing them with information about Jewish traditions together with the history and achievements of the state of Israel.

I will tell the story of the unforgettable meeting with today's white-haired Israelis in the "Association of former Leipzig residents in Israel". They left the city as children in the dark years of National Socialism, and even as Israeli

patriots they retained their love of the city of their birth and their belief in a future for Jewish life in Leipzig.



Thanks to the initiative of Hanna Gildoni, the President of the "Association of former Leipzig residents", the building for the Jewish school,

which Hanna herself also attended, was named after its founder, Rabbi Efraim Karlebach. I'll also talk about the Dubnow Institute at Leipzig University, which is dedicated to the history of Judaism in eastern Europe. I'll mention the Judaeo-Christian working group, the Karlebach Foundation... And then there is something about Jewish life in Leipzig? Apparently nothing could be easier! But in fact that's not the case. If I wanted to really describe it I would have to tell the story of the whole of life in Leipzig, because "Jewish life" is already an inseparable part of the cultural and religious landscape of our city.

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Leipzig has 15,672 artistic and cultural monuments. The German "capital of historic monuments" boasts some 12,000 buildings from the Gründerzeit (mid-19th century to 1873) and Jugendstil periods (late 19th to early 20th century German Art Nouveau) – the biggest wealth of such buildings surviving in the country today. Most of the former upper-middle-class quarters have now been renovated and become choice residential locations, with their splendid façades, elaborate staircases, spacious apartments and green courtyards.

An architectural highlight of Leipzig is the Waldstrassenviertel. Many of its prestigious buildings were built by Jewish merchants, and to this day they shape the face of the city. The prevailing styles here are late classicist, historicist and Jugendstil, and the quarter presents them in a structural integrity that is hard to match. Similarly interesting for architecture enthusiasts is the Musikviertel. The



Leipzig architecture: a reflection of centuries in stone

quarter is home to a large number of cultural, artistic and musical institutions such as the university library "Bibliotheca Albertina", the University of Music and Theatre and the Leipzig Academy of Visual Arts. Its proximity to Johannapark and Clara-Zetkin-Park promises calm and recreation, and yet the quarter offers its residents easy access to all the amenities of the city centre, which is within easy walking distance. In the neighbourhood of Leipzig's

old market square, visitors can encounter the architectural styles of nearly six centuries. There is the Old City Hall of 1556/1557, which presides over the bustle of the many colourful market events from the medieval Easter Market in spring to the historic Christmas Market in winter. Old and new have entered a powerful symbiosis in the city centre. The new

buildings of Petersbogen and Marktgalerie, for example, take up the typical construction methods of the historic trade courtyards and arcades which bear witness to the city's history as a centre of trade fairs.

Only minutes away, the new university campus is being built in Augustusplatz. Construction is advancing at full speed as the campus is scheduled for completion in time for the 600th anniversary of the alma mater in 2009. It will provide a state-of-the-art environment for science and research in a city that cares for its roots and yet always looks ahead.

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