Kibbutz Zerubavel – Hamburg/Blankenese (maritime Hakhshara)

Also Known As
Kibbuz Serubabel
Type of Hakhshara
regular Hakhshara, maritime/fishery Hakhshara
Founded
1945
Opened
circa March 1946
Closed
November 1946
Operating Area
The kibbutz was located in the Elbkurhaus, a center for spa guests on the Elbe river. The Elbe and the Elbe estuary were among the areas used for training practice.
Areas of Training Offered
Fishing, seamanship, sports
Sea travel and sailor training, fishing, nautical science, fish processing, shipbuilding and navigation, rowing and swimming
Description
The maritime Hakhshara training center "kibbutz Zerubavel" was established in 1946 in Blankenese, close to Hamburg. The Jewish Agency and the left-wing Poale Zion movement ran the maritime kibbutz Zerubavel and offered training mainly to young Displaced Persons (DPs) from Eastern Europe that would enable them to emigrate to British Mandate Palestine. In addition to promoting the Jewish maritime and fishing industries, the left-wing Poale Zion Germany also made sure to (re-)establish a close connection to the land and sea of Eretz Israel, contributing to the "healing of the Jewish nation" and the socialist character of the envisaged new Jewish state.

The name Zerubavel
The name Zerubavel (Zerubbabel) illustrates just how closely connected the maritime kibbutz in Blankenese was to the ideology of the Poale Zion movement. Naming the kibbutz Zerubavel not only referenced the grandson of King Jehoiachin, who lived in exile in Babylonia and who, according to biblical tradition, led the Jewish tribes back to Judah and began with the reconstruction of the Second Temple, but also to Yakov Vitkin (Zerubavel, 1866-1967), a leading member of Poale Zion movement. Vitkin emigrated to Palestine in 1910, and, alongside David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, was one of the country's leading Zionists. Zerubavel considered the pioneers in particular to be the "heirs to the ancient heroic tradition", who, like the Maccabees, were to work to defend and build the country – ideas, that were also important in the founding of Hakhshara centers post-1945.

The maritime kibbutz in Blankenese
The approximately 70-80 participants in the maritime kibbutz Zerubavel had mostly survived World War II and the Shoah in Eastern Europe. The Jewish survivors, adults as well as adolescents and children, arrived in the British occupation zone in various ways, such as the DP camp Belsen (Hohne) or the newly established American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) Warburg

Children's Health Home in Blankenese/Hamburg. Along with other Zionist organizations, the Poale Zion movement considered it their duty to provide the survivors of the Shoah, particularly the children and teenagers, with a family environment, social support and education, as well as job perspectives and a feeling of national belonging.
Therefore, the Poale Zion movement opened the maritime kibbutz in the Elbkurhaus on the Mühlenberg in Blankenese, which had 70 participants in March 1946, 81 in July 1946 and 50 in November 1946. An article in the Yiddish language newspaper Unzer Sztyme [Our Voice] (No. 8, March 17, 1946, p. 25.) reported on the children's home with a kosher kitchen and the other activities offered at the site. Another article from Unzer Sztyme (No. 13, September 15, 1946, pp. 3–4) gave an overview of the kibbutz itself:
"The fishery school, which has already existed for five months, has proven in this time that it can train qualified fishermen. The comrades from the school are preparing for emigration in this way. […] Right now, 80 comrades are taking part in a theoretical course in the school. But the most important thing is the practical work."
Under the direction of Abraham Schweike, the Poale Zion movement used the local infrastructure and focused on socialist-Zionist ideals, as well as the idea of the "regeneration" of the Jewish nation through focusing on the land and the sea – ideas that had also played a role even before 1945.

The traditions of maritime Hakhsharot before 1945

During the Nazi regime, maritime Hakhsharot had gained in importance, as on the one hand, the rigidly enforced immigration policy of the British Mandate authorities in Palestine necessitated a professional differentiation among Jewish emigrants, and on the other, various Zionist organizations had begun to call for the "Zionist conquest of the seas". In this spirit, independent fishery Hakhsharot were therefore established on the Danish island of Bornholm, in Livorno, Italy and in Hamburg. In addition, in cooperation with Captain Pietsch, a further training center for Jewish seafaring was developed in the free city of Gdynia (Danzig), which existed from 1935-1938. However, Hamburg played a larger role due to the fact that a Beth Halutz already existed here. Various German-Jewish shipping companies such as the Fairplay Schleppdampfschiffs Reederei Richard Borchardt (Fairplay tugboat shipping company Richard Borchardt) or the Arnold Bernstein Schifffahrtsgesellschaft m.b.H. (Arnold Bernstein shipping company) were already providing training in some seafaring professions. Therefore, some of the early Hakhshara participants in Hamburg were dreaming of a "Hakhshara kibbutz on the water"; a dream that would only become reality after 1945 in Blankenese.

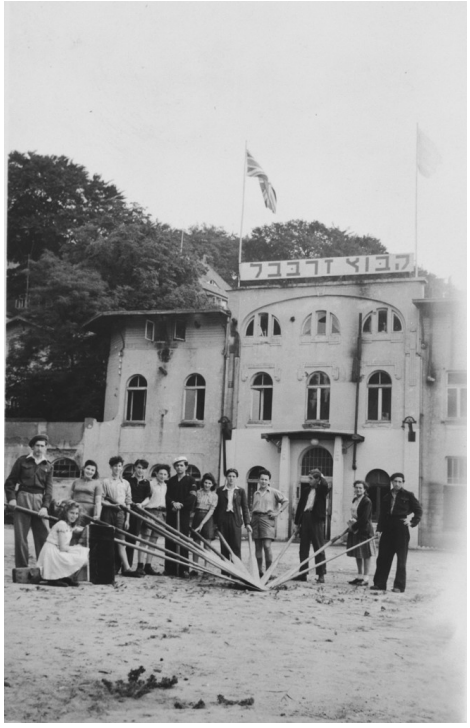
Training and localization of the kibbutz

While the maritime Hakhshara came to an end with the forced confiscation of the German-Jewish shipping companies in Hamburg and the expatriation of Lucy Borchardt (escape to Great Britain) and Arnold Bernstein (escape to the USA) in 1938/39, Poale Zion Germany held on to the Hamburg location after 1945. Under the leadership of Abraham Schweike, the idea of seafaring Hakhshara regained in importance. Just as in the initiatives before 1945, the participants were to receive both theoretical and practical instruction in the different fishing techniques, netting or fish processing as well as in navigation and ship construction. An early 1946 report on the fishery school describes the takeover of the Elbkurhaus and the first renovation work on the bomb-damaged building. Thanks to the approval from the British and German authorities as well as the support of the newly established United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), not only could a school be established, but also food supplies could be secured through rations (for DPs). On a total of four rented fishing boats, the participants were to gather practical experience, supported in part by non-Jewish German seafaring and fishing experts. The approximately 900 –

1,000 kg of fish caught per month were to be passed on to Jewish institutions in the city or processed on the kibbutz itself. With a total of three brigades (of 30 people each), fishing was to be learned on trips lasting up to two weeks at sea or six days on the river.
On September 18, 1945, Harry Goldstein, board member of the newly founded Jewish community in Hamburg, visited the fishery kibbutz. Although there had been isolated tensions between the mostly Eastern European Jewish DPs from Bergen-Belsen and the newly established predominantly German-Jewish oriented community in Hamburg due to the different answers to the questions of recognition and acceptance as a Jew, the rebuilding of Jewish life in Germany and the distribution of international aid and supplies, both Josef Rosensaft (Belsen) as well as Harry Goldstein (Hamburg) viewed the maritime kibbutz as an institution that needed to be supported. Nevertheless, Harry Goldstein considered the fishery kibbutz that he visited in June 1946, a "branch of the 'Belsner'", who used it as a warehouse for black market activities, which the Hamburg authorities and the British military administration also suspected and which would have consequences for the kibbutz' later development.

The closing of the fishery kibbutz
On October 17, 1946, the British Labor MP Richard B. Stokes tabled a question in the House of Commons to Minister for the Affairs for the Control of Germany and Austria John Hynd, which challenged the providing of fishing boats to Jewish DPs in the kibbutz in Blankenese. Helmut Schwalbach has shown in his research that Stokes' inquiry associated the activities of the maraitime Hakhshara in Blankenese with illegal immigrant activities in Mandate Palestine, although John Hynd denied this. Nevertheless, a similar association was made in an article from the Daily Telegraph (November 18, 1946), which called the fishery kibbutz a "cover for Jewish propagandists" and suspected it as being a site of illegal migration activities. Already on November 6, 1946, according to a report by Norbert Wollheim on the fishery kibbutz, the British military administration had announced the closing of the school and that the approximately 70 DPs would be brought to Neustadt/Holstein. This was seen as a "combative action" by kibbutz representatives. "The kibbutz is determined not to leave the school without a fight and has therefore asked the Central Committee for an immediate démarche before there are unpleasant consequences", as Wollheim described the mood in the kibbutz. On November 21, 1946, the British military authorities shut down the fishery kibbutz Zerubavel. The British military police not only occupied the kibbutz, but also organized a transport that was to take the participants to Belsen. Of the former seventy to eighty participants, 26 were still on site – other reports spoke of an already abandoned kibbutz. Although Wollheim and Rosensaft protested against the procedure and the handling of the fishing school, they were unable to prevent its closure. Lennart Onken's research highlighted how much the closure affected individual members and how some of them took part in the founding of the Maritime Training School in Neustadt. Others emigrated to British Mandatory Palestine and found a new home in various kibbutzim, such as in Kiryat Anavim or En Gev on the Sea of Galilee. Others immigrated to the USA.

This was the end of the history of the maritime kibbutz Zerubavel. After the closure of the Warburg Children's Health Home and the demolition of the Elbkurhaus, there are hardly any traces left of this special Jewish-maritime institution in Blankenese. The archive materials in Bergen-Belsen, Bad Arolsen, Washington, D.C./USA, Yad Vashem/Israel and in the kibbutz Lo'Chamei Ha-Ghettaot/Israel comprise the scattered heritage of this unique maritime Jewish history.



Kibbutz Zerubavel
© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Ann Bicky_Photo archive no. 64251_Kibbutz Zerubavel

Anlegestelle des „Kibbutz Zerubavel“ bzw. der „Jewish Fishery School“ (gegründet von der Po’alei Zion Deutschland) in Blankenese/Hamburg, 1946 (1946)
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State of Conservation

not preserved

vor 1950- wurde das Elbkurhaus abgerissen.

Related Organizations

- American Joint Distribution Committee (sponsor)
- Jewish Agency for Palestine (sponsor)
- Poale Zion Deutschland (sponsor)

Related Persons

- Glaser, Gitl
- Izbicki, Moniek
- Knobl
- Rajzman, Bronka
- Rajzman, Moshe
- Rubin
- Sandman, Abraham
- Schweike, Abraham (director)

Sources and Notes

Norbert Wollheim, „Bericht“ – betrifft: Jüdische Fischereischule in Hamburg-Blankenese, Lübeck (12.11.11946), [12]; Protocols of the Central Jewish Committee (CJC) regarding the daily life of the Jewish communities, the DP camps and the various Jewish organizations in the British Occupied Zone in Germany, 1946–1950, O.70 Rosensaft Bergen-Belsen Archive, file no. 13, Microfilm code 99.1875, Yad Vashem Documents Archive https://documents.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&search=global&strSearch=Josef%20Rosensaft&GridItemId=3686775&TreeItemId=3686767 [eingesehen am 5.3.2022].

Besprechung mit Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster – Staatsminister Hynd, 25.11.1946, Norfolk House, [4–5]; Protocols of meeting of Central Jewish Committee (CJC) representatives with representatives of the British authorities, 1946–1950, O.70 Rosensaft Bergen-Belsen Archive, file no. 5, Microfilm Code 99.1875, Yad Vashem Documents Archive https://documents.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&search=global&strSearch=Josef%20Rosensaft&GridItemId=3686765&TreeItemId=3686767 [eingesehen am 5.3.2022].

Links:
https://www.after-the-shoah.org/hamburg-fischerei-kibbuz-serubavel-hachschara-fishery-kibbutz-zerubavel-hachsharah/ [17.3.2022]
https://docplayer.org/132990643-Neue-anfaenge-nach-1945-in-blankenese.html [17.3.2022]
https://www.viermalleben.de/4xleben/Bilder/kloenschnack10_2006.pdf [17.3.2022]

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Helmut Schwalbach: Fischerei am Anleger Dockenhuden. Der Kibbuz von Blankenese, in:

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Recommended Citation

Björn Siegel, Kibbuz Zerubavel – Hamburg/Blankenese (Seefahrts-Hachschara), in: Hakhshara as a Place of Remembrance, December 12, 2022. <https://hachschara.juedische-geschichte-online.net/en/site/7> [October 12, 2024].

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