

The German Federal President's History Competition  
Results of the 23<sup>rd</sup> German History Competition in 2012/2013

**Report**

In the 23<sup>rd</sup> competition, students aged under 21 were asked to conduct their own research on the topic of "Familiar Strangers. Neighbors in History".  
5,080 students took part and submitted more than 1,320 contributions.

Do we suffer from an increasing individualization? Or, on the contrary, do we witness the rediscovery of neighborhood? Extended families and rural structures seem to be losing their importance. Once, parties, churches or clubs and associations had been offering spaces for social interaction; today internet communities and virtual meetings took their places. However, the importance of a community spirit among citizens is increasing. In many places neighborhood initiatives or multigenerational homes are on the rise. Neighborhood as the nucleus of a culture of cooperation and mutual support is once more very popular. But what understanding do children and young people have of the words "neighbor" or "neighborhood"? Which aspects and notions of neighborhood do they find to be extraordinary and relevant?

The participants investigated how neighborly relations have changed in course of time. They explored the topic - thematically and methodologically - to a very broad extent: they investigated the relationships in urban neighborhoods as well as the aspects of cross-border neighborhood. The children and young people showed a special interest in the topic of integration of new neighbors, e.g. displaced persons, guest workers or members of different religions. Neighborly relations "under stress", in the times of the National Socialism and the partition of Germany, also inspired many contributions.

The students' results show the diverse shapes that neighborhood can take on: they last from conflicts and exclusion to tolerance and mutual support. The students' high appreciation of cooperation and community, which are characterized by tolerance and support, becomes particularly clear in the competition entries.

To strengthen the European dimension of the competition, together with the *Fédération des Maisons Franco-Allemande* in France and the *Foundation Karta* in Poland, the Koerber Foundation launched a special German-French and a German-Polish competition. About 1,500 adolescents participated with more than 200 contributions to those bi-national neighborhoods. The topics ranged from the history of bi-national partnership between cities or schools, from German emigrants in France or Poland, up to questions concerning the cohabitation in border areas.