

# The Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg. A Difficult Heritage and a Public Space

Alexander Schmidt

Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds, Nuremberg

## Abstract

The former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg reflect politics and public debates in Germany between suppression, non-observance and direct reference to the National Socialist Past since 1945. Within this debate, various ways of dealing with the architectural heritage of the National Socialism exist. Those approaches are often contradictory. Since 1945 (and until today), the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds have been perceived as an important heritage. However, despite innumerable tourists visiting the area, parts of the buildings were removed and through ignoring the historic past of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds, an everyday usage of the area was established. As of the public representation of the city, Nuremberg's Nazi Past was played down and hidden. Simultaneously, considerable efforts were made to maintain and renovate areas of the Party Rally Grounds, partly out of a pragmatic manner as well as to document and educate about history. The special role Nuremberg played under National Socialism, led to a particularly prominent culture of remembrance (*Erinnerungskultur*). However, this isn't the outcome of a simple success story coming from initial public suppression to a conscious examination of the National Socialist Past. It has been a rather contradictory non – linear process, continuing until today.

**Keywords:** Nuremberg, heritage, Nazi Party Rally Grounds

## Introduction

Together with Tempelhof Airport and the Olympic Stadium, both in Berlin, as well as the unfinished *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength Through Joy) seaside resort Prora on Rügen Island, the Nuremberg Nazi Party Rally Grounds are among the most extensive architectural remains from the time of National Socialism in Germany (Doosry 2002; Schmidt & Urban 2006; Schmidt 2017a). Millions of copies of images from the annual Nuremberg Nazi Party Rallies, the biggest propaganda events of National Socialism, were made available to the public. The last Nazi Party Rally of 1938 alone lasted eight days and brought a million people to the city (Zelnhefer 2002; Urban 2007; Schmidt 2016).

However, the architectural heritage of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds and the presence of the Party Rallies in the media in the shape of photographs by Hitler's photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, and of the film *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will) by Leni Riefenstahl which met with world-wide recognition, are only part of Nuremberg's difficult heritage from the time of National Socialism. Nuremberg was also the city where the anti-Semitic rabble-rouser, Julius Streicher, published his newspaper *Der Stürmer* (The Stormer). In Nuremberg, during the 1935 Party Rally, the Nuremberg Race Laws were proclaimed, establishing the legal foundation for further persecution of the Jews. In addition, the Nuremberg Trial of the main war criminals was also viewed rather negatively in the early post-war decades and was therefore perceived as a burden on the city's reputation.

Thus, Nuremberg has clearly been confronted by its heritage from the time of National Socialism and could hardly avoid the issue of its role during the Third Reich (Gregor 2008; Schmidt 2017b). All the more so since memories of National Socialism were clearly visible in the cityscape – mainly on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds (Maconald 2009).

### **A Look Back – Planning and Construction on the Nazi Party Rally Grounds 1933 to 1939**

It was in no way clear from the beginning that after 1933, Nuremberg's most important leisure area on Dutzendteich Lake in the south eastern district of the city, covering an area of eleven square kilometres, was going to be transformed into the Nazi Party Rally Grounds with numerous parade grounds, assembly halls and a stadium (Dietzfelbinger 2002; Weimer 2007). The project started on a relatively small scale, when the decision was taken to destroy Luitpold Grove, a park from the turn of the century, and to construct in its place the Luitpold Arena, a parade ground for the *Sturmabteilung* (Storm Troopers, SA) and *Schutzstaffel* (Protection Squadron, SS). This was largely completed for the 1933 Party Rally, and from then on, every year a ceremony was held here, to commemorate the dead of the SS and SA and to consecrate their new standards.

But the Luitpold Arena construction project, completed in a short time and directed by the municipality, was only the beginning. Nuremberg's Lord Mayor, Willy Liebel, pushed the project for a new large hall for the Nazi Party Congress, designed by Nuremberg architect, Ludwig Ruff, and subsidised by the German Reich. In 1935, the foundation stone for the Congress Hall on Dutzendteich Lake was laid. It was only partially completed by 1939, and therefore never used during the Nazi Party Rallies. The beginning of World War II basically also signalled the end of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds construction project, so that "*the first giant among the structures of the Third Reich*", as Hitler put it at the foundation stone ceremony, remained an unfinished major structure on Dutzendteich Lake in 1945.

It was only after the Luitpold Arena construction project and after the first planning phase of the Congress Hall that Albert Speer was commissioned to develop an overall design for the Nazi Party Rally Grounds. As far as possible, he had to integrate existing construction plans (Luitpold Arena, Congress Hall) as well as the already established event

area of the Zeppelin Meadow into his overall plan. By adding a large axis (*Große Straße* – Great Road) Speer tried to create a certain degree of symmetry. Every structure and every parade ground were to be given a counterpart, so that the entire grounds would give the impression of an overall impression of a cohesive plan – an attempt which was only partially successful.

Thus, the Great Road, the central axis of the grounds, meets the existing Luitpold Arena at an angle. This necessitated a long building as a kind of separation which was to be used as an exhibition hall. The counterpart of the very large Congress Hall was also comparatively small – a hall which was to host Hitler’s speeches on cultural topics. Neither this hall nor the exhibition hall proceeded beyond the construction model stage, though. The Great Road is also important for the Grounds because it runs in a north-westerly direction, immediately aligned with Nuremberg Imperial Castle, thus creating a symbolic link between mediaeval Nuremberg, the city of Albrecht Dürer and of the imperial diets, and the ‘new Nuremberg’ and the ‘Temple City of the Movement’, one of the names Nazi propaganda gave to the Party Rally Grounds. Especially Nuremberg’s Lord Mayor Willy Liebel emphasized the alleged connection between the medieval Nuremberg and the city under the National Socialism. He gifted Hitler a detailed reproduction of the Imperial Sword, which is part of the Imperial Regalia – as well as the Imperial Crown and Imperial sceptre. After the *Anschluss* (annexation) of Austria into Nazi Germany, the Imperial Regalia were brought from Vienna to Nuremberg and were supposed to be displayed on the Nazi Party Rally Grounds. In the nineteenth century, Nuremberg was already perceived as a typical German city linked to a romanticised idea of a great German history. During National Socialism this was further stepped up: Nuremberg was supposedly the “*most German of all German cities*” (Schmidt 2013: 137).

In the south-easterly direction, the Great Road led to the so-called *Märzfeld* (March Field) which was to be used for the Wehrmacht’s demonstration manoeuvres. Only a small part of the March Field was actually completed so the Wehrmacht events were held on the Zeppelin Field.

The German Stadium was the last and biggest construction project on the Nazi Party Rally Grounds. It was intended to be the world’s biggest stadium, over 100 metres high and with room for 400,000 spectators. Although all that happened was bringing in construction site equipment and preliminary excavation work, the German Stadium project is of outstanding importance for the architectural history of National Socialism. For here, for the first time, Albert Speer had planned a building which was to be the largest of its kind worldwide. As a consequence of this boundless construction the question arose of where the large amounts of building materials were to be procured. Speer came up with a typical solution which will become typical in the subsequent years. With the aid of loans, he enabled the SS to set up the company *Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke* (German Earth and Stone Works), which ran granite quarries deploying concentration camp inmates as slave labourers. Thus, with Speer’s cooperation, the concentration camps in Flossenbürg, Mauthausen, Groß-Rosen and Natzweiler were established to produce granite for Speer’s monumental structures (Jaskot 2000; Jaskot 2002).

This directly links the construction project ‘Party Rally Grounds’ to the crimes of National Socialism. The same applies to the camp area south-east of the Party Rally Grounds, where between 1933 and 1938 the SA, SS, Hitler Youth and other groups were housed in large tented settlements. During the war, the camp infrastructure was used as a complex for prisoners of war, as a distribution centre for slave labourers and as a collecting camp for the deportation of Jews (Lessau 2020).

Apart from the Luitpold Arena, the best-known part of the Party Rally Grounds is probably the Zeppelin Field which still exists today. It was designed by Albert Speer and almost completed by 1938; comprising the parade ground and surrounding stands. As one of the few implemented projects it hosted several events: the Wehrmacht’s demonstration manoeuvres, the roll-calls of the Reich Labour Service and the Political Leaders, as well as a so-called ‘Day of the Community’ were all held here. The area also became famous because of the ‘Light Dome’ formed by anti-aircraft searchlights and staged every year after 1936 during the evening event with the Political Leaders – an impressive staging of the idea of the so-called ‘people’s community’.



Figure 1. The architecture of the Documentations Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds is a counterpart to the architecture of 1935 (©Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds D-0138-01).

### **The Nazi Party Rally Grounds since 1945 – Ways of Dealing with a Difficult Heritage in a Public Urban Space**

Today the visible built heritage consists mainly of three major remains of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds: the two kilometres long Great Road is most often used as a parking area for major events. The unfinished Congress Hall serves as a storage hall, as the rehearsal stage for Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra, and houses the Documentation Centre

Former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. And finally, the Zeppelin Field today serves as a sports ground and event space for major events such as the music festival *Rock im Park*.

Unlike memorial sites such as concentration camps, the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds are not a closed space, but part of the city and accessible to the public at any time. So, visitors, tourists, passers-by, and Nuremberg citizens alike have been confronted with these large, unmissable built remnants of National Socialism in their everyday lives. Various ways of dealing with this historic heritage developed, which since 1945 have often existed simultaneously and parallel to each other. (Dietzfelbinger 1990; Jaskot 2008; Schmidt 2015).

### ***Visiting***

As early as 1945, people made a point of visiting the Party Rally Grounds as a symbolically important heritage of National Socialism. Thus, the large swastika sculpture topping the centre of the Zeppelin Grandstand was shown on the first title page of Time Magazine after the end of the war, together with an American GI who had raised his right arm in a Hitler salute which was presumably intended as an ironic statement. The first Jewish service of worship after 1945 was also held on the Zeppelin Grandstand, conducted by an American military rabbi. A few days after the conquest of Nuremberg, after a celebration in the city centre, the US Army also held a victory parade on the Zeppelin Field. At the end of the parade, the swastika sculpture was blown up, and this was eternalised on film. In the following decades, the US Army symbolically renamed the Zeppelin Field 'Soldiers' Field' and inscribed this name in large letters on the Zeppelin Grandstand.

Not only Americans, but also German groups have come to visit the Grounds, mainly the Zeppelin Field, as a historic witness. For instance, the *Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* (German Trade Union Congress) held its Labour Day event on the 1 May 1947 on the Zeppelin Grandstand. At the other end of the political spectrum, the *Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft* (Sudeten German Homeland Association) in the mid-1950s held a major Sudeten German Day and here of all places, at the historic location of the Party Rally Grounds, demanded the restitution of the Sudeten region. Major religious events such as a World Congress of Jehovah's Witnesses and some of Billy Graham's crusades, deliberately referenced the historic location of Zeppelin Field with the intention of countering the National Socialist past with prayer and religious ceremony.

Not only official events have attracted visitors to this location, also innumerable tourists have visited the Nazi Party Rally Grounds since 1945 (Macdonald 2009: 149–152; Schmidt 2012). In the first post-war decades they were largely left alone to wander the grounds without any information or support from guides. Today, the Zeppelin Field is one of the most visited locations in Nuremberg and the topic of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds is an established part of the city's tourism concept. The Documentation Centre Former Nazi Party Rally Grounds alone welcomes more than 300,000 visitors every year.

### ***Removing***

Parts of Nuremberg's urban society, also parts of German post-war society as a whole would have preferred to get rid of the burden of the Nazi past as fast as possible. In the

case of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, there was the tangible hope of erasing the memory of the National Socialist past by removing the buildings. When, for example the US Army returned the Luitpold Arena which had previously served as a parking space for military vehicles to the City of Nuremberg, the city had all the structures from the time of National Socialism demolished and the area transformed back into a park. Thus the best-known venue of the film *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will) disappeared in the green of meadows and trees.

‘Removing’ could, however, also take on a completely different meaning. In 1963, a group of young Nuremberg architects demanded that the Congress Hall should be dismantled. Their idea, headlined a ‘*Schöneres Nürnberg*’ (More Beautiful Nuremberg), considered the Congress Hall a disruptive presence, making the whole area offensive. The monumental Nazi structure should no longer stand in the urban space just like that. Instead, they planned the construction of an art gallery and a teacher training college on the flat hill consisting of the remains of the then demolished Congress Hall. The architects did not succeed with their plan: there was too much interest by the municipal administration in a possibly high-quality use of the existing building, which after all, although it was never completed, had cost eighty-two million Reichsmarks. An investment they did not want to lose. The construction of the Documentation Centre 2001 also aims to overcome the ideological message of National Socialist architecture by modern counter-architecture and partially destroying the Congress Hall (Handa 2017).

Probably the most spectacular act of destruction of a building on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds concerned the Zeppelin Grandstand in 1967. Stating as the official reason that the rows of pillars to the right and left above the main grandstand were dilapidated, the city had them blown up. Certainly, another factor contributed to this decision: in the years before, a group of Israeli visitors had complained about mosaics on the ceiling of these arcades which were reminiscent of swastikas. The decision to blow up the pillars triggered a vehement debate in the city: many, for example taxi drivers, argued that such important tourist sites simply could not be destroyed. Others considered this demolition a gesture of helplessness, since not only the swastika mosaics, but all the buildings and the entire grounds were reminiscent of National Socialism. In addition, Nuremberg Motor Sports Club which since 1947 had used the grandstand for a major car and motorcycle race also wanted to keep the Stone Grandstand and continue using it. Quite a few of the critics of the decision to blow up the pillars came from right-wing and right-wing extremist circles, a fact which confirmed the city’s intentions.

As a consequence, the pillars were then blown up in 1967 in spite of all the resistance. It was the last spectacular act of destruction as a symbolic gesture of the annihilation of the National Socialist past (an intention which however was never officially acknowledged by the City Council). But still today, here and there, remnants of the Party Rally Grounds are removed, for example when foundations of the March Field are in the way of new building projects for the Langwasser district.

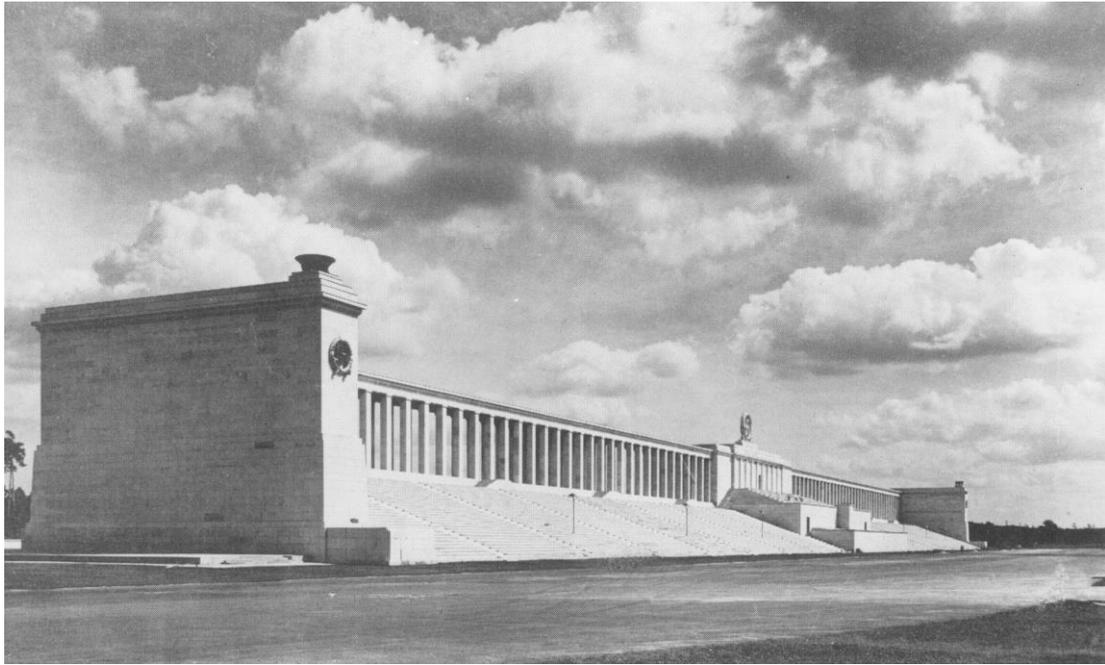


Figure 2. The Zeppelin Grandstand of Albert Speer 1938 (©Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds Ph-0423-02).



Figure 3. The overall design for the Nazi Party Rally Grounds by Albert Speer, Propaganda-Postcard in 1937 (©Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds Ph-1167-00).

### *Ignoring*

Many uses of the grounds since 1945 have not taken into account the historic past of the area and have used them in a completely pragmatic manner. Numerous sports and leisure events are a good example of this: joggers run around Dutzendteich Lake, alone or as part

of major running events. Thousands of breeders of German Shepherd Dogs meet on the Zeppelin Field for a central competition. These and many other events have one thing in common: they see the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds and its structures mainly as an event venue – and not as a historic location.

This (at least seemingly) ahistorical use started at a relatively early date with the ‘Norisring Races’ which have been held annually at the Zeppelin Grandstand since 1947. This motor sports competition started off with motorcycles and today also includes racing cars. The event organisers see the Zeppelin Grandstand merely as a grandstand, not as the location where Hitler made his speeches and where thousands of people cheered him. Correspondingly, in this context, the grandstand is not referred to as the Zeppelin Grandstand, but as the Stone Grandstand.

But the organisers of the races have not been averse to using the monumental buildings constructed for the Party Rallies for their purposes: the so-called Stone Grandstand has figured as the logo for the Norisring Races on many posters. Nuremberg Motor Sports Club used the so-called Stone Grandstand as an impressive backdrop, and was therefore a fierce opponent of blowing up the pillars in 1967.

It is probably the predominant approach to use of the grounds just to ignore the architecture and the history of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds. This applies both to major events and to some quite major building projects. So, the Nuremberg Fun Fair is held twice per year, immediately adjacent to the Congress Hall. The monumental granite facade of the Congress Hall serves as backdrop for the stalls, rides and the Ferris wheel, making it well-known to nearly every Nuremberg child – who however has no idea what use had originally been intended for this building.

Ignoring history is virtually a prerequisite for some of the projects. So, for example, a group of investors going by the name of Congress and Partners in 1987 suggested that the entire Congress Hall should be transformed into a large shopping centre, including a hotel, penthouse accommodation on the roof and many other features (Macdonald 2008: 96–99). The plan was to completely commercialise this monumental building from the Nazi era. Only the granite facade would have remained. This project finally failed, not least because sections of the public could not envisage such a use for this building without any reference to its history. This type of comprehensive and complete use, however, presupposes that history should not restrict the current desire to use the building in any way. This again requires a public process of negotiation about whether this is deemed acceptable in every individual case. When the city district of Langwasser was planned on the area of the former camps for Party Rally participants and on the area of the incompletely constructed March Field in the south-east of the Party Rally Grounds, the deliberate decision was taken that neither the architecture of the grounds nor the history of the Party Rallies should in any way influence or impair the development of the new city district, in an architectural or intellectual/spiritual way. The logical consequence was that the towers on the March Field area which had already been completed were blown up, and the stones were used for paving terraces and garden paths.

Unlike the blowing up of the pillars on the Zeppelin Grandstand which happened roughly at the same time, the demolition in Langwasser did not meet with any protest or discussion. ‘Ignoring’ history in this case was an official decision, so to speak, and actually an attempt to create an ahistorical space. This was not successful in the long run, though. In past years, historians, but also inhabitants of the Langwasser city district have taken a very intensive look at the history of this location, thus dealing with the camps on the Party Rally Grounds and with the March Field area. In the course of this process there was palpable regret that so many architectural traces of the former use of the areas during the Party Rallies had been so completely destroyed.

Those who use the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds for leisure sports in their everyday lives, those who live on the former grounds or those who are on their way to a football match in Nuremberg stadium will not think about the National Socialist past of this area all the time, and they don’t have to do that. This everyday use, however, makes a decisive contribution to the fact that there is a mainly friendly atmosphere on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, which are far from being a cult site for backward right-wing extremist groups. Such everyday use, by ignoring history, does not imbue the buildings of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds with a special honour or dignity – an honour and dignity the Nazi builders of the Party Rally would probably have desired for the grounds.



Figure 4. Pragmatic use of the Zeppelin Field as “Soldiers field” for baseball (©Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds 03-1-01).

### *Hiding*

The early post-war decades were often characterised by attempts to hide Nuremberg's Nazi past, hence also the history of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds. No references were to be found in city guidebooks and in the public domain of the city as to where the Party Rally Grounds had been. Visitors encountered locked doors and no information was provided for them. This gap was only inadequately filled by taxi drivers for whom the tour to the Zeppelin Grandstand was a profitable business, or by the janitor of the Congress Hall and the people operating the takeaway kiosks on the grounds. The entrance hall in the Zeppelin Grandstand, a kind of foyer for VIP visitors to the Party Rallies, was only accessible after the mid-1980s when the first exhibition on the history of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds was established there.

In a very pragmatic manner, the US Army hid any unambiguous Nazi symbols they found on the grounds. A swastika mosaic in one of the stairwells of the Zeppelin Grandstand was painted over in green without further ado, and in one of the halls of the former SS barracks, they simply put a carpet over the marble floor which was also decorated with swastikas.

'Hiding' or the attempt to hide not only concerned the history of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds, but Nuremberg's entire Nazi past. Thus, for decades, not only the foyer of the Zeppelin Grandstand was closed to the public, but the public was also barred from visiting Court Room 600 in the Nuremberg Palace of Justice where the Nuremberg Trial of the Main War Criminals had been held. Although again and again mainly foreign tourists wanted to visit the location of the trials, the Bavarian judiciary tried for a long time to evade this issue. Today, the building houses a permanent exhibition on the history of the Nuremberg Trials which is visited by 90,000 people from home and abroad every year.



Figure 5. The blown-up pillars of the Zeppelin Grandstand in 1967 (© Municipal Archive of the city of Nuremberg A 40 / L 706-19).

### ***Maintaining***

One would think that in view of the huge damage to Nuremberg's image caused by National Socialism, the citizens of Nuremberg might have wanted to do away with the architectural heritage of National Socialism as fast as possible. There were indeed such demolition activities, as we have already seen, but at the same time, starting in the immediate post-war years, efforts were made to maintain the buildings, insofar as they could be used. So, a significant sum was invested to make the unfinished Congress Hall building safe and useable in order to hold the Great German Construction Exhibition there in 1949. A year later, the City of Nuremberg even celebrated its nine-hundredth anniversary in the former Nazi building, with a major exhibition. Both exhibitions, however, avoided any direct reference to the Congress Hall's Nazi past. Instead, the building was referred to as *Ausstellungsrundbau* (Exhibition Rotunda) (Schmidt 2017a: 52) – although most visitors, of course, knew only too well the era in which this structure had been created.

In the following decades, large projects again and again aimed to maintain the architectural remains of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. For example, in the 1980s, the Great Road was extensively refurbished so that it could continue to be used as a large parking space for *Nürnberg Messe* (Trade Fair and Exhibition Centre) – whose beginnings were linked to the above-mentioned exhibitions in the Congress Hall. Since 1973, the buildings on the Reich Party Rally Grounds have been listed as historical monuments, and in 2008 it was even discussed whether the buildings should be included on the UNESCO-World Heritage List (Macdonald 2018).

'Maintaining' is also an important key word for the current discussions concerning the Zeppelin Field (Lehner 2015). After a comprehensive examination of the stands in 2007 and 2008, it was obvious that the entire structure was threatened with complete dilapidation. A fundamental decision therefore became necessary: whether to maintain the entire structure or to leave it to decay in the medium term. Until today, this has remained a cause for controversy, one of the reasons being the significant cost of the refurbishment. The overall cost of refurbishing the entire structure including the grandstand and the visitors' stands is estimated to be 80 million Euros. After a long public discussion and intensive debates with experts during a symposium, the City of Nuremberg decided to maintain the Zeppelin Field as a learning location. The Zeppelin Field should be a place where to educate the public on the complex history of the Party Rally Grounds, thus on the difficulty of dealing with uncomfortable heritage, but also where to preserve the memory of WWII and understand the implications of that dramatic event in our history (Zelnhefer 2017). The Federal Republic will bear half the cost, and the Free State of Bavaria will also make a financial contribution.

The objective of the refurbishment is to keep the area accessible and to make sure that this much visited location can continue to be used as a location for historical education. The alternative would be increasing decay right through to the state of a ruin which would have to be fenced in for safety reasons. To present a ruin – then with an almost romantic atmosphere, with more and more shrubs and trees growing on it – behind a fence, to

present this ruin as Nuremberg's conclusive way of dealing with its historic heritage, does however seem difficult. Nevertheless, the plan to maintain the area, particularly in view of the cost, has not managed to convince all its critics (Knigge 2015). In part, the value of the Zeppelin Grandstand and Zeppelin Field as learning locations is questioned – and from this point of view, any maintenance of the area with its significant cost can indeed hardly be justified (Herbert 2015).

In 2015, more than 230,000 people visited the Nazi Party Rally Grounds with guided tours (Macdonald 2006). At least as many people explore the site on their own, so that at least half a million people visit the party rally grounds each year out of historical interest (Bühl-Gramer 2019). Only about a quarter of these visitors are school classes, the rest are educational travellers and tourists in groups and individually. About half of the visitors come from abroad – at least that is the figure for the Documentation Centre Party Rally Grounds (Christmeier 2009). This high number of visitors to the area as well as the successful educational work done on the grounds would very much underline the area's value as a learning location. In future this educational function is to be further improved with better development of the area and an extended list of information points. The hall inside the Zeppelin Grandstand which was hardly ever open to the public is to be made accessible and explained with commentary. As a supplement to the Documentation Centre Former Nazi Party Rallies, the Zeppelin Field area which already has a large number of visitors today will then provide a great variety of information as well as learning locations and programmes. This is also necessary to provide the historic information to tourist visitors who sometimes come to the Zeppelin Field without any preparation.



Figure 6. Zeppelin Grandstand with graffiti against war and NSU (so called “Nationalsozialist Underground) in 2018 (©Alexander Schmidt).

### **Conclusion: A less difficult heritage – the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in the 21st century**

As far as its role during National Socialism is concerned, Nuremberg is a special case. Only a few German cities played such a prominent role in National Socialist propaganda. Because of this, Nuremberg was less able than other cities to ignore its Nazi past – although such attempts were indeed made. In addition, the architectural remains of National Socialism in Nuremberg were so extensive that their mere scale literally forced the city to deal with them in one way or another.

The entire spectrum of ways of dealing with this area, from removing to maintaining, from hiding to visiting and ignoring could be observed in Nuremberg, not in any chronological order, but simultaneously and partially contradicting each other. So there is no success story of suppression in the beginning right through to an enlightened *Erinnerungskultur* (culture of remembrance), but rather there has been a contradictory process which in parts has lasted until today – however with a clear trend towards an active and purposeful way of dealing with the buildings, including their maintenance. The exhibition ‘Fascination and Terror’ which opened relatively early in the mid-1980s is clear proof of this open way of dealing with the city’s own Nazi past and with the built heritage of the Party Rally Grounds.

Since the 1990s at the latest, we can also no longer talk of a “burden of the past” in dealing with the buildings on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds (Macdonald 2016) – on the contrary: now, a visit to the Party Rally Grounds has become a fixed element of Nuremberg tourism and has made a significant contribution to the increase in visitors to Nuremberg. The question of maintaining the dilapidated buildings constitutes the first challenge for the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. An open discussion must be held as to whether this maintenance is necessary, and if so, why. Intensive discussions have been held in Nuremberg on this issue, and they will stay with us for some time to come. Even more than eighty years after construction began, the sheer size of the monumental buildings on the Nazi Party Rally Grounds continues to provoke questions about the right way to handle them, about their preservation, decay or conversion. Their monumentality did not allow them to be completely ignored. This ultimately helped Nuremberg to deal with this initially difficult legacy.

Dealing with great numbers of visitors (including tourists) is a second challenge. The topic of National Socialism does not fit in a quick checklist of supposed tourist hot-spots. How can you reach a large number of people with a low threshold programme, even one with critical content, thus going beyond a superficial sightseeing tour? Dealing with the buildings on the Nazi Party Rally Grounds today has become only one part of a comprehensive culture of remembrance in Nuremberg. This also comprises the presentation of the Nuremberg Human Rights Award, the way the city deals with the history and heritage of the Nuremberg Trials and the establishment of an ‘International Nuremberg Principles Academy’ dedicated to the further development of international criminal law. Both the Human Rights Award and the Nuremberg Academy refer to possible consequences and to concepts which have developed from the events during

National Socialism. In view of right-wing terrorist threats such as the so-called *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (NSU – National Socialist Underground Movement) in Germany with a series of murders during the past few years, in view of growing right-wing populist movements in Germany the way we deal with the architectural and spiritual heritage of National Socialism has become even more urgent and important. The buildings on the Nazi Party Rally Grounds also stand for the Nazi ideology of a homogeneous people, the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community) created via demarcation and exclusion of other peoples and people. In Nuremberg we can show where this ideology can lead.

## References

- BÜHL-GRAMER C. 2019. *Perspektivenwechsel. Das ehemalige Reichsparteitagsgelände aus der Sicht von Besucherinnen und Besuchern*. Nürnberg: Stadt Nürnberg, Kulturreferat.
- CHRISTMEIER M. 2009. *Besucher am authentischen Ort. Eine emoirische Studie im Dokumentationszentrum Reichsparteitagsgelände*. Idstein: Schulz Kirchner Verlag.
- DIETZFELBINGER E. 1990. *Der Umgang der Stadt Nürnberg mit dem früheren Reichsparteitagsgelände*. Nürnberg: Pädagogisches Institut.
- DIETZFELBINGER E. 2002. Bauen für die Ewigkeit – das Reichsparteitagsgelände in Nürnberg, in: S. ZELNHEFER (ed.), *Die Reichsparteitage der NSDAP in Nürnberg*, Nürnberg: Verlag Nürnberger Presse: 261–269.
- DOOSRY Y. 2002. *„Wohlauf, lasst uns eine Stadt und einen Turm bauen...“ Studien zum Reichsparteitagsgelände*. Tübingen: Wasmuth.
- GREGOR N. 2008. *Haunted City. Nuremberg and the Nazi Past*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- HANDA R. 2017. Presenting the Extremely Difficult Past: Günther Domenig's Documentation Center of the National Socialist Party Rally Grounds, Nuremberg, Germany. *Montreal Architectural Review* 4: 63–82.
- HERBERT U. 2015. Erhalten? Wozu?, in: J. LEHNER, Erhalten! Wozu? Perspektiven für Zeppelintribüne, Zeppelinfeld und das ehemalige Reichsparteitagsgelände. *H-Soz-Kult* 01.09.2015 [www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-78559](http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-78559).
- JASKOT P. B. 2000. *The architecture of Oppression. The SS, Forced Labour and the Nazi Monumental Building Economy*. London/New York: Routledge.
- JASKOT P. B. 2002. Heinrich Himmler and the Nuremberg Party Rally Grounds, in: R. A. ETLIN (ed.), *Art, culture and media under the Third Reich*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 230–256.
- JASKOT P. B. 2008. The Reich Party Rally Grounds Revisited: The Nazi Past in Postwar Nuremberg, in: G. D. ROSENFELD & P. B. JASKOT (eds.), *Beyond Berlin. Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press: 143–162.
- KNIGGE V. 2015. Zeugniswerte, Bildungswerte und Geld – Plädoyer für eine geschichtsbewusste Nachnutzung des Reichsparteitagsgeländes, in: J. LEHNER (ed.), Erhalten! Wozu? Perspektiven für Zeppelintribüne, Zeppelinfeld und das ehemalige Reichsparteitagsgelände. *H-Soz-Kult* 01.09.2015, [www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-78559](http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-78559).

- LEHNER J. (ed.), 2015. Erhalten! Wozu? Perspektiven für Zeppelintribüne, Zeppelinfeld und das ehemalige Reichsparteitagsgelände. *H-Soz-Kult* 01.09.2015 [www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-78559](http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-78559).
- LESSAU H. (ed.), 2020. *Das Reichsparteitagsgelände im Krieg. Gefangenschaft, Massenmord und Zwangsarbeit*. Petersberg: Imhof.
- MACDONALD S. 2006. Mediating heritage. Tour guides at the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, Nuremberg. *Tourist studies* 6: 119–138.
- MACDONALD S. 2008. Unsettling memories: Intervention and controversy over difficult public heritage, in: M. ANICO & E. PERALTA (eds.), *Heritage and Identity. Engagement and Demission in the Contemporary World*. London: Routledge: 93–104.
- MACDONALD S. 2009. *Difficult Heritage. Negotiating the Nazi past in Nuremberg and Beyond*. Abington: Routledge.
- MACDONALD S. 2016. Is “Difficult Heritage” still “Difficult”? Why Public Acknowledgment of Past Perpetration May No Longer Be So Unsettling to Collective Identities. *Museum International* 67: 6–22.
- MACDONALD S., 2018. Endorsement effects and warning potentials: Architecture from totalitarian eras as heritage, in: H. HÖKERBERG (ed.), *Architecture as propaganda in twentieth-century totalitarian regimes. History and heritage*. Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa.
- SCHMIDT A. 2012. Weder braun noch schwarz: Tourismus auf dem ehemaligen Reichsparteitagsgelände in Nürnberg, in: H.-D. QUACK & A. STEINECKE (eds.), *Dark Tourism. Faszination des Schreckens*. Paderborn: Universität Paderborn: 171–178.
- SCHMIDT A. 2013. Nürnberg, die “deutscheste aller deutschen Städte”? Das Bild des spätmittelalterlichen Nürnberg in der nationalsozialistischen Proaganda, in: M. STEINKAMP & B. REUDENBACH (eds.), *Mittelalterbilder im Nationalsozialismus*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- SCHMIDT A. (ed.), 2015. *Das Gelände. Dokumentation. Perspektiven. Diskussion. 1945-2015*. Petersberg: Imhof.
- SCHMIDT A. 2016. A Mobilized Community of People – Intention and Effect of the Nuremberg Nazi Party Rallies, in: C. HÖFLER & M. KARCH (eds.), *March Formations. The Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg*. Berlin: Wagemann Medien: 22–26
- SCHMIDT A. 2017a. *Das Reichsparteitagsgelände in Nürnberg*. Nürnberg: Sandberg.
- SCHMIDT A. 2017b. “Schattenort” Nürnberg? Von der Last der Vergangenheit zur touristischen Vermarktung, in: S. EISENHUTH & M. SABROW (eds.), *Schattenorte. Stadtimages und Vergangenheitslasten*. Göttingen: Wallstein: 98–116.
- SCHMIDT A. & URBAN M. 2006. *The Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg. A Short Guide*, Nürnberg: Sandberg.
- URBAN M. 2007. *Die Konsensfabrik. Funktion und Wahrnehmung der NS-Reichsparteitage 1933-1941*. Göttingen: V&R unipress.
- WEIMER S. 2007. Fiat ars, pereat mundus...? Über das Reichsparteitagsgelände in Nürnberg, in: N. HILLE & M. E. Müller (eds.), *Zeiten-Sprünge*. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner: 283–298.
- ZELNHEFER S. 2002. *Die Reichsparteitage der NSDAP in Nürnberg*. Nürnberg: Verlag Nürnberger Presse.
- ZELNHEFER S. (ed.), 2017. *Zeppelin Field – A Place for Learning. A Project to Maintain a Very Special National Heritage*. Accessed 09 Dec 2020

<https://museums.nuernberg.de/documentation-center/the-site/the-future-of-the-nazi-party-rally-grounds/>