

## **NURENBERG DECIDES TO CONSERVE NAZI RALLY GROUNDS**

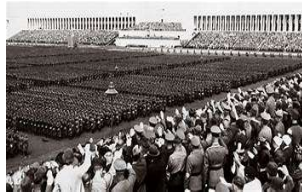
**SOME ARGUED THAT THE SITE SHOULD BE LEFT TO DECAY IN RUINS, BUT OFFICIALS HAVE DECIDED TO MAINTAIN IT AS TESTAMENT TO THE CITY'S DARK HISTORY**

**ZEPPELIN FIELD – A PLACE FOR LEARNING –A PROJECT TO MAINTAIN A VERY SPECIAL NATIONAL HERITAGE**

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**THE NAZI RALLY GROUNDS DURING AND SHORTLY BEFORE WW2**



**THE NAZI RALLY GROUNDS AFTER WW2 AND TODAY**



## **INTRODUCTION**

**THE NAZI PARTY RALLY GROUNDS DURING WW2 AND IN THE LATE 30'S**

**IMPRISONMENT, MASS MURDER AND FORCED LABOR**



Watchtower at the camp's main entrance, winter 1939/40.

autumn 1939: shortly after the war began, the tent cities that had housed Nazi party rally participants at the rally grounds in Langwasser were replaced by countless wooden barracks, barbed wire fences and watch towers. In very short order an extensive camp complex had arisen. Over the next few years, more than a hundred thousand civilians, prisoners of war, and forced laborers from western, southern, and Eastern Europe would be transported here. Most were compelled to serve "work duty" in agriculture or industry - often under inhuman conditions. ***By the war's end, several thousand prisoners of war and forced laborers had perished in Nuremberg.***

When the U.S. Army reached Nuremberg-Langwasser in mid-April 1945, it was able to free about 14,000 prisoners from the POW camp - the weak and sick, left behind by the fleeing German Wehrmacht.

***The history of the prison camps at the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds has gone largely unknown until now.*** While images of the party's rallies in Nuremberg became notorious around the world as icons of Nazi propaganda, ***few remembered that this area had served to confine prisoners of war and forced laborers between 1939 and 1945.***

This exhibition presents the latest results of research. In five time segments, it attempts to paint a more detailed picture of how those in the camp lived - and suffered. ***Biographies highlight the fate of some of the inmates and bear impressive witness to how deeply the Nazi Party Rally Grounds were embroiled in the National Socialists' racist warfare and policy of annihilation during World War II.***

#### **THE FUTURE OF THE NAZI PARTY SITE**



***Each year, more than 200,000 visitors come to visit the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, including the Zeppelintribüne.***

Even today, the remaining structures of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds still dominate a large section of the urban landscape in southeastern Nuremberg. How the city has dealt with the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds and their structures has gone through several phases over the past 65 years and more. The first decades after 1945 were characterized by a mixture of perplexity, ignorance, psychological repression, and sheer pragmatism. The new democracy had little use for such structures, whose only purpose had been as propaganda for the National Socialist regime. This phase includes car races, sports events, uses for storage, as well as the demolition of dilapidated and unfinished parts of buildings.

A reconception began only after the amended Bavarian Monument Protection Act of 1973 placed the structures of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds under protection. The former silence gradually gave way to keeping and preserving the structures, in combination with teaching about the history of Nazism. The establishment of the first exhibition, "Fascination and Terror" - kept rather simple because of a lack of funds - at the Zeppelintribüne in 1985 was a crucial step toward using the site more fully as a way of teaching history. The exhibition was limited to summer months and the building was already in questionable condition, yet interest from visitors all over the world was rising. So in 2001, the former location was replaced with the opening of a contemporary permanent exhibition at the Documentation Center in the former Congress Hall. The guidelines for the city's future treatment of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, adopted unanimously by the City Council in 2004, linked the preservation of the buildings with an educational mission. From now on, a task force of various municipal agencies is to address concerns that involve the site as a whole.

*Today, the question of adequate treatment of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds has arisen once again. The Zeppelintribüne and Zeppelinfeld especially, more than seventy years after they were built, are structurally troubled. Without prompt, skilled restoration, this site for historical and civic education could be lost within a few years.*

A concept paper prepared in 2011 by the City of Nuremberg's Task Force on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, dealing with how to treat the Zeppelinfeld educational site, was approved that October by a large majority of the Culture Committee of the City Council. It establishes several guidelines for further procedure:

1. The structural integrity of the Zeppelinfeld and Zeppelintribüne is to be preserved.
2. The vivid presence, informative depth, and autonomous experience of the Zeppelintribüne as a the historical site serves to counteract both the mystification and trivialization of its era.
3. Temporary artistic engagement with the structural relics on the grounds opens up new options for access and understanding. For artistic uses, a concept will be developed for the entire former Nazi Party Rally Grounds, using the Zeppelintribüne and the Zeppelinfeld as core components and venues.
4. Everyday uses and leisure events are an integral part of the contemporary handling of National Socialist propaganda architecture deliberately opposes the enforced conformity of National Socialist events with opportunities for individualized growth and development. But this can apply only if the structural effect of the buildings is not permanently compromised (for example, by booths, fences, etc.).

A November 2011, a conference of specialists, titled "Conservation or Deterioration?" was held at the Documentation Center, where experts from Germany and elsewhere explored the future treatment of the Zeppelinfeld from the perspectives of education, cultural studies, tourism, and preservation of historical monuments. More than 100 participants took advantage of the opportunity to talk with experts at the site about the prospects for preservation and concepts for future uses. The event was covered by the national press. *Both the experts and the public agreed to support the preservation of the Zeppelintribüne facility.*

#### **RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR HISTORY: REASONS FOR REFURBISHMENT**

Until the mid-1990s, the US Americans played sports on the field, and once a year, the ring road around the Zeppelin Grandstand ("Norisring") is the venue of high-class motorsport events. And the Grandstand is occasionally put to other "trivial" uses. *But largely, these buildings have been in the way ever since, awkward, cumbersome, and challenging. The City of Nuremberg is aware of this. Between 2005 and 2011 the City invested over one million Euros to safeguard access to the Zeppelin Grandstand.* In addition, in the same period, over three million Euros had to be spent on infrastructure measures such as paths and roads in the immediate surroundings. The City has not only financed the upkeep of the buildings. With the exhibition "Fascination and Terror" in the Zeppelin Grandstand (1985 to 2001), the Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds (housed in the unfinished Congress Hall since 2001), the Area Information System (since 2006), and the Memorium Nuremberg Trials (in the Palace of Justice since 2010), it has kept adding new sources of information. Its information policy aiming to enlighten people is closely linked to the preservation of the building vestiges from the Nazi era.

The 2004 guidelines underline this attitude. Despite all the repairs, the Zeppelin Grandstand is rotten today. Since 2010, access for visitors to various areas has been prohibited for safety reasons. If there was no refurbishment, this would result in an accelerated decay within the next decade. It must be assumed that sooner or later the spectator steps will have to be blocked off. *According to building experts, the site can not be preserved without a general refurbishment.*

First estimates put the costs at between 60 and 75 million Euros. In Germany, there are quite a lot of building relics from the Nazi era. In many cases, the buildings have continued to be used. The Olympic Stadium in Berlin has remained a sports arena, the former ministries of the German Reich in Berlin were converted into offices, and the “House of Art” in Munich is an exhibition venue - even though, of course, everywhere the style of these buildings unmistakably points towards the time of building.

In Nuremberg, the situation is a very special one, though. The Party Rally Grounds designed by Albert Speer, with their various buildings, served only one main purpose: as a forum for the glorification of the Nazi regime and the “political Messiah“, Adolf Hitler. A liberal, pluralist, and democratic society such as that of the Federal Republic of Germany, however, has no need for places for march pasts and roll calls for 100,000 to 200,000 people in uniforms, brought into line, or for a megalomaniac Congress Hall for 50,000 party members. This is why the Nazi buildings in used after 1945. Nuremberg could not be suitable, not to mention commercially, This is the difference between the Nazi buildings in Nuremberg and other major state and party buildings erected under the sign of the swastika during the “Third Reich” in Germany. After 1945, the Nuremberg buildings remained largely in their original state.

They were in no way stripped of their original character or even “whitewashed” - by conversion or new usage. Even the Zeppelin Grandstand is only rarely used as a grandstand today. The Zeppelin Field itself in its vast size is of very little practical value. Parts of the area are used as sports fields now. many years, the Zeppelin Grandstand has been a fixed element of city tours. Every day, visitor groups come to the Grandstand. Zeppelin Field - A Place for Learning

### **SUMMARY**

Between 1933 and 1938, Hitler supporters flocked to a huge complex in Nuremberg for a series of mass Nazi party rallies. The once-imposing grounds, where parades and processions were held in celebration of the Führer, are now crumbling. Nuremberg officials are about to undertake a controversial plan to conserve this epicenter of the city's tortured past.

The Nazi party rally grounds, or Reichsparteitagsgelände, stretch for more than four square miles across southeastern Nuremberg, which Hitler declared the “City of Nazi Party Rallies” in 1933. Designed by Albert Speer, Hitler’s chief architect, the complex boasted sprawling tent encampments and barracks where visitors could stay during the week-long rallies, a grand parade street that spanned more than one mile, a Congress Hall that could seat 50,000 people, a stadium where tens of thousands of German youths displayed their vigor before the Führer, and the so-called “Zeppelinfeld,” a fortification-like arena where Hitler surveyed his adoring supporters from a large grandstand.

Problems, however, lurked beneath the site’s grandiose veneer. Few of the grounds’ planned components were finished before construction came to a halt with the advent of WWII. The structures that did exist were hastily built, which in turn means that the complex has not held up well over time.

“The damp is the biggest problem,” Daniel Ulrich, head of Nuremberg’s construction department, tells Catherine Hickley for the Art Newspaper. “The original construction was quick and shoddy. It was little more than a stage set designed purely for effect. The limestone covering the bricks is not frost-proof and water has seeped in.”

The project to preserve the site is expected to cost €85 million (around \$95 million), half of which is being contributed by Germany’s federal government. Earlier this month, the state of Bavaria promised to pay one-quarter of the remaining sum, as *Deutsche Welle* reported at the time.

Officials have long grappled over what should be done with this dilapidated monument to Nazi supremacy. In 2015, experts and citizens convened at a forum to discuss the issue, where some argued that the site should be maintained so that visitors will long be able to envision the pomp and circumstance that once fueled deadly ideologies on its grounds. Others favored bulldozing the site, or letting it dwindle through “controlled decay.”



“Are there sensible, political, social, or aesthetic grounds for restoring banal architectural monstrosities that still manage to delight those who seek the aura of the Führer?” Norbert Frei, professor of history at Germany’s Jena University, asked in the German Die Zeit newspaper, per a translation by the *Independent*’s Tony Paterson. Such fears are not unfounded; earlier this year; torch-wielding members of a neo-Nazi group marched onto the rally grounds and posed on the Zeppelinfeld grandstand.

**Ultimately, however, officials decided that the grounds should be preserved;** in part, according to Hickley, because they did not want to erase this difficult chapter of the city’s history, and in part, because they did not want to be forced to close off large portions of the site. The conservation project will involve, among other measures, installing ventilation systems to remove humidity from the interior of the structures and replacing stones in stairs and facades. The plans also call for expanding an educational Documentation Center that opened in 2001 and setting up information stations around the site.

Speaking to Hickley, Julia Lehner, Nuremberg’s chief culture official **stresses that returning the rally grounds to their former glory is not the goal of the conservation project.**

“We won’t rebuild, we won’t restore, but we will conserve,” Lehner says. “We want people to be able to move around freely on the site. It is an important witness to an era—it allows us to see how dictatorial regimes stage-manage themselves. **That has educational value today.**”

#### JUST A THOUGHT

Somehow it just seems justifiably correct when you remember that these Nazi Rally Grounds were in Nuremberg, the same city that hosted the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials a little later. Karma will always get you.....sometimes in the same place.....

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## **PLACE OF THE NURENBURG WAR CRIMES TRIALS**

### **THEN & NOW**



PREPARING THE COURTROOM FOR THE TRIAL



COURTROOM DURING TRIAL



COURTROOM AS IT APPEARS TODAY –STILL IN USE

The courtroom is still used today as a court of law, usually for the Nuremberg-Fürth Regional Court.



The Palace of Justice in Nuremberg on the day of  
Judgement of the International Military Tribunal  
was handed down. Nuremberg, Germany,  
October 1, 1946.



The Palace of Justice Today

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