

## **Architecture and Democratization:**

### **Overlooked witnesses to Allied intervention in occupied Germany after 1945**

**International Conference, 4-6 June 2020**

**Chair in Heritage Conservation, Bamberg University**

In 2019 and 2020, Germany marks 70 years since its post-war division into East and West and 30 years since reunification. Both anniversaries offer renewed occasion to examine the processes that led to the creation of the two German states in 1949, together with the premises on which they were founded and which seemed vindicated in 1990: premises such as the inevitability of democracy, the value of internationalism, and the possibility of a peaceful and stable world order. Given the current questioning of these ideas not only here but throughout Europe and beyond, such a re-examination seems relevant now in a way that it has rarely been before.

Architecture, too, must be part of this discussion. Both the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic were visions of a new, different and better Germany that was to be realized in part through planning and building. The rehabilitation of the country in the wake of Nazism and total war – the reform of its political and social systems, the retooling of its economy, and not least the reorientation of its population toward the values of democracy as variously defined – was to be reflected both literally and figuratively in the fabric of its rebuilt cities.

While this work was largely accomplished by Germans themselves, it was also very much an international project, one promoted and supervised by the occupying Allied powers. By supporting certain German initiatives in the area of building, by offering their own cities and structures as models and providing opportunities for knowledge exchange, and by committing significant financial, material and intellectual resources to democracy-promoting projects and programs that included a building or planning dimension, the military and civilian authorities of the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union sought to shape the character of German reconstruction in line with their respective ideological and political goals.

The legacy of this effort endures in the landscape of post-reunification Germany today. Events such as the 2009 Berlin exhibition "*Geschenke der Amerikaner*" (Gifts from the Americans)<sup>1</sup> periodically recall them to mind; in that context as in others, however, it is generally only the most overt expressions of ideology and the acknowledged design highlights that receive attention. Meanwhile, the vast majority of Allied interventions in Germany's built environment – those that were to accomplish the main work of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Geschenke der Amerikaner*, 9 May - 30 June 2009 in the Amerika Haus Berlin, now home to the C/O Berlin Foundation.

democratization effort – continue to be overlooked. In fact, the country's built landscape on both sides of its internal border, and well beyond the confines of Berlin, is punctuated with structures bearing witness in both more and less immediately visible ways to the occupation powers' attempts to forge durable, supranational communities of value and interest around the malleable concept of democracy.

The conference "Architecture and Democratization" aims to address this oversight. Encouraged by parallel efforts in Austria<sup>2</sup>, and taking seriously the notion that "Democracy must be made visible if it is to be understood and embraced"<sup>3</sup>, the first goal of the conference will be to call attention to forgotten or neglected artefacts of Western and Soviet cultural-political intervention in Germany's built environment, with a view to creating a broader as well as a more detailed picture of this activity.

Second, the conference will aim at generating analyses of the thinking behind these interventions and the ways in which building and planning were envisaged as serving the ends of German democratization in the post-war and Cold War context. Contributors are encouraged to consider the following questions:

- What modalities of cultural-political influence did the different occupying authorities ascribe to building, planning and design?
- What do the examples identified reveal about the concepts of "democracy" promoted by each of the occupying powers? How did these relate to their immediate goals for Germany on the one hand, and to their larger geopolitical aims with regard to the developing Cold War on the other?
- Given that the intentions of the American, British, French or Soviet authorities were often realized by Germans themselves, how did the latter receive, interpret and/or transform these intentions in fulfilling them?
- What role was played in the democratization effort by other channels of architectural discourse between occupiers and the occupied, such as design and planning exhibitions, conferences, or exchanges of professionals?
- What evidence exists of interaction and exchange among the four occupying powers themselves on questions of architecture and democratization, and what was the character and effect of this interaction?
- What lasting impacts, if any, did the interventions made during the period of Allied occupation have on German patterns of planning and building during the decades that followed? Conversely, what lessons or insights did the occupiers take away with them from their experiments in Germany, and how were these applied in their own countries?

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<sup>2</sup> *Cold War and Architecture. Contributions to Austria's Democratization after 1945*, 17 October 2019 – 24 February 2020 at the Architekturzentrum Wien, <https://www.azw.at/en/event/kalter-krieg-und-architektur-6/>.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Dreyer, chairman of the organization *Weimarer Republik e.V.*, at the symposium *Die Frankfurter Paulskirche. Ort der deutschen Demokratie*, Frankfurt a.M., 30 Sept. - 1 Oct. 2019.

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A third focus area will concern the value of this architectural legacy of the past as a source of insights for the present – both as a set of responses to an earlier crisis of democracy, and as one of the means by which those responses became solidified as part of the seemingly permanent structure of the post-war world. Papers that offer suggestions for ways to conserve and present this historical resource – by no means solid or permanent after all, but evidently quite vulnerable and fragile – and thus to ensure that it is visible and accessible to current and future generations, will be particularly welcome.

The publication of an edited volume containing the conference proceedings is planned.

Proposals for papers in either English or German are requested by **1 February 2020**; selected participants will be notified by 15 February 2020.

Please submit abstracts of **300-500 words** by e-mail to:

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Conference homepage: <https://www.uni-bamberg.de/en/iadk/denkmalwissenschaften/conference-architecture-and-democratization/>

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