

An Obligation to the Past – Nuremberg’s Interaction with the National Socialist Era Then and Today

As an answer to the role that the city played during the time of National Socialism, Nuremberg has made a commitment to be known as the City of Peace and Human Rights. The Israeli artist Dani Karavan created the Way of Human Rights in 1993. Located in front of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, its pillars list the 30 articles from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in various languages. Since 1995, the Nuremberg International Human Rights Prize is awarded every two years.

Since its opening in 2010, the Memorium Nuremberg Trials remembers the International Military Tribunal of the major war criminals of the National Socialist regime. The museum makes the historical location of the trial, Courtroom 600 of the Nuremberg Palace of Justice in the Fürther Strasse, accessible. An exhibit explains the background, process and legacy of the trial. A new media installation in Courtroom 600 takes visitors on a trip to the past. Other parts of the exhibit address the subsequent Nuremberg military trials and other legal confrontations with the National Socialist regime. The developments which began with the Nuremberg trials and led to the International Criminal Court of Justice in The Hague are also discussed.

Interaction with the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds

Immediately after World War II, Nuremberg took a practical approach to its National Socialist legacy, the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. On one hand, one dealt with the past by using the area for daily or leisure activities; on the other hand, the architecture of the National Socialists was ignored or the context in which it was created hidden.

It was first the exhibit “Fascination and Terror”, which was opened in 1985 in the Zeppelin Tribune and maintained until 2001, that formulated the guiding principles of the city of Nuremberg for its interaction with the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. The opening of the Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds in 2001 finally marked a fundamental change in the engagement with National Socialism in the city. Since the international conference “Preservation or Deterioration? The Future of the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg” in 2011 and the Symposium “Preservation! To What End? Perspectives for the Zeppelin Tribune, Zeppelin Field and the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds” which invited proven international experts to Nuremberg in 2015, was the framework set for a responsible and at the same time critical interaction with the grounds. The former Nazi Party Rally Grounds

is changing. That includes the Congress Hall, the Documentation Center, the Zeppelin Field and Tribune and the Dutzendteich Train Station.

Culture in the Congress Hall

After World War II, the round section of the Congress Hall was used pragmatically: In 1949, the first German Construction Fair took place here, which focused on the topic of “stone”; in 1950 the city of Nuremberg celebrated its 900th anniversary. Since 1963, the Nuremberg Symphony has its home in the southern head-end structure of the Congress Hall; in 2001 the Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds opened in the northern head-end structure. Until late in the 2010s, the Congress Hall was used for storage. As part of Nuremberg’s bid for the title of European Capital of Culture 2025, the idea emerged to develop four of the in-total sixteen segments of the Congress Hall into atelier and practice rooms for artists of all types. Furthermore, presentation rooms for visual art, music, theater and dance were planned. The ideas for these “Ermöglichungsräumen” (“Enabling Rooms”) were deepened and made more concrete in the years 2021/22 in close connection with artists. Currently, ca. 7,000 square meters are planned.

In 2021, it became clear that the Opera House at Richard-Wagner-Platz in Nuremberg had to be completely renovated. In a diverse participation process it was decided that the venues for music theater and dance during the renovation will be placed in the Congress Hall. As the actual performance space with auditorium, stage, orchestra pit, side stages and practice rooms, a supplementary building will be created in the so-called “inner courtyard” of the Congress Hall. The construction has already begun. The production and presentation rooms for the different art branches and the performance space for the Nuremberg State Theater will open for the season 2027/28. With the opening, the Congress Hall will be a place of art with a national and international aura. Already today, a comprehensive event program in the Congress Hall makes the potential of the site visible.

New Permanent Exhibit in the Documentation Center

Opened in 2001, the Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds provided an important contribution to a deeper confrontation with the National Socialist past with its permanent exhibit “Fascination and Terror”. Content and structural imperatives led to the decision to renovate the building and to expand and fundamentally rework the permanent exhibit. The Documentation Center has been closed since the beginning of 2021. An interim exhibit temporarily informs those interested about the time of National Socialism in Nuremberg. The opening of the new permanent exhibit, which in its content and methods will reach widely beyond the former presentation, is planned for autumn 2025.

Zeppelin Field / Tribune Will Become a Learning and Encounter Site

The Zeppelin Meadow, which was part of the Volkspark Dutzendteich, was already used during the Nazi Party Rally in 1933. The following year, Albert Speer received the order from Adolf Hitler to develop a master plan for the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. In this, the field should serve as a center for a marching and assembly place. Between 1935 and 1937, the whole complex was created in several stages with the Zeppelin Tribune, Field and Ramparts. The complex was one of the few architectures that was finished and used on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. In the interior of the Zeppelin Tribune is an entry hall, which received the name “Golden Hall” after World War II, due to its ceiling mosaics. In front of the tribune is the Zeppelin Field and the ramparts, which are subdivided into 34 towers. After 1945, the US Army occupied the area and used it as a training area and sports field. Furthermore, in a sense of democratic appropriation, many events took place here. Each year, the German Touring Masters Norisring Race takes place around the tribune; on the field, with more than 60,000 visitors each year, the music festival “Rock im Park”.

The blowing up of the gallery of columns in 1967 and the removal of the end pylons of the tribune at the beginning of the 1970s are an expression of a pragmatism in the interaction with the architecture. At the beginning of the 2010s, the city of Nuremberg, the Free State of Bavaria and the Federal Republic of Germany agreed that is a national task to preserve the ensemble of the Zeppelin Tribune and Zeppelin Field and to develop it into a learning and encounter site. Due to extensive structural damages, the Zeppelin Tribune is currently only partially accessible. As part of the development of the learning and encounter site, the tribune will be opened and made handicapped accessible, the so-called “Golden Hall” will become a walk-in exhibit; the west side of the field will also be opened. The substantially damaged tribune and the ramparts with their towers and staircases will be structurally improved and refurbished. In the center of the development stands historical-political education. Because of this, three rooms of the Zeppelin Tribune will, in the future, be used as a museum. In addition, four “reflection sites” will be created on the grounds, which should be developed as experimental spaces. The outdoor area of the Zeppelin Field and Zeppelin Tribune with its “reflection sites” should be finished in 2030.

Dutzendteich Train Station as Part of a New Learning and Encounter Site

In 2022, the city of Nuremberg purchased the Dutzendteich Train Station, which is located on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. The train station was built for the Party Rally in 1934 and served as an arrival and departure station for visitors to the Party Rallies. After World War II, it was used as a restaurant.

As part of the development of the learning and encounter site, it will take over several new functions, including as the first information site for visitors to the grounds. Here, information

about the history of the grounds and the train station since 1871 will be conveyed. A newly designed outdoors area will invite guests to pause and relax. The opening of the Dutzendteich Train Station is planned for 2027.