

Mayor – City of Nuremberg,  
Department for Cultural Affairs

# Nuremberg Congress Hall

An emblematic location of contemporary history





Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past decades, the City of Nuremberg has engaged intensively with the Nazi past. At the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg the legacies of this era, protected historic monuments since 1973, have been a forceful testimony to totalitarianism and ideological delusions.

This ensemble of buildings includes the Congress Hall, one of the largest buildings of the Nazi era. Though never completed, it is uniquely important as part of the national legacy. Up until today, only a small part of the structure has been used, for example since 2001 with the establishment of the internationally renowned Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds.

Now, with its approach to this building, the City of Nuremberg is opening a new chapter in cultural commemoration and engagement with the past. Through art and culture we seek to suffuse this Nazi building with democratic values. It will provide production and presentation spaces for all genres of the liberal arts and for educational initiatives, and a venue for Nuremberg State Theatre; all in all a place to nurture and promote innovative impulses, that will have a major impact both at home and abroad.

The City of Nuremberg would not be able to take this courageous step without the support of strong partners. The Federal Republic and the Free State of Bavaria are already committed to this emblematic location associated with the Nazi perpetrators.

As stated in the coalition agreement of the current government: "Our awareness of freedom and democracy is based also on our culture of remembrance" – an important statement which applies to the Congress Hall, too.

The Focus Nuremberg Congress Hall will proactively face the challenges posed by locations carrying the burden of a negative history. In dealing with these challenges it will open up new dimensions which will need to be given a secure basis through the establishment of a foundation.

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, reading "Julia Lehner". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long, sweeping line extending from the end.

Prof. Dr. Julia Lehner  
Mayor – City of Nuremberg





In December 2024, work began on a new stage space for the Nuremberg State Theatre, located in the interior courtyard of the Congress Hall, as shown in this visualisation. Its external façade will be completely covered in greenery. This will, quite deliberately, soften the architectural language of the new theatre building which will be completed in 2028.



# Focus Nuremberg Congress Hall

## A place for art, culture and education

Since the City of Nuremberg's application to become European City of Culture 2025, the city has pursued the goal of opening up parts of the Congress Hall on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in order to create a space for the arts. Up until then large parts of the structure had not been used at all or only for mundane purposes.

In 2028, over 7,000 square metres of so-called Enabling Spaces are to be provided here, including studios, studio stages, exhibition areas and rehearsal rooms for arts and culture of all genres including the independent scene. At the same time, Nuremberg State Theatre will open a stage at the Congress Hall. Currently, this stage space is being constructed in the Congress Hall's interior courtyard.

This will lead to a significant expansion of the Congress Hall's artistic and cultural potential to complement what is already in place, such as Nuremberg

Symphony Orchestra, the Serenadenhof open-air performance venue, and the Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds. The latter was recently re-designed and extended in response to continuously increasing visitor numbers. The Federal Republic of Germany and the Free State of Bavaria have supported both this endeavour and the development of the neighbouring Zeppelin Field and Grandstand to a place for learning and encounters.

The Congress Hall is intended to be a space where existing and new institutions will not only generate innovative cultural impulses, but also create spaces for discourse, debate and democratic education. The City of Nuremberg is already using a small part of the Congress Hall in order to explore this cultural potential. The cross-genre and interdisciplinary contributions by both regional and international artists and cultural creators have been extremely well received. So far encounters, discus-

sions, participatory events, music, performances and visual art events covering a wide bandwidth have been organised here. This has included a cooperation with the German pavilion at the Biennale di Venezia on the topic of how to engage with Nazi architecture, which particularly took into account the special aspects of the Nuremberg venue. At the same time, ideas for a needs-based operating concept have been developed in a participatory manner and with regular artist involvement.

With its sheer monumentality, the Congress Hall is a prime example for the megalomania of the Nazi regime. By means of art and culture it will in future make a powerful counter-statement to Nazi ideology, firmly based on a Foundation yet to be endowed; thus it will be able to make a decisive contribution to strengthening the democratic structures in our country.





# The Congress Hall – a National Legacy

## Historic signatures of an emblematic place

Between 1933 and 1938 the National Socialists held their annual Party Rallies in the south-eastern district of Nuremberg, staging them as celebrations of the Nazi state and party. These mass events attracted attention both at home and abroad and have shaped the image of Nuremberg as “City of the Party Rallies” to this day. However, only a few of the propaganda buildings were actually completed. Most of them remained incomplete, and this is true of the Congress Hall too.

With its ground area of 275 x 265 metres and a height of 40 metres, the Congress Hall is nevertheless one of the largest architectural remnants of the Nazi era. Adolf Hitler had laid the foundation stone on 11 September 1935, but after the outbreak of the war in 1939, work was almost completely stopped.

What remained was the horse-shoe-shaped shell with buildings at each end, and an open interior courtyard which would have been the interior of the completed hall. The main purpose of the Congress Hall would have been to provide a stage for Hitler once a year at the Nazi Party congresses, but it was never used for this intended purpose. Nevertheless, as an expression and example of the monumental architecture of the Nazi era, the building has been a protected monument since 1973.

In the immediate post-war period, the building’s 80,000 square metres of floor space were put to pragmatic use: first of all as a food store for the US Army, and then, after it had been returned to the City of Nuremberg, for purposes such as the exhibition venue for the first German Building Exhibition in 1949. In the following decades this approach to dealing with the empty interior spaces was continued. Many institutions, associations and individual persons used the huge area for storage purposes. For three decades, until 2006, the biggest tenant was the Quelle mail order company who used it as a massive storage space.

This pragmatic approach was closely intertwined with a certain helplessness in view of the Congress Hall’s dimensions and building history, as can be seen in the uses put to the interior courtyard. For some time, the police used it as a vehicle pound for cars which had been towed away in the city area.

From an early stage, the two end buildings of the horseshoe became a home for art and culture. Since 1962, the Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra have used the south wing, with a concert hall and rehearsal rooms including a sound studio. Since 2001, its northern counterpart has housed the Documentation Centre Nazi Party Rally Grounds, providing an extensive educational and informational programme on the Nazi era.



View of the interior of the Congress Hall: currently, around 80,000 square metres of floorspace are not being used. The building that stands today was intended to provide access to the interior of the Congress Hall during the Nazi Party Rallies. 16 identical building segments are arranged in a semi-circle, originally designed to house functional rooms, such as corridors, cloakrooms, toilets or stairwells.



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#### Published by:

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