

## Täterort Topography as Object: The Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism and Modern Infrastructures of Memory

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**Abstract.** Munich's significance as the birthplace of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP) was emphasized in propaganda and urban planning of the Nazi regime. Among buildings, adapted for the party's needs, was the Palais Barlow, which became the headquarters of the NSDAP until it was bombed by the Allies in 1945. Today, the Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism (NS Doku), opened in 2015, stands on this site. This article examines the relation between the presence of the NS Doku in the local topography, which is deeply associated with the NS regime, and contemporary contexts of approaching the difficult past. It traces the beginnings of this institution and sets them in the decades-long debates on acknowledging the city's "brown" past. It claims the pivotal importance of connectedness of various factors, including aesthetics and functionality, local politics and sustainability, in fulfilling its educational role and reshaping the character of *Königsplatz* that served as rally grounds under the NSDAP regime.

**Keywords:** infrastructures of memory, memory culture, topography, the Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism National, architecture, *Königsplatz*.

### „Täterorto“ topografija kaip objektas: Nacionalsocializmo istorijos dokumentų centras Miunchene ir šiuolaikinės atminties infrastruktūros

**Santrauka.** Miuncheno, kaip Nacionalsocialistinės vokiečių darbininkų partijos (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP) susikūrimo vietos, reikšmė buvo ypač pabrėžiama nacių režimo propagandos ir miestų planavimo dokumentuose. Vienas iš šios partijos reikmėms pritaikytų pastatų buvo „Palais Barlow“ – jis iki 1945 m., kai buvo subomarduotas Sąjungininkų, naudotas kaip NSDAP būstinė. Dabar šioje vietoje stovi 2015 m. atidarytas Nacionalsocializmo istorijos dokumentų centras (*NS Doku*). Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas santykis tarp *NS Doku* vietos topografijos, kuri yra glaudžiai susijusi su nacionalsocialistiniu režimu, ir šiuolaikinių kontekstų, neatsiejamų nuo su sudėtingos praeities vertinimo. Aptariamos šios institucijos ištakos, jų ryšys su dešimtmečius trukusiomis diskusijomis dėl miesto „rudosios“ praeities pripažinimo. Straipsnio autorė teigia, kad sąsajos tarp įvairių veiksmų, įskaitant estetiką ir funkcionalumą, vietos politiką ir tvarumą, yra labai svarbios vykdant švietimo funkciją ir pertvarkant Karaliaus aikštės (*Königsplatz*), nacistinio režimo laikais buvusio mitingų vieta, veidą.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** atminties infrastruktūros, atminties kultūra, topografija, Miuncheno nacionalsocializmo istorijos dokumentacijos centras, architektūra, Karaliaus aikštė (*Königsplatz*).

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## Introduction

Whereas the small-scale remains and ruins of the past tyrannies can be easily removed or covered, big constructions pose challenges as their dismantling requires enormous costs and significant intervention in urban topography. In the case of Germany, there are still monumental constructions from the era of the National Socialist (hereinafter, NS) regime that had remained in public sphere but were adapted to modern use. Such buildings are scattered across the country. One of them can be found in Berlin, where the former facility of Goering's Ministry of Aircraft now accommodates the Federal Ministry of Finances.<sup>1</sup> In other cases, the buildings related to the regime were destroyed immediately after World War II (hereinafter, WWII) or shortly after. Berghof, Hitler's Alpine retreat, was finally torn down by the Bavarian government in 1952, whereas in Nuremberg, the parts of the Nazi rally grounds (*Nürnberger Reichsparteitagsgelände*) were demolished in 1945, once the U.S. Army took control of the site.<sup>2</sup> The uneven approach to architectural remains of the past dictatorship had derived from the experience of a divided state, urban planning (including available budget and vision for a new purpose of the building or the whole area) and public confrontation with the past. I conceptualize these factors as infrastructural components that have indirectly influenced political and administrative decisions to either support or oppose the re-purposing or demolition of the remaining Nazi architectural structures. Yet, as the number of witnesses (*Zeitzeugen*) has shrunk gradually, new generations may not be aware of the history behind old and odd-looking buildings.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, finding balance between the past and the present-day demands is crucial.

In the article, I take a closer look at the area of Maxvorstadt's *Königsplatz* (King's Square) in Munich in a context of tangible traces of the Nazi era and their spatial, symbolic and aesthetic relation to contemporary institutionalized commemorative activities, mostly instigated by the local NS-Documentation Center. I examine the erection of the Munich Center of Documentation of the History of National Socialism (hereinafter, NS Doku) and the interplay between architecture, memory and education. By studying the case of Munich's struggle with its past, I aim to answer the question about the interconnectedness of material remains of oppressive regime, new architecture and contemporary commemorative and learning initiatives that contextualize history as open discussion and multidirectional learning rather than static and straight process. I argue that the Nazi-contaminated places,<sup>4</sup> the commemorative initiatives, especially those driven by citizens, contextualize not only the material remains of the past, but also the presence of state institutions, which role is to educate about the NS and democratic values.

The theoretical framework that underpins my research is derived from infrastructural studies, which provide an interdisciplinary toolkit for approaching the phenomena under consideration from the perspective of culture and social dynamics. Regarding spatiality, I emphasize its socially constructed character rather than limit this term to an abstract and passive structuring category. Consequently, I agree

<sup>1</sup> On German post-war strategies to rebuild specific buildings or entire quarters, see Oswalt, P. *Bauen am nationalen Haus: Architektur als Identitätspolitik*. Berlin: Berenberg Verlag GmbH, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> On the topic of Nuremberg's struggle with its past, see Macdonald, Sh. *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203888667>.

<sup>3</sup> See more, *Ende der Zeitzeugenschaft?: über den Umgang mit Zeugnissen von Überlebenden der NS-Verfolgung* / Eds. A. Reichwald, J. Scharnetzky, J. Lauer, H. Loewy, J. Skriebeleit. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag GmbH, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> In this article, when referring to urban landscape and architecture, I use Holly Case's term of contamination. She argues that in history, there are symbols, structures and ideas that "tainted" and transformed the events and that those "taints" can be traced in different timeframes. As a result, we live in "a contaminated world." "Leben in einer vorbelasteten Welt—Living in a Contaminated World"—Talk and Discussion with H. Case moderated by Martin Schulze Wessel, 27.11.2023, Fritz Thyssen Foundation (Cologne). See Case, H. Tracing Taint. *The Berlin Journal*, 2023–24, No. 37, p. 50–51. Retrieved from [https://www.americanacademy.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/BJ37\\_230825-web.pdf](https://www.americanacademy.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/BJ37_230825-web.pdf) [accessed 02/03/2025]. See also, Hackelsberger, Ch.; Huse, N. Bauen auf "kontaminiertem" Boden. Zwei Stellungnahmen zum Wettbewerb von 1990 zur Bebauung des Areals der ehemaligen "Ehrentempel." In: *Bürokratie und Kult: das Parteizentrum der NSDAP am Königsplatz in München: Geschichte und Rezeption* / Eds. I. Lauterbach, P. Steinle, J. Rosefeldt. München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1995, p. 319–334.

with Sabine Hansmann that space is produced in a continuous activity of various human and non-human factors, characterized by multileveled negotiations. Hansmann calls this process using Bruno Latour's term of spacing.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Maxvorstadt's *Königsplatz* and the NS Doku, a "doing space" means not only active learning and interpreting, but also engaging with the surroundings.

The structure of the article reflects its analytical trajectory, beginning with a conceptual discussion of infrastructures (Part 1) and followed by a brief historical background of the area of *Königsplatz* (Part 2). The next part (3) explores the process of "normalization" of the square in post-war period and at the end of the twentieth century. The final parts (4–6) focus on the case study of the NS Doku, its program and embeddedness in the local cultural landscape and architectural topography. They trace back the elements of infrastructures that underpin the role of the NS Doku as an educational institution that blends the boundaries between the past and the present, historical narrative and artistic initiatives. The article concludes with the remarks on materiality of memory and interconnectedness between human and non-human factors in commemorative practices.

## 1. Infrastructures of Memory

Whereas research on infrastructures understood as tools, technical opportunities and networks that enable transmission of information, goods and people dates back to the 1970s, only recently scholars began applying the category of infrastructure to the studies of other kinds of human activity, including art and social dynamics.<sup>6</sup> As anthropologist Brian Larkin suggests, infrastructure can also define interrelations among things that emphasize their active role in the creative processes.<sup>7</sup>

With the material context still being present in nowadays reflections on infrastructures, its importance has been softened and evolved in the direction of material representation and facilitating the infrastructural ecosystems. In the case of exhibitions, remembrance and practical implementation of infrastructure studies, the solid and systematic definition seems to slip away making it vague and contextual, as it can be formulated in the specific, individual context.<sup>8</sup> The infrastructure has an amorphous nature, and it includes a wide range of entities: objects, processes, a singular agent and a network constructed with multiple (f)actors of various dispositions. Geoffrey C. Bowker takes the concept of infrastructures further applying it to memory studies. He proposes to reflect on memory-making processes with the recognition of infrastructures within.<sup>9</sup> As Larkin and others have noted, the infrastructural approach could be implemented within social disciplines, including museum studies and memory studies. In other words, commemorative practices, which encompass the negotiations between the state and society, erecting monuments, buildings and founding institutions and finally, their everyday operations and presence in local topography, could be regarded as a multilayered enabling, leading to the formation of material components of memory culture, and as a result, to the emergence of more general reception

<sup>5</sup> Hansmann, S. Spacing: Following Negotiations in the Process of Exhibition Dismantling. *Museum & Society*, 2024, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 96, <https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v22i1.4370>.

<sup>6</sup> See Pinnix, A.; Volmar, A.; Esposito, F.; Binder, N. Introduction. In: *Rethinking Infrastructure Across the Humanities* / Eds. A. Pinnix, A. Volmar, F. Esposito, N. Binder. Bielefeld: Verlag, 2023, p. 17, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839469835-001>.

<sup>7</sup> See Larkin, B. The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2013, Vol. 42, p. 329, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522>. See also, Bowker, G. C.; Star, S. L. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1999, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6352.001.0001>; Schlögl, R. On the Symbolic Infrastructure of Face-to-Face Communication in Early Modern Society: Simple Successful Media. In: *Rethinking Infrastructure Across the Humanities* / Eds. A. Pinnix, A. Volmar, F. Esposito, N. Binder. Bielefeld: Verlag, 2023, p. 97–104, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839469835-007>.

<sup>8</sup> See more, Mar, P. *Cultural Infrastructure: Select Annotated Bibliography*. Australia: Institute for Culture and Society Western Sydney University, 2023. Retrieved from [https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/2013565/Cultural\\_Infrastructure\\_Annotated\\_Bibliography\\_MLC-ZC-DMS-101123.pdf](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/2013565/Cultural_Infrastructure_Annotated_Bibliography_MLC-ZC-DMS-101123.pdf) [accessed 02/03/2025].

<sup>9</sup> See more, Bowker, G. C. Afterword (Memories Are Made of This). *Memory Studies*, 2009, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 119–121, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698008097399>.

of narratives about the past.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the infrastructure of memory includes social practices, political decision-making processes, and the entire context of exhibitions, cultural institutions, monuments and installations that concern historical events.<sup>11</sup>

Architecture is heavily and in multiple ways embedded in the infrastructures of memory. It propels and embodies an interplay between materiality and non-material entities, such as emotions, values and symbols.<sup>12</sup> Architectural construction's style, design and the final form depend on regulations, rules, budget and decisions made on local and national levels. As a result, the process of creating a material structure reveals various infrastructural dimensions that can be traced back and help identify non-human factors involved in the conceptualization and internalization of specific constructions.

Extensive studies on the architecture of the NS that examined the topic from the angles of economy, “logistic of atrocities,” urban planning and the role of propaganda, greatly contributed to the existing knowledge and historiography.<sup>13</sup> However, the perspective that examines the contemporary presence of architectural artefacts in urban tissue and concerns memory laws, to borrow Nikolay Koposov's term,<sup>14</sup> and the local dimension of approaching the past, including its institutionalized forms, still suggests new fields to explore.<sup>15</sup> Infrastructural approach in examining the frictions between materiality, already existing urban structures and norms, and systems of values of democratic, pluralistic societies, offers the opportunity to expose the interrelated entanglements that lead to understanding the conditions for perseverance of specific codes of memory and state memory culture as a whole.

## 2. From a Cultural District to a Nazi Quarter

The Maxvorstadt district in Munich can be characterized as an urban palimpsest,<sup>16</sup> where the material traces of different epochs overlap. This representational area started to emerge under the rule of the Bavarian king Maximilian I Joseph in the early nineteenth century. His successor, King Ludwig I, continued the process of erecting the neoclassic and monumental buildings in the area. Under his reign, the Hellenistic buildings mushroomed in *Königsplatz*, serving as the galleries of antiquities from the collection of the Crown Prince. The Glyptothek (art gallery) became the first public museum in Munich, while the Propylaea, a Hellenistic city gate, commemorated the assistance of the House of Wittelsbach, the ruling

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Rogoff, I. The Expanding Field. In: *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* / Ed. J.-P. Martinon. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> I reformulated and adapted a term of “infrastructures of memory” used by Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska: Saryusz-Wolska, M. *Infrastructures of Holocaust Mass Graves: Work-in-Progress* in Tylawa. *Teksty Drugie*, 2023, No. 1, p. 190–196, <https://doi.org/10.18318/ttd.2023.en.1.14>. See also, Jensen, C. B.; Morita, A. Introduction: Infrastructures as Ontological Experiments. *Ethnos*, 2017, Vol. 82, No. 4, p. 615–626, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2015.1107607>.

<sup>12</sup> See more, *Infrastructures and Social Complexity: A Companion* / Eds. P. Harvey, C. Jensen, A. Morita. London and New York: Routledge 2016, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622880>.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance, *Kłopotliwe dziedzictwo?: architektura Trzeciej Rzeszy w Polsce* / Eds. J. Purchla, Ż. Komar. Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2020; *Space in Holocaust Research: A Transdisciplinary Approach to Spatial Thinking* / Eds. J. Fubel, A. Klei, A. Wienert. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111078816>; Gutschow, N. *Ordnungswahn: Architekten planen im "eingedeutschten Osten," 1939–1945*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Fachzeitschrift, 2001.

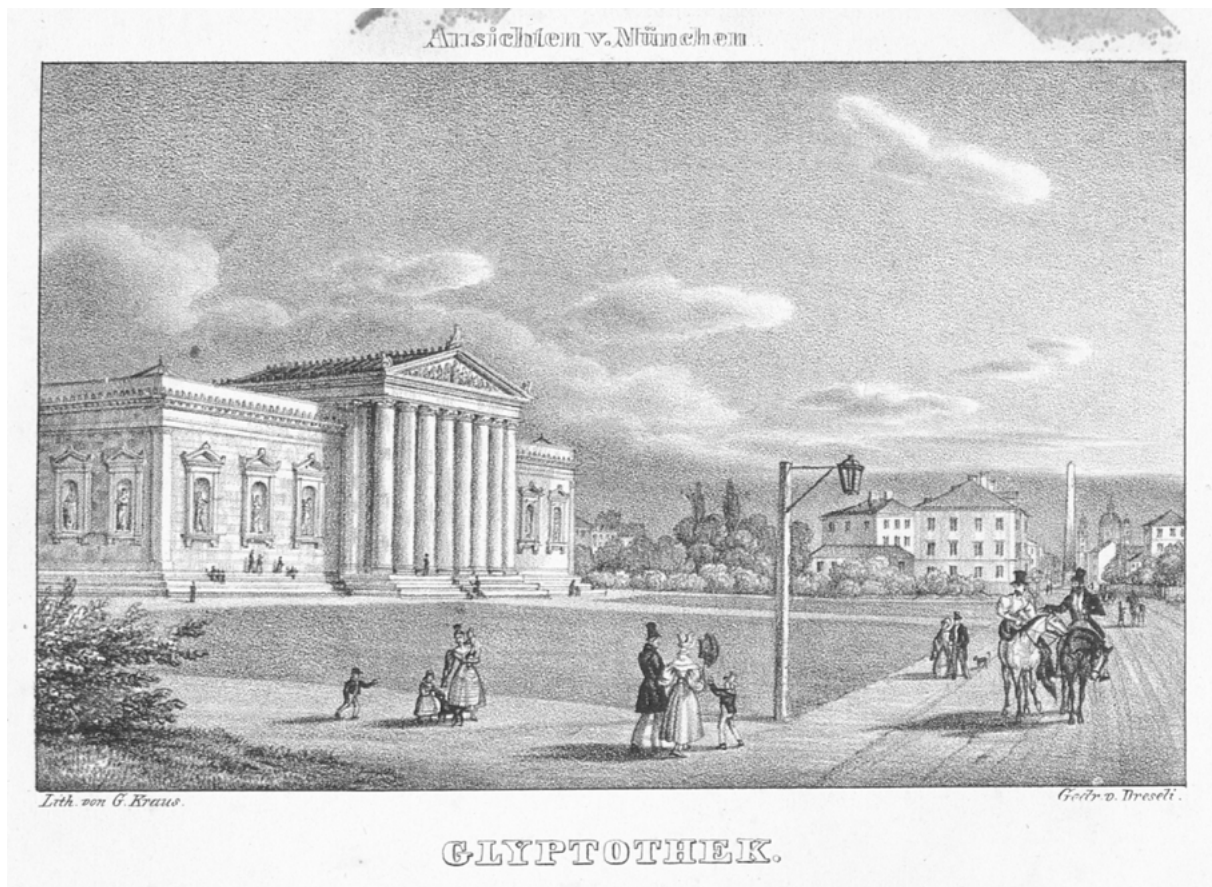
<sup>14</sup> See more, Koposov, N. *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108304047>.

<sup>15</sup> See for instance, *Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past* / Eds. G. D. Rosenfeld, P. B. Jaskot. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008; Handa, R. *Presenting Difficult Pasts Through Architecture: Converting National Socialist Sites to Documentation Centres*. London and New York: Routledge, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429265891>. Consider also the volume of *Kunsttexte.de* No. 3 (2019) with contributions on the topic of architecture of the period of Third Reich in Poland: *Kunsttexte.de*, 2019, No. 3. Retrieved from <https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/kunsttexte/issue/view/6088> [accessed 02/03/2025]. Regarding the “constellations of transnational memory,” see also, Galai, Y. The Transnational Mythscape of the Second World War. *Memory Studies*, 2022, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 842–857, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698019863151>.

<sup>16</sup> Here, I use Anna Zalewska's term of palimpsest, which is defined as a process of accumulating and overlapping subsequent activities and events, whereas the previous ones have been simultaneously changed. See Zalewska, A. Palimpsest. In: *Modi memorandi: leksykon kultury pamięci* / Eds. M. Saryusz-Wolska, R. Traba. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2014, p. 318. A concept of palimpsest has a broad application in humanities as it relates to the discourses of memory, archeology, architecture, etc.



family in Bavaria, in the independence fights of Greece. The neighboring villas became the family residences of industrialists and Munich's upper class, whereas *Königsplatz* gained a prestigious status of the representative square for leisure activities and public events (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The building of Glyptothek with Palais Barlow (the future Brown House) in the background. Litography by Aloph von Schaden, 1835, from the collection "Zwanzig neu aufgenommene bildliche Darstellungen der vorzüglichsten Gebäude. Strassen und öffentlichen Plätze der königlichen Bayerischen Haupt-und Residenzstadt München". Source: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Bild Archiv, Hbks G 265 gb = Bavar. 2332 i /Abb. 17, port-023020, public domain.

*Königsplatz* lost its leisure character at the beginning of the 1930s, when the National Socialist German Worker's Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*; hereinafter, NSDAP) purchased the Palais Barlow located on Brienner Strasse 45 for its new national headquarters. In the following years, and after the some architectural adjustments, the building, later known as the Brown House, became a symbolic and operational center of Nazi ideological control, coordinating the most important activities of the Nazi party. Yet, the Brown House was not the sole building in the area contributing to the infrastructure of power. Since 1933, *Königsplatz* was restructured to serve a representative role and demonstrate regime's domination. On the premises along *Arcisstrasse* (Arcis Street) that were systematically acquired by the Nazis new buildings proliferated. The newly constructed buildings included the NSDAP Administrative Building (*Verwaltungsbau*) and the Leaders' Building (*Führersbau*): monumental neoclassical twin buildings that orchestrated the activities of the Nazi party and served a propaganda role on a political scene. A Temple of Honor, a small temple-stylized construction with the sarcophagi of the sixteen men who died during the Hitler-Ludendorff-Putsch in November 1923, was attached to each building. The death ("sacrificed lives") of Hitler's supporters, called the martyrs of the movement by propaganda, paved the way for the nation-wide spread of the Nazi ideology and the growth of the movement. In consecutive years, *Königsplatz* became a parading ground and the main stage of the Nazi spectacles in

Munich, titled a capital of the movement. The instrumental character of this area transformed it into the NSDAP quarters that witnessed the celebrations of the anniversary of the Beerhall Putsch, as well as political meetings, including the signing of the Munich Agreement in September 1938. The final phase of WWII, which came with bombing raids, incurred a partial damage to some of the NSDAP buildings.

The demolition of Nazi monuments took place immediately after the war and occurred simultaneously with the rebuilding of the city's historic center that was heavily damaged during the Allied bombings. Besides the removal of direct signs of the Nazi regime, which included the demolition of the Temples of Honor, the next decade did not bring clear decisions on how to approach the Nazi past and its material traces in the city's topography. For some years, *Königsplatz* served as a parking lot and only in the end of the 1980s, the granite plates that covered the square since the 1930s were removed. The impulse of restoring *Königsplatz's* nineteenth-century character arose in 1979, right after the Olympic Games, when, as Winfried Nerdinger argues, "the city began to develop a new awareness of its Nazi past."<sup>17</sup>

### 3. The Tangibility of Memory: What to Keep and How to Remember

Discussions on tangible and intangible remnants of the NS era coincided with the period of rebuilding Germany after the war. In West Germany, the remembrance initiatives mainly involved the second-generation individuals and local activists rather than direct participants and observers of the events of WWII.<sup>18</sup> In East Germany, the emergence of memorial places was facilitated by political and propaganda narrative about the liberation by the Red Army; the case of places directly related to Nazi perpetrators was more complex. In West Germany, it was the citizens who demanded from local authorities taking steps towards the acknowledgement of the Nazi past. In the context of the sites that used to be the scenes of violence and acts of terror, the narrative has focused on the commemoration of victims of the criminal regime, while the reflection on the "perpetrators" has come in a mediated way. The perpetrators' site, on the contrary, traces and explains the wider context for the motives behind the actions, and presents historical facts in a critical way, with an enhanced educational component.

I classify the activities of local groups of historians and journalists, as well as the informal conventions that structure the process of creating commemorative forms as 'soft' infrastructures, connected to social dynamics, politics and the relationships between people and existing norms.<sup>19</sup> The reconstruction of the process that lies behind the establishment of the NS Doku in Munich allows for the identification of key institutional relationships and the main actors whose voices in the debate on commemorating the victims of Nazism and drawing lessons for the future has had a significant impact on the eventual nature of the institution.

In the case of the Bavarian capital, "the revival of the public space" was additionally prompted by the celebrations of the 800th anniversary of the city's founding celebrated in 1958, and a decade later, the preparations to host the Summer Olympics. The unrealized urban plans included building memorial portals, churches, exhibition spaces and even leisure spaces, such as cafes and beer garden in the place of the Temples of Honor.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, the ruins of the temples were fenced off and planted so the greens could cover the area. Another idea for changing the functions of the buildings erected under the NS included turning the twin buildings of *Führerbau* and the Administration Building into hotels; however,

<sup>17</sup> Nerdinger, W. *Erinnerung gegründet auf Wissen / Remembrance Based on Knowledge: Das NS-Dokumentationszentrums München / The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism*. Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2018, p. 27, <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748961550>.

<sup>18</sup> See more, Wüstenberg, J. *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316822746>.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Simone, A. M. People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, 2004, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 407–429, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-16-3-407>.

<sup>20</sup> In 1946, Cardinal Faulhaber came up with the idea of creating Catholic and Protestant chapels in the place of Temples of Honor. See Nerdinger, W. *Erinnerung gegründet auf Wissen / Remembrance Based on Knowledge: Das NS-Dokumentationszentrums München / The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism*, p. 13.

the idea did not get the approval.<sup>21</sup> The 1946 proposal of the Social Democrats to rename *Brienner Straße* and *Königsplatz* to the Street of Victims of National Socialism and the Square of Victims..., respectively also was withdrawn.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, in 1948, the Ministry of the Interior decided that given the historical and psychological burden, no construction plans should be drawn for the site of the Temples of Honor.<sup>23</sup>

The city council's approach to architectural remnants of the Nazi regime has been rather in favor of forming the new quality in the places contaminated by the brown past. The proposal for establishing a place that would commemorate the victims of regime in the former Wittelsbacher Palais, submitted by former prisoners of concentration camps and members of council, was withdrawn by the Bavarian Prime Minister in 1955. Less than twenty years later, the site of the former headquarters of Gestapo, condemned as the House of Horror (*Haus des Schreckens*), was sold to the Bavarian State Bank (*Bayerische Landesbank*). In this case, the colloquial saying, "Removing something from one's eyesight [equals to] removal from one's memory," is apt to some extent, as the construction of the modern Bank building was finalized in 1982, and the plans for memorial marking in the area were postponed for some more years. An impulse came from Berlin, where in 1987, during the 750th anniversary of founding of the city, the exhibition "Topographie des Terrors. Gestapo, SS und Reichssicherheitshauptamt," which addressed the NS-past in Berlin's centuries-long history, was open. The temporary exhibition was located in the pavilion of the site of the former headquarters of Gestapo in Berlin. Just two years later, in 1989, the idea of building the House of Contemporary History on the site of Brown House was discussed in Munich city council; however, it was shelved until 2001.

The shift in Bavarian public opinion, mainly related to the question of "forgetting," has been accompanied by ongoing scientific and historical research carried out by Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen, among others, and the trials and tribunals addressing the Nazi crimes. The Ulm Einsatzgruppen Trial of 1958, Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt (1963–1965) and the Third Majdanek Trial in Düsseldorf (1975–1981) particularly gained wide public interest. Between 1977 and 1983, Broszat led the Bavaria Project aimed to analyze the everyday life in Bavaria during the Nazi era. The results of the research were made public in the form of monographs and books, as well as historical exhibitions. The NS and WWII became the subject of symposia and panel discussions, reaching the non-academic audience as well. Munich addressed its "brown history" in the form of two temporary exhibitions that were exhibited in the season of 1993–1994: one focused on the NS architecture, whereas another one discussed the history of the city during the period.<sup>24</sup> Both exhibitions were co-organized by the Munich City Museum.

In 1990s, the citizens' initiatives and public actions that addressed the Nazi past and triggered further discussion about the approach towards the past and memorialization of the victims from the regime-driven violence gained public attention. On the local level, one of the strongest advocates for marking space in Maxvorstadt was the local district committee with its chairman, Klaus Bäumler.<sup>25</sup> In November 1996, the Committee suggested to create a facility in Munich similar to the Topography of Terrors.<sup>26</sup> As a result, a year later, the city council agreed to open a permanent exhibition dedicated to Munich in 1933–1945 in the City Museum.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> This idea, as Nerdinger argues, came from the members of the Christian Social Union Party in the city council. See *ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> See Handa, R. *Presenting Difficult Pasts through Architecture: Converting National Socialist Sites to Documentation Centres*, p. 62; Nerdinger, W. *Erinnerung gegründet auf Wissen / Remembrance Based on Knowledge: Das NS-Dokumentationszentrums München / The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> See Nerdinger, W. *Erinnerung gegründet auf Wissen / Remembrance Based on Knowledge: Das NS-Dokumentationszentrums München / The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism*, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> See more, *NS-Dokumentationszentrum am Königsplatz: Materialien zur aktuellen Diskussion; zum Gedenktag für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus 2002* / Eds. K. Bäumler. München: Bezirksausschuß Maxvorstadt, 2002. Bäumler served as president between 1978 and 2008. He was also a vice president of *Politischer Beirat* of the NS Documentation Center.

<sup>26</sup> *NS-Dokumentationszentrum München: Lern- und Erinnerungsort zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus: Materialien 1996–2015 (17.11.2015)* / Eds. W. Nerdinger, H. G. Hockerts, M. Krauss, P. Longerich, M. Grdanjski, M. Eisen. München: NS-Dokumentationszentrum München, 2015, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> See Nerdinger, W. *Erinnerung gegründet auf Wissen / Remembrance Based on Knowledge: Das NS-Dokumentationszentrums München / The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism*, p. 33.



#### 4. Shaping Contemporary Memory Landscape

The plan for establishing a documentation center near *Königsplatz* had taken a more feasible shape in the early 2000s.<sup>28</sup> After the initiative gained public attention (through articles in Germany and abroad), the initially uncooperative Bavarian government agreed to the proposal to establish the documentation center. The municipality of Munich agreed to the idea in 2001 and an approval from the Bavarian *Landtag* came a year later. The concept of creating an institution that would address the history of the NS and its entanglements with the city's past competed with a plan of charting a walking trail around Maxvorstadt that would expose historical buildings and places that belonged to the NS.<sup>29</sup> The idea, developed by a historian from the Institute of Contemporary History, was supported by the Bavarian State Ministry of Culture and the Munich City Department of Culture. As it was rejected, the plan to build the documentation center proceeded. Thomas Thiermeyer describes the documentation centers as a new form of display

*The stern documentary style of the museum's presentation, based mainly on the reproductions of documents and witness accounts, made the biggest impact on the imagination about the places where the history took place ("it happened right here!") with the exclusion of all scenographic captions. Images of events were to be created in the minds of visitors ... This concept is based on an intellectual immersion into the depicted matter, rather than emotionally overwhelming the viewer with it.*<sup>30</sup>

Another debate, this time about the form of exhibition, arose in 2003. Following the call from the Department of Culture, the panel of experts submitted two conceptual proposals for a documentation center. The first document, drafted by Norbert Frey, Cilly Kugelman and Volkhard Knigge envisaged the *Haus der Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus* (The House of the History of National Socialism) with original exhibits and narrative focused on "people's community" rather than a role of Munich.<sup>31</sup> A contrary vision penned by Winfried Nerdinger, proposed an exhibition without objects, but strongly focused on Munich, its authentic historical locations and "topography of perpetrators."<sup>32</sup> In April 2004, it was agreed that Nerdinger's concept was the best option to educate the new generations and visitors to Munich. More than one year later, in November 2005, the permission was given to use the empty site of the former Brown House to build a documentation center.<sup>33</sup> In the same year, the panels of experts (*Kuratorium*, *Wissenschaftlicher Beirat* and *Politischer Beirat*) started to meet regularly and work on the content of the exhibition. Soon after, in 2006, the initial construction plans were drafted. In the following years, the discussions revolved around the financing of the new institution, which further prolonged the process of developing the site.

Moreover, the ruins of the basement on site of the former Brown House discovered during the archaeological excavations in 2006 presented yet another dilemma regarding the future of the remnants of the building.<sup>34</sup> The decision to include or exclude the fragments of the cellar's walls in the exhibition had to be made quickly, as it would have affected the plans of the permanent exhibition. The final decision on not

<sup>28</sup> See Handa, R. *Presenting Difficult Pasts Through Architecture: Converting National Socialist Sites to Documentation Centres*, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Univ.-Prof. Dr. -Ing. Winfried Nerdinger, *Gutachten der Landeshauptstadt München*, 5 Februar, 2004; Dr. Volker Dahm, *Projekt eines NS-Dokumentationszentrums in München*, *Gutachten des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin*, 4 November, 2002. As part of the thematic walks ThemenGesichtspfade, the city of Munich provides free maps for self-navigated walks, focused on the history of the NS ("Der Nationalsozialismus in München" and "Orte des Erinnerns und Gedenkens"). The NS Documentation Center offers a mobile app *Orte Erinnern*, which contains a city map of Nazi-contaminated places and a lexicon.

<sup>30</sup> Thiermeyer, T. Polifonicznie i blisko człowieka: jak niemieckie muzea przypominają dziś o drugiej wojnie światowej. In: *Druga wojna światowa w pamięci kulturowej w Polsce i w Niemczech: 70 lat później (1945–2015)* / Eds. J. Kałużny, A. Korzeniowska, B. Korzeniowski. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Muzeum II Wojny Światowej w Gdańsku, 2015, p. 89.

<sup>31</sup> See Nerdinger, W. *Erinnerung gegründet auf Wissen / Remembrance Based on Knowledge: Das NS-Dokumentationszentrums München / The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism*, p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> *Stadtarchiv München*, KULR 2842.

<sup>34</sup> See Hintermeier, H. München gräbt: was wurde im "Braunen Haus" gefunden? *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 November, 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/muenchen-graebt-was-wurde-im-braunen-haus-gefunden-1384300.html> [accessed 02/03/2025].



including the ruins into the Center's space was aided by the expertise of the Federal Office for Artefacts' Protection (*Landesamt für Denkmalpflege*), which confirmed that they have no historical value (*Denkmahlqualität*).<sup>35</sup> Parallel to the conceptual works, a competition for the architecture plan of the building was organized. The project drew 115 European architecture firms. The jury awarded the first prize to the project drafted by the Berlin-based architecture firm, Georg Scheel Wetzel Architekten. The victorious proposal envisaged the light-color cube made of concrete. It comprises multileveled exhibition space the size of approx. 1,200 m<sup>2</sup>, offices and function rooms (seminar room, library, study room and offices).<sup>36</sup> Such building was to accommodate approx. 250,000 to 300,000 visitors a year.<sup>37</sup> The proposal for the new institution was acclaimed and recognized by the experts in the field of architecture. The project won two awards: the Bavarian Architecture Prize 2015 and the Bavarian State Prize for Architecture<sup>38</sup> (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** View of the NS Doku (right) and the former Führerbau, presently the University of Music and Theater in Munich (left). 2024. Photo by Izabela Paszko.

## 5. The New Beginning?

The laying of the cornerstone ceremony finally took place in 2012—two years too late to include it in the program of the city's 850th founding celebrations in 2010. The preparation for the permanent exhibition was underway along the work on the grounds of the former Brown House. Nerdinger, elected

<sup>35</sup> Pressemitteilung des Freistaats Bayern und der Landeshauptstadt München 19.1.2007: NS-dokumentationszentrum München: Keine Einbeziehung der baulichen Überreste im Kellergeschoss. *Stadtarchiv München*, KULR 2845.

<sup>36</sup> See more, Parker, D. NS-Dokumentationszentrum in München. *Bauwelt*, 2009, No. 12, p. 8–11. Retrieved from [https://www.bauwelt.de/dl/754051/10827568\\_158a43f645.pdf](https://www.bauwelt.de/dl/754051/10827568_158a43f645.pdf) [accessed 02/03/2025]; *NS-Dokumentationszentrum München: Georg - Scheel - Wetzel Architekten* / Ed. H. Adam. Altenburg: Druckerei zu Altenburg, 2015, p. 27. According to the concept plan, a shop and cafeteria were also envisioned in the building. However, in 2024, the food was still not offered and a small selection of books could be bought at the reception. See *NS-Dokumentationszentrum*, Jahresbericht 2015, p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> See Landeshauptstadt München—Baureferat, Kulturreferat. In: *Neubau NS-Dokumentationszentrum in München: vom Realisierungswettbewerb bis zur Grundsteinlegung*. München: Landeshauptstadt München, Baureferat, 2012, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> See *NS-Dokumentationszentrum*, Jahresbericht 2015, p. 39.

for the role of a new director, emphasized that the *idée fixe* of the documentation center was to “remind, educate and understand” (*Erinnern, Lernen, und Verstehen am historischen Ort*): to understand what led to the formation of the NSDAP in Munich and what was the aftermath of the Nazi ideology after 1945.<sup>39</sup> Nerdinger envisioned a place with a strong emphasis on education and exchange of knowledge, rather than a memory place that commemorates victims or a research institution.<sup>40</sup> His concept of a permanent exhibition was developed over the years and successfully implemented in the Center. According to Nerdinger, the documentation center was supposed to offer a counterbalance to the narrative focused on concentration camp memorials in Dachau and Flossenbürg, as it would deliver a rational, historical context to reflect on the perpetrators of the Nazi crimes.

The director of the NS Doku foresaw a center deeply embedded in the topography of *Königsplatz*, the main and only authentic object on display. The cubicle of modern shape boldly stands out in the classical and neo-classical architecture that surrounds it. However, the white color of the façade softens the sharpness of the shape blending it with other nearby light-colored stone buildings. A two-fold reasoning lies behind the choice of a neutral color: the practicality, elegance and modern trend of museum architecture on the one hand, and the symbolic neutrality on another hand.<sup>41</sup> The absence of extravagant forms alludes to the mission of the NS Doku: learning through a recognition of differences combined with unemotional, rational analysis of the facts.<sup>42</sup>

The NS Doku lacks original objects. Instead, it focuses on fact-grounded narrative of motivations that gave rise to the NSDAP and Nazism in Munich, the city’s role and the aftermath for modern society of the Bavarian capital. Such decision was motivated by the desacralization of Nazi-contaminated objects that was supposed to help to achieve a neutral approach to the presented content. The interior of the NS Doku, which retains the natural color of white concrete, “offers the most neutral possible background and subsurface for the exhibitions.”<sup>43</sup> The furniture is rather restrained—the shortage of seating is compensated by folding chairs made available to visitors. However, it is difficult to say if the lack of seating in the galleries was due to space constraints or whether it was a deliberate thought to make the visitors feel uncomfortable in the space (see [Figure 3](#)).

The exhibition does not impose a dominant agenda. Although it is arranged chronologically, the visitors are free to choose their preferred route to explore the exhibition. The three floors of the exhibition cover a different historical period associated with the NS. While the concrete walls of a natural white and grey color distance the visitors from their surroundings, the longitudinal two-floor high windows enable to “re-enter” the topography of the perpetrators’ site.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the presence of authentic landscape, transformed by the Nazis and during the post-war period, takes place on mental (or even imaginary) level rather than through the act of observing the original object (see [Figure 4](#)). The effect of “looking through the window” and using the surrounding infrastructure as an element of the exhibition has been used at the Documentation Center in Nuremberg. In this city, which on numerous occasions served as the stage

<sup>39</sup> See *NS-Dokumentationszentrum*, Jahresbericht 2015, p. 10. See also, *NS-Dokumentationszentrum München: Empfehlungen für die konzeptionelle Ausrichtung erarbeitet durch den wissenschaftlichen Beirat NS-Dokumentationszentrum (23. Juni 2006)* / Eds. W. Nerdinger, H. G. Hockerts, M. Krauss, P. Longerich, M. Grdanjski, M. Eisen. München: NS-Dokumentationszentrum München, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> See Nerdinger, W. *Erinnerung gegründet auf Wissen / Remembrance Based on Knowledge: Das NS-Dokumentationszentrums München / The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism*, p. 7. For explanation and definitions of German places of remembrance, see Echternkamp, J.; Jaeger, S. Introduction: Representing the Second World War in German and European Museums and Memorials. In: *Views of Violence: Representing the Second World War in German and European Museums and Memorials* / Eds. J. Echternkamp, S. Jaeger. New York: Berghahn Books, 2019, p. 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv12pnrz7.6>.

<sup>41</sup> Compare with James Simon Galerie in Berlin (David Chipperfield Architects).

<sup>42</sup> See more, Nerdinger, W. *Erinnerung gegründet auf Wissen / Remembrance Based on Knowledge: Das NS-Dokumentationszentrums München / The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism*, p. 7; *NS-Dokumentationszentrum München: Georg - Scheel - Wetzel Architekten*, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup> *NS-Dokumentationszentrum München: Georg - Scheel - Wetzel Architekten*, p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> For contextualization of the building materials on the memory sites, see Leworthy, P. Memory, Materials and the Built Environment. *Memory Studies Review*, 2024, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 157–175, <https://doi.org/10.1163/29498902-20240005>.



and tribune for the propaganda ceremonies of the Nazi regime, the object that can be seen “through the window” is the ruins of the unfinished Congress Hall, incorporated into the Documentation Center on the Nazi Party rally grounds (as of February 2025, the construction was under remodeling).



**Figure 3.** One of the information panels of the permanent exhibition, NS Doku, Munich. 2024. Photo by Izabela Paszko.



**Figure 4.** Vertical, tall windows of the former Führerbau with the archival footage from the wartime and postwar period. Photo by Izabela Paszko.

The permanent exhibition “Munich and the National Socialism” shown in the NS Doku is largely the implementation of Nerdinger’s concept, which the director refined even further in the following years together with the members of the Scientific Council. Nerdinger’s concept was based on four fundamental, chronological phases with Munich playing a central role.<sup>45</sup> The first phase unfolds the socio-political milieu in Munich after the First World War. The narrative progresses by explaining the beginnings of the NS movement, whereas the next part deals with the rule of the regime (1933–1945). The last part concerns the effects of the dictatorship after 1945. Additionally, the exhibition offers contextual information on society, culture and the course of the formation of the Nazi power apparatus. The permanent exhibition stretches over four floors (top-to-down) with each floor displaying a different aspect of the NS regime. However, the optics focused on Munich and Bavaria is what connects all parts of the exhibition. The narration is presented in more than thirty panels and complemented by additional material (photographs, copies, etc.) displayed on the tables. The main objective of the exhibition is to explain and understand the structure and mechanisms of the NS, thus highlighting the importance of democratic values in the context of contemporary politics.

The NS Doku in Munich can be seen as the city’s response to the need of confronting its NS past. However, as Aline Sierp has noted, it remains a “latecomer” in the broader landscape of German memory institutions, emerging significantly later than comparable sites in other cities.<sup>46</sup> The creation of the Center was shaped by the involvement of multiple institutions, each bringing its own perspectives, agendas, and responsibilities. As a result, the process was marked by complex constellations of institutional relationships and power dynamics, which influenced not only the timeline of the project but also its final form and interpretive focus.

## 6. Temporary Exhibitions That Merge the Past and the Present

In recent years, the NS Doku in Munich has become an institution which scope of activities has gone far beyond history education. Whereas the permanent exhibition does not provide space for subjective interpretation, the opportunity to comment, discuss and interpret is provided by temporary exhibitions and complementary events hosted frequently at the Center. Unlike similar institutions in the region, the NS Doku in Munich uses opportunities presented by temporary and special exhibitions, as well as artistic projects to tackle the current issues and set them in relation to the permanent exhibition. Such events often use the public space outside the building.<sup>47</sup> The examples of the NS Doku’s interdisciplinary activities include collaborations with theater groups, film festivals and local and international artists. In autumn 2023, the NS Doku showcased an installation of artist Zhanna Kadyrova.<sup>48</sup> The photo installation “Out of Home” was created after the Russian invasion on Ukraine, the homeland of Kadyrova. In May 2024, as part of the first edition of the Go drag! munich festival, the NS Doku invited Muriel Aichberger, whose lecture “Glamor, Trash and Politics—Drag as Performative Resistance” dealt with gender norms, activism and the history of drag. It seems that the activities correspond to the Center’s architecture. It confronts the difficult past, and asks about its role in the context of modern German society and its history.

New contexts to reflect on the aftermath of Nazi ideology are provided by right-wing violence of the recent years, which has been unfolding in Europe, including Germany. Across the country, many citizens’ initiatives

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *NS-Dokumentationszentrum München: Empfehlungen für die konzeptionelle Ausrichtung erarbeitet durch den wissenschaftlichen Beirat NS-Dokumentationszentrum* (23. Juni 2006), p. 7–9.

<sup>46</sup> See more, Sierp, A. A Contested Latecomer: The Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism. *History & Memory*, 2020, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 9–33, <https://doi.org/10.2979/histmemo.32.1.03>.

<sup>47</sup> Compare with the statement of Doreen Pastor: “Germany’s memorial sites are also reluctant to make connections to present-day violence out of fear of making inappropriate comparisons.” See Pastor, D. “The Value of Being There”: Visitor Experiences at German Holocaust Memorial Sites. In: *Visitor Experience at Holocaust Memorials and Museums* / Ed. D. I. Popescu. London and New York: Routledge 2022, p. 248, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003220626>.

<sup>48</sup> On Zhanna Kadyrova’s installation at the NS Doku in Munich, see Zhanna Kadyrova # Out of Home / Curator A. Hoffsten. *Nsdoku München*, September 8 to October 8, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.nsdoku.de/en/zhanna-kadyrova> [accessed: 25.03.2025].



and cities' projects have addressed the problem of political radicalization as a threat to democratic values and social security.<sup>49</sup> The main theme of additional activities planned for 2024 in the NS Doku was right-wing extremism and the commemoration of its victims. Between April and July 2024, the NS Doku hosted the exhibition "Rechtsterrorismus. Verschwörung und Selbstermächtigung—1945 bis Heute" showing a cross-section of right-wing terrorist acts that took place around the world in recent years. From September to December 2024, it was exhibiting the digital cartography project "Wir sind hier," which dealt with spatiality of remembrance and emotional impact in urban space with regard to memory of victims of right-wing violence. The project, created in 2022, was inspired by an error on an American housing-search website. Because of the glitch, the outlines of the houses that were demolished to build a highway were shown. The project "Wir sind hier" asked the question about the ways in which the victims of politically-ignited acts of violence are remembered in the context of topography of cities, such as Berlin, Hanau or Munich. The project was concerned with the places to which the victims of the attacks were connected and which were part of their lives. In this way, the burden of remembrance lies not on the death site (the site of the attack, the mourning, etc.), but on the places associated with the memories of victims' lives (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Fragment of the artistic installation by Tayla Feldman from the project "We Are Here," NS Doku, Munich. 2024. Photo by Izabela Paszko.

<sup>49</sup> The opening of the NS Documentation Center in Chemnitz is planned for 2025. The event would be part of the program of Chemnitz as the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2025.

Institutionally, the NS Doku is affiliated with several local cultural networks, including Kunstareal München, Die Vielen, and Various Others. These organizations unite cultural and artistic institutions, while promoting democratic values, cultural diversity and comprehensive educational initiatives, including those that address the history of the NS era. The aforementioned installation by Kadyrova was presented as part of the collaboration with the international art initiative, Various Others. Through artistic collaborations, the NS Doku crosses the boundary of historiography—engaging in the dialogue and critical discussion about the past within the context of contemporary socio-political issues and their artistic conceptualization.

With the fulfillment of the goal to recognize the buildings and spaces that facilitated the implementation of violence and exclusion during the NS era, in many cases, now they are given back to society and operate on the principles of inclusivity and tolerance. In the spirit of this approach, a wooden infrastructure was created at the entrance to the NS Doku in the summer of 2024, which not only diversifies and softens the geometric styling of the surrounding buildings but, above all, creates the conditions for dialogue and participation. In this way, the empty square has become a meeting place that functions separately from the NS Doku itself. The NS Doku and its immediate space have returned on the map of Maxvorstadt and Munich as a ‘living’ place that contributes to the contemporary character of the city.

Behind the selection of the site of the former Brown House for the NS Doku rest motivations of symbolic significance. The historical background of *Königsplatz* and its proximity to the Consulate General of the State of Israel (opened in 2011) give a special meaning to the educational mission of the NS Doku. Its relation to other institutions located in Maxvorstadt is part of both purposely conceptualized and unconscious processes related to the “relational geography of memory infrastructure,” to use the term of David Bell and Lourdes Orozco.<sup>50</sup> It sets the place against the nearby buildings, thus, implicating a new interpretation and contextualization of the exhibition at the NS Doku. This particular form of “overlapping” of the meanings at the memory place could be observed already in the 1990s, when the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. was opened in 1993. James E. Young quotes Michael Berenbaum, the project director of the USHMM, who examined the chosen location of the Memorial Museum in the context of the surrounding institutions that strengthen democracy:

*“When people leave the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum,” Berenbaum writes, “the monuments to democracy that surround it—to Lincoln and Jefferson and Washington—will take on a new meaning.” Such American icons of democracy will either be affirmed for the ways their ideals prevented similar events in America or, in the eyes of Native Americans, African Americans, and Japanese Americans, reviewed skeptically for the ways such ideals might have preceded, but did not, the persecution of these groups on American soil. Every visitor will bring a different experience to the museum, as well as a different kind of memory out of it.*<sup>51</sup>

The spatial connectedness became evident during an attempted attack of September 5, 2024, when a gunman opened fire on the NS Doku on his way to the Israeli Consulate. This incident confirmed the lack of neutrality and forced engagement of a memory place in the public debate on current affairs, world crises, military conflicts and right-wing violence.

## Conclusion

Memory is deeply rooted in materiality. Although the embodiment of commemoration takes place through material artefacts, objects, buildings, they also act as custodians of memory and remind us of the past. In the context of events that span in time and territory, there is a grafting of forms of

<sup>50</sup> Bell, D.; Orozco, L. Neighbourhood Arts Spaces in Place: Cultural Infrastructure and Participation on the Outskirts of the Creative City. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2021, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2019.1709059>.

<sup>51</sup> Young, J. E. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 347.

commemoration that diffuses the landscape of memory and allows for diverse permanent forms of commemoration.

In the case of Munich, the city with a prominent role in Nazi party politics and administration, the buildings and sites associated with both perpetrators and their victims are scattered throughout the urban area and beyond it. While centralized memory and culture institutions, such as the NS Doku, provide a synthesized insight into the “brown past” and its effects on contemporary society, it is important to experience history spatially. This would allow us to physically orientate the connections between individual buildings, measure distances and identify the grid of connections. Administrative agencies, party offices or forced labor camps did not operate in a vacuum but were connected by a network of transport and personal contacts. The proximity of the KZ Dachau sub-camps to the main railway junctions, or the neighborhood of Heinrich Hoffmann’s photography atelier and the headquarters of the NSDAP in 1925–1929, encourage us to see the sites associated with the NS regime in broader perspective.

In the context of “infrastructures of memory,” the NS Doku is heavily embedded in Munich’s history and contemporary politics. Its functioning depends on many factors. So are the conditions that led to the establishment of this institution in this particular place of a particular appearance. As the article shows, infrastructural processes are based on connectedness, with little margin left for chance events or coincidences. The culture of remembrance, although inspired and processed from below, is subjected to official definition leading to popularization and dissemination of narratives.

As the activities of the NS Doku in Munich and the city’s remembrance activities, such as marches, demonstrations or artistic events, in public places demonstrate, learning about the city’s history and its residents’ approach to the past is linked to the topography of the city and its architecture. The NS Doku, although strict in its shape, in fact, is the lens, a gateway through which the act of reflecting on the past is accomplished.

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