

## ICOMOS Germany

Monuments of Modern Architecture at Risk – Case Study Berlin<sup>1</sup>

*Poststadion, Berlin, 1926–29, arch. Georg Demmler, listed monument. Out of use since the beginning of the 1990s. Condition c. 2000*



*Hubertusbad, Berlin, 1925–27, arch. Rudolf Gleye, Otto Weis, listed monument. Out of use since the beginning of the 1990s. Condition c. 2000*

Berlin was a metropolis of the Modern Movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Famous architects and planners lived and worked in the German capital or designed architectural and urban developments for Berlin during the pre-war-period, such as Bruno Taut, Erich Mendelsohn, Walter Gropius, Hans Poelzig, Peter Behrens, Hans Scharoun et al. The most significant buildings and quarters of “modern times”, which had survived World War II in Berlin, were appreciated since the 1970s as architectural heritage and as heritage of the social and democratic traditions in the Weimar Republic (1918–1933). Both parts of the Cold War metropolis, West Berlin and East Berlin, initiated protection and restoration campaigns of historically and artistically valuable buildings or building groups of the 1920s already before the Iron Curtain fell. Especially residential areas of the social housing program between the wars were conserved and modernized as listed monuments before the Berlin Wall came down.

After the German reunification in 1990 conservation campaigns and restoration projects concentrated on the former eastern part of Berlin and included a large number of housing estates. Subtle façade restoration of protected office buildings dating from the time between the World Wars, such as the Shell House by Emil Fahrenkamp in the West and the House Alexander by Peter Behrens in the East, received conservation awards (Ferdinand von Quast Medaille, Europa Nostra Prize) because of a successful revitalisation during the 1990s. A few key buildings of Berlin Modernism had been preserved only as war ruins in the half century after 1945, such as the assembly hall of the school compound Schlichtallee in Lichtenberg by Max Taut (1929–32), once the largest school complex in pre-war Germany. The ruin is provisionally sheltered since 1992; a competition for the reconstruction of the exterior architecture and for a modern revitalization of the interior was won by Max Dudler in 2002, but the rebuilding has not yet been completed.

### Monuments of pre-war modernism in danger

Some prominent monuments of pre-war Modernism, which had survived World War II and the Cold War, are now endangered by a lack of public heritage awareness or even by ignorant new building projects. The “Post-Stadion” in West Berlin (Moabit), a modernist sports ground designed by the specialised “sports architect” Georg Demmler in 1926–29, has been out of use for more than 15 years and is in severe trouble. The foundation stone for the “Hubertusbad” (Rudolf Gleye, Otto Weis, 1925–27) in East Berlin was already laid in 1919. That

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Heritage at Risk. ICOMOS World Report 2001/2002 on Monuments and Sites in Danger*, München 2001, especially case study Berlin, pp. 101–105.

swimming hall is considered a characteristic example of Social-Democratic achievements and of modern architectural attitudes after the German November Revolution. After the reunification this indoor swimming pool was closed and renewal plans were stopped by the district of Lichtenberg, because there was neither public money nor public use for an indoor pool. The need and costs of renovation are growing from winter to winter. Thus under threat the listed building is still waiting to be sold and for private commercial or cooperative investments in restoration and revitalisation of that modern monument. Both the “Post-Stadion” and the “Hubertusbad” are state-owned properties and threatened as listed monuments of the Modern Movement in Germany; in 2001 they were visited by members of ICOMOS.<sup>2</sup>

The housing estate “Neu-Jerusalem” was listed only in 1995 as an example of early avant-garde architecture or Bauhaus style in Berlin (1923–24). The residential buildings designed by Erwin Gutkind are located in the vicinity of the Staaken airship port and were used by pilot students and their families. The estate consisted of 21 identical semi-detached houses, each with c. 800 m<sup>2</sup> of garden, as well as of an experimental single-family house built using a prefabricated construction system. After 1945 “Neu-Jerusalem” became part of the Soviet Occupation Zone and was handed over to the communal housing administration of East Berlin. The gradual modifications of the settlement’s appearance continued for half a century. The last coat of paint was applied in the 1970s. In 1990, after the German reunification, the houses were taken over by the Federal State of Berlin. At present the building group is managed by the “Berlin Liegenschaftsfonds”, the trustee of the Federal State of Berlin for property and plots for sale in the city. Around 5,000 public properties are waiting for private investors, including a large number of listed buildings, such as the rented three-storey residential buildings of “Neu-Jerusalem”.<sup>3</sup> Today the condition of the cubic-shaped houses is still desolate and in need of



Settlement „Neu Jerusalem“, Berlin, 1923–24, arch. E. Gutkind. Current Condition



Kant-Garagenpalast, Berlin, 1929–30, arch. R. Paulick, H. Zweigenthal. Current condition

restoration. The development of a maintenance plan for refurbishing the houses is of high urgency.<sup>4</sup>

The Kant-Garagenpalast (1929–30) was the first multi-storey garage in Berlin, designed by Richard Paulick and Hermann Zweigenthal. It offered space for 300 cars on four levels. Despite the many constraints posed by the size and location of the property, the architects succeeded in creating a profitable garage facility thanks to their use of a double ramp system “imported” from the United States and used here for the first time in Europe. It comprises two intertwining ramps, one for cars driving up and the other for those driving down. Both the Jewish client, Louis Serlin, and the Jewish architects had to flee Nazi Germany. The parking garage survived World War II virtually unscathed; only the residential building next to it was bombed and destroyed. In 1956 the building’s new tenant, German Shell AG, built a car wash and maintenance facility on what remained of the neighbouring building’s foundations. The parking garage and workshop are still in use – and in dire need of a refurbishment and of an economic development for contemporary functions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Sport – Stätten – Kultur. Historische Sportanlagen und Denkmalpflege. Sports – Sites – Culture. Historic Sports Grounds and Conservation. (ICOMOS – Hefte des Deutschen Nationalkomitees. Journals of the German National Committee XXXVIII)*, München 2002, p. 92 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. <http://www.liegenschaftsfonds.de/downloads/DF-english.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Avantgarde – Diffamierung – Welterbe? Heritage of Modern Movement in Russia and Germany: Heritage at Risk or World Heritage? Exhibition Bauhaus Dessau*, 7 July 2006–27 August 2006.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. Bernau, Nikolaus: *Zum 100. Geburtstag des Bauhauslehrers, China-Exilanten und DDR-Staatsarchitekten Richard Paulick*, in: *Berliner Zeitung* 07-11-2003



*Wohnstadt Carl Legien, Berlin, 1928–30, arch. B. Taut, F. Hillinger, listed monument. Out of use since the beginning of the 1990s. Current condition of the laundry house which is threatened by an application for demolition*

### Acute threats of losing modern monuments

The “Wohnstadt Carl Legien” (1928–30) is one of six housing estates in the Berlin modern style which were registered in the German tentative list for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997. The estate in the densely populated district of Prenzlauer Berg was designed by Bruno Taut and Franz Hillinger for the non-profit housing company GEHAG and named in honour of Carl Legien, a trade union leader who had died in 1920. The coloured rows of houses open up towards U-shaped green courtyards. Low-rise buildings for laundries and a central heating plant are significant parts of the infrastructure system in the courtyard. In 1999 the traditional owner had to sell off the residential blocks to the BauBeCon. In 2004 this new building company submitted an application for the demolition of the laundry and heating plant, which fulfilled their historical function until 1985. The conservation authority rejected the dismantling of this characteristic element of a potential World Heritage site. The builder descending from unionised labour (“Neue Heimat”) filed a lawsuit and went to the administration court in 2006. The trial court will have to decide in 2007. Yet it is not too late to appeal to the responsible building society which is advertising the heritage of Bruno Taut and his housing estates in Berlin and Magdeburg in the BaubeCon portfolio.

The industrial and working class quarters Siemensstadt and Oberschöne weide are synonyms for the rise of Berlin from a Prussian residence to a world-famous metropolis

of electrical engineering and industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called “Electropolis”. By 1895, AEG had already begun constructing a long string of industrial installations in Oberschöne weide at the riverbank of the Upper Spree. Here AEG constructed the first three-phase electrical power plant in Germany. Important stages in power engineering innovations were initiated in this plant, which was expanded and modernized several times. Sections of the AEG-Kabelwerk Oberspree were developed nearby from 1897 to 1930. Three decades of industrial architecture are collected on the grounds of the cable works complex, erected by renowned AEG architects such as Paul Tropp, Johannes Kraatz, Klemm, Peter Behrens and Ernst Ziesel. The factory district is characterized by the yellow brick façades to this day.<sup>6</sup> The Fernmeldekabelwerk (telephone cable factory) designed by Ernst Ziesel (1880–1946) completed and crowned the whole complex in 1927–28 by using strictly modernist and rationalist industrial architecture. The cubical building is characterised by a visible steel framework and large glass partitions, which exceeded the modern AEG building tradition in favour of an avant-garde attitude. The factory is regarded as a masterpiece of modern factory architecture in Germany and as a chief work in the oeuvre of Ernst Ziesel, the successor of Peter Behrens as senior architect of AEG (1924–41). It was listed as a monument of industrial heritage as early as in 1977 and in 1995 an arrangement was obtained to conserve and restore the building at the expense of the Federal State of Berlin, which became the sole owner of the factory after the German reunification, when it went out of service.

Ten years later the Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung (Senate Department for Urban Development) presented an application to demolish the listed monument and some months later the submitter authorised a building application for a new project of the Fachhochschule für Wirtschaft und Technik Berlin (FHTW; university of applied sciences for economy and technology). Students and teachers of the study course “restoration” of the FHTW joined forces in an initiative to save the threatened industrial heritage.<sup>7</sup> The Berlin chamber of architects and the civil engineers (Architektenkammer, Baukammer), the Berlin Heritage Council (Landesdenkmalrat Berlin) and the Technical University (Technische Universität Berlin) supported the NGO protests, organised public hearings with a panel of experts, sent open letters to the responsible senator for urban development and even took part in go-ins against the demolition of the monument. Both industrial heritage conservationists and modern heritage conservationists, such as ICOMOS Germany and DOCOMOMO Germany,<sup>8</sup> made a request or sent open letters and pleaded for the conservation and revitalisation of this Berlin monument. On the occasion of the International Heritage Day (18<sup>th</sup> April) which was dedicated to industrial heritage in 2006 the problem was addressed in Berlin. In his opening speech during a Heritage at Risk conference in Moscow in April 2006 Michael Petzet, President

<sup>6</sup> Cf. [http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/denkmal/denkmale\\_in\\_berlin/en/industrie\\_und\\_technik/oberschone-weide.shtml](http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/denkmal/denkmale_in_berlin/en/industrie_und_technik/oberschone-weide.shtml)

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://www.denk-mal-industrie.de>

<sup>8</sup> Cf. [http://www.docomomo.de/Veranstaltungen/fernmeldekabelfabrik\\_docomomo.pdf](http://www.docomomo.de/Veranstaltungen/fernmeldekabelfabrik_docomomo.pdf)

of ICOMOS, objected to the demolition of that important monument of industrial and modern heritage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on behalf of ICOMOS.

### Monuments of post-war modernism in danger

The Cinema “Zoo-Palast”, built in 1955–57 by Schwebes & Schoszberger near Zoo railway station as a symbol of a new open-minded society and as a festival site for the Berlin Film Festival (founded in 1955), is threatened to be closed and demolished for a huge commercial transformation project of the surrounding “Zentrum am Zoo” from the same time and by the same architect. The so-called “Tränenpalast” (“palace of tears”), an important monument of history and architecture from the Cold War period (1962), situated next to the border railway and subway station Friedrichstrasse, is recently at risk because of a large-scale investment in that central area. In the wider sense the listed building is part of the complex border system of the GDR.<sup>9</sup> The transparent glass pavilion erected in 1962 served as a border checkpoint hall. Here farewell scenes with lots of tears took place between visitors from the West and their East Berlin relatives; the building also became a symbol for the human suffering caused by the border between the two German states. Since the reunification the passport and duty control station has become very popular as a culture hall.

Good news has come from the listed student village of Schlachtensee (1957/58; architects Fehling & Gogel; landscape architect Hermann Mattern) since the last case study on Berlin was published in the Heritage at Risk report 2001–2002.<sup>10</sup> Enthusiastic students and their experienced supporters have founded a building cooperative in self-administration (Genossenschaft Studentendorf Berlin-Schlachtensee e. G. – Berlin-Schlachtensee Students Village Cooperative Ltd.) and initiated a conservation and modernisation plan. The student village was acknowledged as cultural heritage of national significance in 2005 and the refurbishment of the first student apartments will be funded by the Minister of State in the Federal Chancellery and by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Cultural Affairs and the Media.<sup>11</sup>



*AEG-Kabelwerk Oberspree Telephone cable factory, 1927–28, arch. E. Ziesel, listed monument. Process of destruction, 2006*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Monuments: The Berlin Wall. Monument of the German Division*, in: [http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/denkmal/denkmale\\_in\\_berlin/en/berliner\\_mauer/index.shtml](http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/denkmal/denkmale_in_berlin/en/berliner_mauer/index.shtml)

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *case study Berlin*, in: *Heritage at Risk. ICOMOS World Report 2001/2002 on Monuments and Sites in Danger*, München 2001, p. 104.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. <http://www.Studentendorf.com/>