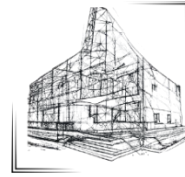


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(IN)VISIBLE TRACES.
ARTISTIC MEMORIES OF
THE COLD WAR

(In)Visible Traces. Artistic memories of the Cold War

Cold War in Germany

Memorial Site Bautzner Straße Dresden / Gedenkstätte Bautzner Straße Dresden

SEBASTIAN GONANO, MEMORIAL SITE BAUTZNER STRASSE DRESDEN

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1) Detailed Historical Introduction: Cold War in Germany

The end of the World War II and the partition of Germany into its four occupation zones practically marks the beginning of the Cold War for Germany. The occupation zones developed into the Western German „Federal Republic of Germany“, aka the FRG and the Eastern German „German Democratic Republic“, aka the GDR. The division of Germany became a blue-print for several Cold War conflicts, like Korea and Vietnam.

The conflict of Western and Eastern Germany was in itself a miniature version of the Cold War, with Berlin as its primary staging ground. Berlin itself, entirely surrounded by the Soviet Occupation Zone, which later on became the GDR, was split apart between the four occupation countries. The Eastern half held by the Soviet Union, the Western half held and administrated by the USA, France and the United Kingdom.

As relations between the Soviet Union and the Western allies started to deteriorate, so did the relations between Western and Eastern Germany. As the GDR started to consolidate its power in the East, the Communist party liquidated the Social Democratic party in 1946 and forced its members to join the renamed “Socialist Unity party” (SED) or face repression. Until 1950 all political parties of Eastern Germany were subordinated under the so-called National Front and elections became a farce.

While the economic situation in Western Germany started to rapidly improve in the 1950ies, the so called “Wirtschaftswunder” (economic miracle), the economy of Eastern Germany deteriorated rapidly. The main reasons for this decline were the heavy reparation payments to the Soviet Union and the accelerated collectivization efforts with the goal of establishing a centrally planned Socialist economy. In 1953 mass uprisings started in Eastern Germany and the SED was on the verge of losing control. The Soviet Union had to intervene militarily and cut the protests and strikes down violently. Dozens were left dead and thousands were facing criminal charges for their participation.

In 1954 Western Germany joined NATO while Eastern Germany joined the Warsaw pact. Within ten years since the end of World War II both countries started to rearm. In 1956 Western Germany banned the Communist party. In 1961 inter-German relations reached a new low with the building of the Berlin wall. Emigration and flight from Eastern Germany to Western Germany was one of the foremost problems of the SED. Up to 3,5 million people left the GDR until 1961. The border between Eastern and Western Germany was closed and became militarized in 1952. After 1952 the main route of escape was through Berlin.

In 1961 the GDR started to build a heavily militarized border wall separating Eastern and Western Berlin. Emigration was vastly reduced but the border had to be violently enforced. Until the end of the GDR dozens to hundreds of people were killed trying to cross the Berlin wall. Up to a thousand people died trying to cross the border between East and West Germany.

In the late 1960 to early 1970ies a rapprochement took place between Western Germany and the Warsaw pact countries. With the new Eastern policy of chancellor Willy Brandt the FRG officially recognized its loss of Eastern territories to Poland and the Soviet Union and accepted the new Oder-Neisse border. Official and formal relations with the GDR were established. In 1962 the systematic trading of political prisoners became established. Western Germany paid the GDR to release political prisoners towards the FRG. Until the end of the GDR nearly 34.000 people were traded this way. For the GDR it became a release valve, guaranteeing that a critical mass of political opponents couldn't form. The money received was also a welcome and desperately needed stream of foreign currency.

The political system of the GDR was heavily marked by the establishment of a secret political police under the Ministry of State Security (colloquially called the Stasi). The Stasi imprisoned and terrorized (so called “Zersetzung”) political opponents of the SED as well as people trying to flee the country. It operated 17 prisons and employed up to 91.000 people. The Stasi was not only a vast organization in itself, by the end of the 1980ies it also upheld a network of about 200.000 informants in a population of about 16 million people.

In the late 80ies the GDR started to struggle and ultimately collapsed. Its economy deteriorated under large debts, vast ecological problems became a heavy burden and its political control weakened as the Soviet Union started to reform and lessened their grip and support for the countries of the Warsaw pact. In 1989 the Berlin Wall fell and in 1991 East Germany joined West Germany and ceased to exist.

The reunification and the legacy of the GDR remain to this day a heavily contested and controversial event in Germany.

2) Detailed Legal Status: German National Laws on National Protection

Germany has robust legal frameworks to protect and preserve Cold War heritage sites. Key laws include the Federal Monument Protection Act (Denkmalschutzgesetz) and the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (Kulturgutschutzgesetz).

Federal Monument Protection Act:

This law aims to safeguard cultural monuments and historical sites. Cold War-era structures, such as remnants of the Berlin Wall or Stasi prisons, fall under its purview. The act outlines guidelines for the preservation, restoration, and responsible use of these sites. Any interventions, including renovations or demolitions, require careful consideration and approval to ensure the historical integrity of the location.

Cultural Heritage Protection Act:

This legislation addresses the protection of cultural artefacts and intangible heritage. It plays a vital role in preserving documents, photographs, and other materials related to the Cold War. Museums, archives, and institutions housing such artefacts must adhere to regulations to prevent loss or damage.

In addition to national laws, Germany often collaborates with international organizations, such as UNESCO, to ensure the protection of significant Cold War sites. This collaborative effort emphasizes the global importance of preserving these locations as part of the shared cultural heritage.

These legal frameworks underscore Germany's commitment to recognizing and protecting Cold War heritage, ensuring that future generations have access to the physical and documentary evidence of this crucial period in the nation's history.

3) Location-Focus: Memorial Site Bautzner Straße Dresden/ Gedenkstätte Bautzner Straße Dresden

The Memorial site Bautzner Straße in Dresden served as a Stasi prison during the Cold War, symbolizing the oppressive measures imposed by the East German government. In addition it houses one of the former Soviet prisons that was active until 1952.

It is a place of remembrance, education, and encounter, dedicated to commemorating the victims of political persecution in the Soviet occupation zone and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The memorial documents their fates and makes them permanently accessible to the public.

Today, the Memorial Site Bautzner Straße is meticulously preserved as a memorial site. It stands as a living testament to the experiences of those who suffered political persecution during the Cold War, providing an authentic and educational environment. The institution serves as a space for exchange and encounters, offering those affected a platform to share their experiences.

The collaborative efforts of the Memorial site extend to numerous partner organizations, educational institutions, museums, archives, and associations in Saxony, Germany, and neighbouring countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The cross-border exchange primarily focuses on working with contemporary witnesses, exploring the history of political persecution and opposition, and understanding the system transformation in East Germany and the states of the former "Eastern Bloc."

Furthermore, the memorial actively engages with the public through educational events, panel discussions, and exhibitions, providing a dynamic platform to address a wide array of historical and contemporary topics.

This integrated information captures the multifaceted role of the Memorial Site, combining remembrance, education, research, and collaboration in its mission to preserve the historical legacy of political persecution during the Cold War.



