

World heritage Tempelhof Airport

In the current discussion around the Tempelhof airport proponents and opponents apart from the jurisdictional arguments talk about questions such as economy, security or the actual need.

Apart from these arguments however there is one that is at least just as important, and to many citizens of Berlin it is obviously more meaningful, than to politicians: This argument is called "history" or "historical monument", critics call it "backwardness" or "nostalgia".

The cultural achievement - First airport of the world

In 1923 the Tempelhof airport was the first one in the world that took up business. Before that, airfields at that time were rather experimental fields for the still very young aviation industry. In Tempelhof pilots were not experimental guinea-pigs but conducted the first commercial flights. Also German **Luft Hansa A.G.** began their flying operations here in 1926.

Third biggest building of the world

It is well-known that in the nazi-era architecture was especially much bigger than usual. In Germany nowadays we speak of the so called "**Gigantomania**". With 284,000 square meters of floor area the building was the largest in the world at the time (in 1934), and today still holds place 3. The prognosis's for passenger developments nevertheless were planned up already to the year 2000. At that time this was rather boldly planned, but because of this there was a good cause for building plenty of hangars and facility capacities.

Structurally trailblazing

The today's greater building was planned by **Ernst Sagebiel**, even if the first facility was built before already. At that time people hardly had any experiences with the commercial aviation. **Sagebiel** also planned the airports of Stuttgart, Munich's **Muenchen-Riem** and Vienna, but none of it is (in its original shape) in good condition compared to Tempelhof.

Many architectural decisions from at that time were nevertheless trailblazing for airports in all of the world. Star architect **Sir Norman Foster** made the point: Tempelhof is the "**Mother of all Airports**".

The partitioning of the building into several functional sections (approach, handling of baggage, departure- and landing section, a separate freight- and air mail range) is what we are used to see on all the airports today. We also expect to find hotels and whole shopping malls in an airport, all of this was built in Tempelhof for the first time ever.

One might ask what those remarkable stair towers at the building and the very unusual roof structure were meant to, but the idea to use the airport roof as grandstand for large meetings and marching-ups was never generally accepted. In order to offer entrance for 100.000 spectators, stairs were built alongside the building and 40 meters of steel girders loom out of the roof.

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INITIATIVE ZUM ERHALT DES FLUGHAFENS TEMPELHOF



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Enthusiasm for technique in the "Golden Twenties"

It almost fell into oblivion that Berlin is one of the first centers of aviation history. **Otto Lilienthal** and many other aircraft manufacturers were working here. In this technique-euphoria in the 20's of the last century the decision was made to build in Tempelhof an airport in the city.

Representation object of the National Socialism

Although many people rather dislike to be reminded of this time, the Tempelhof Airport building clearly shows the influence of the National Socialism. With the high halls lined with shelly limestone, the ornamentations and its equipment as a marching-up arena it clearly stands for the hybrid at that time. But also we have to question us, how easily we can be impressed from this symbolism.

Place of refuge during the Second World War, place of arms industry and forced labour

Although the building was never completed at that time due to the war, it was nevertheless a place of refuge for many thousands of citizens during the Second World War.

The shelters and **catacombs** in its cellars and in addition, the autonomous water and power supply offered safe protection for the people. At the same time this was very useful also for the arms industry. We also know that at the end of war forced laborers in the railway tunnel of the airport were mounting planes, which could roll directly to deployment.

Center of the air lift

In the year 1948 General **Lucius D Clay** and mayor **Ernst Reuter** made the courageous decision to supply Berlin by airlift, in order to break the Soviet blockade. European history would probably have looked much different, if the city of Berlin would have fallen. The airlift was the cornerstone for the good relationship of Germans and Americans for over 40 years and the beginning of a liberal Germany.

The Tempelhof Airport was logistic center of this airlift, which demanded large logistical achievements and also numerous victims of the Western Allies.

Scene of the cold war

When West Berlin in the cold war was an **outpost** of the west, the airport played a central role. Here was the American information center for monitoring air and radio traffic of Eastern Europe.

Result

Tempelhof Airport is and always will be something special. By its special status for many decades it has been preserved in a condition, which nowhere else in the world can be found.

The airport as a whole is listed as a protected historic monument today already.

To apply to **UNESCO** for the recognition of Tempelhof Airport as a world heritage is a task for the city of Berlin, the German Federal Government and for all citizens of Berlin.