

DRAFT
WASHINGTON AS COMMEMORATION
Capital Cities Case Study Research Study

APPENDIX C
BERLIN, GERMANY

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Population: 3.4 million

Commemoration Planning in Berlin

Germans distinguish between *gedenkstätten* (place of national memory) and *denkmale* (statues or historical markers). Gedenkstätten are usually larger installations that include staff and/or an educational component, while denkmale are used to mark the location of a specific historical event, though some are not necessarily in the exact place where the event occurred. All of Berlin's gedenkstätten pertain to the Nazi crimes of the 20th Century, but are also accurately located where the suffering and death took place (e.g. the Topography of Terror and the House of the Wannsee Conference). The single exception is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.¹ The memorial is centrally located on the "no-man's-land" on either side of where the Berlin Wall once stood.²

Since the opening of the Berlin Wall, there have been nine new memorials for the victims of Nazism, six large monuments dedicated to the same theme and more than 3,000 "stumble stones" (shown at right) to commemorate specific locations where Jews lived. The stones include names, deportation and death dates.



Stumble stones in Berlin

Rainer Klemke, the key official interviewed for the case study, explains that "our experience is such that with a narrower focus, the acceptance of a memorial increases," so a dedicated to *all* victims or *all* wars would probably be too general because people are drawn to memorials that has particular meaning for them. The Berlin Wall is perhaps the most general, as it is dedicated to "the Memory and Victims of the Berlin Wall from 1961-1989 and the victims of communist violence."

Narrowly-focused memorials result in more works, however. Since the Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe, there are now calls for monuments in the neighborhood of the Brandenburg Gate for monuments to gay and gypsy victims. Similarly, the memorial to the victims of Tiergarten 4 ("T4") was expanded to include homosexual victims in 2008.³ The T4 monument emerged from significant public discussion about the importance of memorials and monuments dedicated to various groups. A similar decision-making process driven by public discussion took place around a proposed monument to Georg Elser, the first person to try to assassinate Hitler, which has now been approved for construction.

Foreign gifts are a difficult and diplomatically-delicate topic in Berlin. While, in principle, these monuments are erected only on the grounds of artistic worth, but many artists and states would like to make a gift directly to Berlin and see it located on an important location in the city. Some gifts are still accepted on diplomatic grounds.⁴

Process to Establish New Works

Ideas for new works are proposed by groups of interested citizens, sometimes contrary to the *politik* of the day (e.g. political opposition or counter-cultural groups). Through public hearings, "podium discussions" and formal participation by the relevant state offices, historians and other experts, victims' organizations and interested citizens, "civil servants" (planners, bureaucrats) work to develop concepts to be presented to the German Parliament or Senate of Berlin. Different parties often work out political agreements regarding monuments and their advisors negotiate the details. Ultimately, the national Bundestag or the Berlin Senate decide whether the concept and location are sound and in the interest of a public undertaking.

The federal government or the Berlin Senate exclusively finance gedenkstätten and their perpetual maintenance, but smaller memorials and tablets are occasionally established by private individuals or groups.

A set of guidelines has been developed for commemorations of national importance following lengthy public discourse (available upon request, in German).

Selected Commemorations in Berlin

a. Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is Berlin's most significant and controversial commemoration honoring the six million Jews killed by Adolf Hitler's Nazi government. The memorial is a field of 2,711 concrete slabs or "stelae" unevenly arranged in a grid pattern on a 4.7-acre site.



Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

According to the memorial's designer, American architect Peter Eisenman, the stelae produce an uneasy, confusing atmosphere and suggest that "when a supposedly rational and ordered system grows too large and out of proportion to its intended purpose, it in fact loses touch with human reason. It then begins to reveal the innate disturbances and potential for chaos in all systems of seeming order, the idea that all closed systems of a closed order are bound to fail."⁵ Although the monument clearly calls to mind the image of a graveyard, the stelae do not correspond to any literal symbolism such as the number of Holocaust victims. Rather:

In this monument there is no goal, no end, no working one's way in or out. The duration of an individual's experience of it grants no further understanding, since understanding is impossible. The time of the monument, its duration from top surface to ground, is disjoined from the time of experience. In this context, there is no nostalgia, no memory of the past, only the living memory of the individual experience. Here, we can only know the past through its manifestation in the present.⁶

A memorial to Jewish victims of the Holocaust was first championed by television journalist and producer Lea Rosh and historian Eberhard Jäckel. Rosh remained an active advocate for the controversial project for the next 17 years until the memorial was completed in 2005.

The Bundestag passed a resolution in 1992 that the memorial would only be devoted to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and selected prominent site in the center of the newly-unified city of Berlin, near the Brandenburg Gate and the remains of the bunker where Hitler committed suicide.⁷ The memorial was to be completed by 2001, the year the German government would return to Berlin.

In 1994, Chancellor Helmut Kohl announced an open design competition with a 30-member jury of historians, city planners and other representatives from his government, the city of Berlin and Rosh's group. The design chosen from amongst the 523 submissions was an enormous concrete slab with the names of the Jewish victims, which was immediately rejected by the public and eventually Chancellor Kohl. Continued public discussion and arduous debate led to a second, limited, design competition in 1997. This time, the 5-member jury disclosed a conceptual plan for the memorial to address many of the underlying political and conceptual ambiguities related to the memorial. As James E. Young, a Holocaust memorial expert and the only American or Jew on the jury, explained:

“[W]e would be clear, for example, that this memorial will not displace the nation's other memorial sites, and that a memorial to Europe's murdered Jews would not speak for the Nazis' other victims but may, in fact, necessitate further memorials to them. Nor should this memorial hide the impossible questions driving Germany's memorial debate. It should instead reflect the terms of the debate, the insufficiency of memorials, the contemporary generation's skeptical view of official memory and its self-aggrandizing ways.”⁸

The design by Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra was eventually chosen and approved by a majority of the Bundestag in 1997. This design was also incredibly controversial because of its likeness to a graveyard. After Kohl lost the national election to Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, the process nearly devolved into a third competition. The Bundestag, which had taken over responsibility for selecting the final design, considered a completely new memorial by Richard Schröder in 1999, a small monument inscribed with the phrase "Thou Shalt Not Murder."⁹ In a 314-209 vote, the Bundestag approved Eisenman's modified memorial. The final design included a visitor center beneath the memorial, reduced the number of stelae by almost half, lowered the height of the stelae and removed the plans to imprint the names of the victims on top of columns.

The \$35.7 million memorial finally opened to the public in May 2005, two days after the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII in Europe.

b. Berlin Wall Commemorations

Commemorating the Berlin Wall has proven to be a uniquely difficult challenge for the reunified city. In the jubilation following the wall's demolition in 1989, the overriding national objective was to politically, economically and physically reunite the city and country, which led to rapid building development at the former site of the wall.¹⁰ Within a few years, the wall's path through the city had almost completely disappeared.

Over time, a number of new commemorative sites related to the Berlin Wall began to appear. In 1994-1995, the federal government held a competition to design a memorial for the victims of the Berlin Wall. With ongoing controversy about whether and how to commemorate the Berlin Wall, the federal government eventually approved three projects along Bernauerstrasse, the main street where the Wall divided the city: a memorial, a documentation center, and the Chapel of Reconciliation which was demolished during the construction of the wall. In conjunction with these plans, the Berlin Senate prepared an overall



The Berlin Wall Memorial allows visitors to look down on a stretch of the wall from a watchtower.

concept plan for all projects related to the Berlin Wall, such as open-air exhibits at Checkpoint Charlie and the Alexanderplatz, where the Wall was first opened during the Peaceful Revolution. Along the Spree River, the Wall's graffiti and murals are being restored through the East Side Gallery project.

The Berlin Wall is also commemorated through the Berlin Wall Trail and History Mile. The 96-mile hiking and biking trail follows the path of the Wall encircling West Berlin. The History Mile includes 29 different stations with informational boards that recount in words and photos the history of the city, the construction and destruction of the Wall, and other aspects of life in the divided city.



Information kiosk along the Berlin Wall History Mile

The controversy over the crosses at the Checkpoint Charlie Museum exemplifies the German commitment to locating monuments and memorials in historically-authentic sites. In 2004, the private museum erected more than 1,000 wooden crosses commemorating each of the victims who died trying to flee East Germany. The Cultural Senate of the City of Berlin immediately demanded that the crosses be removed because it was not the exact location where the victims died.¹¹ Eventually, the crosses were removed in 2005 because the German bank that owned the vacant lot on which the memorial was located refused to renew the expiring lease on the property. Even so, angry protests took place when the crosses were dismantled with several people briefly chaining themselves to the memorial. A €37 million decentralized commemoration concept was subsequently developed and implemented by the Berlin Senate.

Photo Credits

Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe –

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/93/HolocaustMahnmalLuft.jpg>

Berlin Wall Memorial –

http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/46/BerlinWallBernauerStrasseMarch2005.JPG&imgrefurl=http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BerlinWallBernauerStrasseMarch2005.JPG&usq=__gFleV9e4S9JOe8OVc_Qkae1f2MI=&h=1200&w=1600&sz=398&hl=en&start=33&um=1&tbnid=f5LAC6JMqQC11M:&tbnh=113&tbnw=150&prev=/images%3Fq%3D%2522berlin%2Bwall%2Bmemorial%2522%2Bbernauer%2Bstrasse%26ndsp%3D18%26hl%3Den%26rls%3Dcom.microsoft:en-US%26sa%3DN%26start%3D18%26um%3D1

Berlin Wall History Mile information panels - <http://www.berlin.de/mauer/geschichtsmeile/index.en.html>

¹ The German name of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe uses “denkmal” however the interviewee described it using the word “gedenkstätten.”

² Ward, Janet (2005). “Holocaust Architecture in Washington and Berlin” in Daum, A. and C. Mauch’s eds. *Berlin – Washington, 1800-2000: Capital Cities Cultural Representation, and National Identities*. Washington: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, p. 167.

³ *Aktion T4* was a Nazi program that killed (“euthanized”) as many as 275,000 mentally or physically ill adults and children. The granite slab added to the memorial in 2008 includes a small window where visitors can view a video clip of two men kissing.

⁴ Klemke, personal interview.

⁵ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/memorial/eisenman.html>

⁶ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/memorial/eisenman.html>

⁷ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/memorial/cron.html>

⁸ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/memorial/young.html>

⁹ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/memorial/cron.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.goethe.de/KUE/arc/dos/dos/zdk/en205918.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/25/international/europe/25berlin.html?pagewanted=1& r=1>