

## Scheidplatz. Olympic underground station – Munich 1972

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### Underground stations as monuments?

As everyday architecture, the value of subway stations has so far received little attention or has simply been despised. Many post-war modern buildings are considered ‘ugly’ or ‘boring’, which is why their architectural qualities are hardly appreciated. This lack of awareness leads to careless interventions in the traffic structures, which reduce or severely impair their original design intention. Often, however, these underground stations are of special architectural quality, create a sense of identity and are of essential historical significance.

### Subway construction in Munich

In the late 1950s, a rapidly growing population of around 50,000 inhabitants per year and increasing motorisation contributing to the traffic chaos in Munich made plans for an underground railway necessary.<sup>1</sup>

After all, the first railway ran on the line U6 from 1971 onwards and by then subways had already been running in forty other major cities around the world. As in many of these metropolises, the first plans in Munich began around 1900, but were quickly discarded because they were clearly too oversized for the traffic volume at the time. In the ‘capital of the movement’ in the Third Reich, the first construction measures were then carried out, but due to the war they had to be left as shell constructions.<sup>2</sup>

### Olympic line U3

With the award of the Olympic Games to Munich in 1966, the subway was completed at full speed. In order to connect the site of the event with the traffic system, a 4.2 km-long Olympic line was planned. The 1972 Summer Games marked a turning point in the city’s development and – with the already completed U6 and the new U3 Olympic line – were not only intended to take the Games into account, but also to underscore Munich’s status as a cosmopolitan city. With the first opportunity after the collapse of the National Socialist dictatorship, the Federal Republic wanted to present itself to the world public as a modern and democratic state. The mission statement of the Games was also incorporated into the design of the subway line and given an independent interpretation, which was planned and implemented by the subway department under Garabede Chabasian. The new stations of the line U3 were: Bonner Platz, Scheidplatz, Petuelring and the station Olympiazentrum. They show a common fair-

faced concrete architecture with wall reliefs integrated in the formwork, raised aluminium strip ceilings, the connecting colour orange on walls and furniture, and in selected areas individually manufactured ceramic tiles.

### Underground station Scheidplatz

As part of the U3, the underground station Scheidplatz was also opened in the year of the Summer Games and connects the lines U2 and U3. Planned by the subway department as part of the unit ‘Olympia’, it is of particular importance because of its artistic and architectural individual value, with wall reliefs by Waki Zöllner and the colourfully designed tiles by the artist van Aaken.

### Monument value Scheidplatz

As early as 1998, the Olympic Park with the Olympic Stadium, Olympic Hall, TV Tower and the S-Bahn station ‘Olympiastadion’ was listed as a monument ensemble. The specially built Olympic underground line U3 was not considered in this context. But it is – just as important! – a testimony to the city’s rapid development after the Games, which made Munich a cosmopolitan city, and must be regarded as an essential part of the 1972 monument ensemble. The subway stations also represented the ‘new Germany’ and offered an opportunity to convey in architectural terms the image of a modern, open and tolerant federal state abroad.<sup>3</sup> This historical value is an important monument criterion, which means that Scheidplatz always has to be considered in context with the other three underground stations of the Olympic line. The cultural value of the ensemble, which represents the social changes of the post-war period, must also be taken into account. It can be seen in the design of the stations, which make the history of the city with its political and scientific developments particularly visible during an underground journey. While the first stations, planned by Paolo Nestler, were still characterised by a sober objectivity that was considered to be of little interest, the playful and cheerful nature of the Games then became the guiding design idea of the Olympic line.<sup>4</sup> The stations were to become brighter and more clearly arranged in order to give passengers a feeling of security and prevent vandalism. In the 1980s the will to include the surface into the design grew. This development can also be seen in the choice of materials. It changed from artificial stone and concrete to steel, aluminium and glass and represents the change of the political, scientific and social



Fig. 1 Platform Scheidplatz, photo: Anna-Maria Mayerhofer, 2020



Fig. 2 Replaced furniture, no longer in the predominant colour orange, photo: Anna-Maria Mayerhofer, 2020

spirit of the time. Scheidplatz station, which emerged in the flow of exposed concrete architecture in the 70s, is of monumental importance because of its ideal value, but especially

because of its structural and artistic quality. The wall reliefs by the painter and sculptor Waki Zöllner show window-like sections of a subway car, of which components were inserted



Fig. 3 Blue ceramics at the entrance, photo: Anna-Maria Mayerhofer, 2020

into the formwork and plastically depicted. The reliefs of different widths rhythmically grow and disappear. The work of art clarifies space, time and speed.<sup>5</sup> The artistically designed deep blue ceramic tiles with red accentuations – like motifs from distant galaxies – have also been preserved to this day in their original form. They are a contrast to both the untreated concrete and the complementary guiding colour orange.

### Underground station Scheidplatz to be listed?

The World Heritage Olympic Park must definitely include its infrastructure! In addition to Scheidplatz, the U3 as a whole should be regarded as a consistent and architecturally very successful line. The Olympic line also provides an opportunity to discuss highly current topics whose origins can be found in the planning of post-war modern transport architecture. For example: the social rethinking of the topic traffic and turning away from the car.<sup>6</sup>

Many of the post-war traffic architectures have now reached their first life cycle and are therefore under great pressure to be renovated. There is the threat of changes that falsify the original design concept and disregard the design qualities and historical significance. The first interventions have also taken place at Scheidplatz: The furniture in the predominant colour orange was replaced (see Fig. 2).

The formerly coloured plastic benches were replaced by grey lattice seats, the orange-coloured station signs by black and white ones. Only the rubbish bins are still in their original condition and should be preserved. In contrast, changes are required in the unequal relationship between the restrained exposed concrete reliefs and the currently very dominant and disruptive advertising spaces. The operator MVG is, however, sceptical about the listing of the Scheidplatz station as it fears greater effort and higher costs. To place economic efficiency above the artistic and historical significance of the underground station Scheidplatz is intolerable, especially in view of its importance for the history of Munich.

<sup>1</sup> cf. Schütz, Florian: Geschichte der Münchner U-Bahn. 2016, <https://www.u-bahn-muenchen.de/geschichte/>, (20.07.2019).

<sup>2</sup> cf. Hackelsberger, Christoph: U-Bahn-Architektur in München. München, New York, 1997, Prestel-Verlag, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> cf. van Aaken, Wiepke; Körner, Burkhard: München im Aufbruch: Die Olympia-Linie, Vorabzug „Underground Architecture Revisited“, state April 2019.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> cf. Hackelsberger, Christoph: U-Bahn-Architektur in München. München, New York, 1997, Prestel-Verlag, p.76.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Krass, Sebastian: Denkmäler im Untergrund. 2019, [projekte.sueddeutsche.de](http://projekte.sueddeutsche.de) (20.07.2019).