

The “Old Jahn Stadium” in Regensburg. A lost piece of Olympic history

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An Olympic side venue in the course of time

The “Old Jahn Stadium” served as one of the peripheral side stages of the 1972 Olympic Games in Bavaria and the citizens of Regensburg were naturally proud of this honour. However, compared with the futuristic tent roof construction of the Munich Olympic Park, many athletes didn’t find the old-fashioned facilities modern or stylish. The half-timbered grandstand building, accompanied by concrete stands, made use of completely contrasting aesthetics dating back to its planning in the late 1920s.

Being not an issue in 1972, the grandstand building, the “Jahntower” – which later developed into a cult object among fans – and the valuable ceiling paintings encouraged a discussion about the stadium’s heritage value in recent times. From 2015 to 2017, the architecturally and culturally important building was documented for posterity. And just in time, as it seems, in view of its demolition in 2017. Today, only the Jahntower remains as witness of a lost Olympic site.

Regensburg becomes an Olympic city

In 1969, the Bavarian Government decided that Bavaria as a whole should participate in the Olympic spirit. Therefore, a selection of regional cities were casted to become Olympic venues.¹ With this opportunity in sight, the newly elected head of the SSV Jahn spared no effort to ensure that the Jahn Stadium made it onto the short list of eligible facilities.² Along with other cities,² Regensburg finally got the chance to host four preliminary and second-round football matches.⁴ Thus, in late summer 1972, the world-class teams of Brazil and the USSR left their footprints on the turf.⁵ However, with more than 8.000 visitors watching the regular regional league matches of the time, the Olympic Games were not able to outclass them.⁶ Taking this into consideration, the Olympic Games accounted for only a small part of the history of the Jahn Stadium with surprisingly only little or even no impact on the perception of it.

What’s extraordinary about the Jahn Stadium?

After its completion in 1931,⁷ the stadium consisted of the pitch itself, surrounded by a track, and visitor stands. On the west side, a 24-bay half-timbered grandstand building was located, fitted with a wooden roof above a brick ground floor containing the changing rooms and a pub. It was a very

early and sophisticated example of its kind. Rising visitor numbers led to numerous building activities in the following decades. Given the threat of demolition, the Master of Building Archaeology of the OTH Regensburg examined the building, using the methods of scientific architectural survey, photographic documentation, and observation survey in a teaching research project between 2015 and 2017. The research showed that the structural changes undertaken in order to fulfil the requirements of an Olympic sports venue consisted mainly in the installation of new sanitary facilities in the players’ cabins and a new green for the pitch (Fig. 2, yellow).

Deconstruction facing heritage?

Besides the half-timbered construction with its well-preserved wooden benches, other components, too, raise the question of the heritage value of the site. Rare ceiling paintings were discovered during the demolition process, showing sport scenes and important characters of the SSV Jahn as well as representatives of the city council (Fig. 4). The Jahn Tower on the opposite side of the grandstand building, which was used for the stadium speakers and scoreboards, was the most important landmark for the fans.

However, the current historical or sentimental value was not an issue during the time of the Games. In 1975, a discussion started about selling the now urban site and building a



Fig. 1 Aerial view of the Jahn Stadium Regensburg, 1971



Fig. 2 xtract of the true-to-deformation measurement, showing the construction phases



Fig. 3 After the Jahn Stadium was appointed an Olympic venue, the goals needed to be checked during an on-site visit



Fig. 4 Uncovered ceiling paintings in the pub depicting officials of the city and the SSV Jahn next to sportive scenes

new stadium instead. Eventually, a 2008 city council resolution, stipulating the construction of a new stadium, marked the end of the venue in 2017.⁸

The inner-city location contributed to an immediate subsequent use. The construction of a school and housing units began soon after the clearing of the site.⁹ Preserving this valuable example of early modern football architecture was never an option for the owner. The only part saved from destruction is the legendary Jahn Tower, although stripped of its surrounding stands. To compensate the lack of cultural identity in the new stadium, a duplicate of the tower will now be erected at the new site, dismissing earlier plans for a relocation of the original.¹⁰ Additionally, an artist compe-

tion hosted by the city reflects the desire to keep alive the memory of the old stadium: a miniature reproduction in its capacity as an integrative landscape monument was awarded the first prize.¹¹

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Credits

Figs. 1, 3: Bilddokumentation der Stadt Regensburg/Jahn-Archiv

Fig. 2: OTH Regensburg

Fig. 4: Stadt Regensburg, Bilddokumentation

¹ Otto, Gerd; Otto, Wolfgang. 2014. Servus, Jahnstadion! Eine Regensburger Institution nimmt Abschied. Regensburg: Forum Verlag, p. 124.

² Like with Nuremberg and Passau, "Vereinszeitung" of the SSV Jahn Regensburg, 1970/p. 1,4.

³ Regensburger Stadt-Umschau, 04.09.1972, p. 11.

⁴ Die Woche, 24.08.1972, p. 10.

⁵ Otto, Gerd; Otto, Wolfgang. 2014. Servus, Jahnstadion! Eine Regensburger Institution nimmt Abschied. Regensburg: Forum Verlag, p. 124.

⁶ Otto, Gerd; Otto, Wolfgang. 2014. Servus, Jahnstadion! Eine Regensburger Institution nimmt Abschied. Regensburg: Forum Verlag, p. 125.

⁷ Otto, Gerd; Otto, Wolfgang. 2014. Servus, Jahnstadion! Eine Regensburger Institution nimmt Abschied. Regensburg: Forum Verlag, p. 104.

⁸ According to Wolfgang Otto, archivist of the SSV Jahn. Interview 06/2019, Gmeiner.

⁹ www.mittelbayerische.de. Altes Jahnstadion: Erster Bagger ist da. 20.02.2017.

¹⁰ www.mittelbayerische.de. Jahn-Turm: Die Arena bekommt die Kopie. 23.11.2017.

¹¹ www.mittelbayerische.de. Das Jahnstadion kommt in Miniatur zurück. 11.10.2018.