

A new synagogue for Munich: the history of the “Project St.-Jakobs-Platz” 1999 - 2007

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Introduction

I first became aware of the “Project St.-Jakobs-Platz” in October 1999, when I attended a two-day symposium in the Ludwig Maximilians University and in the Old Town Hall, where the concept of a new Jewish museum in Munich was discussed. *rijo* had welcomed the Jakobsplatz project since November 2000, although not uncritically when looked at from the architectural and urban planning practice point of view. At that time, we were the first Internet website to document and comment in a comprehensive and independent manner on the various planning and construction stages. The following chronicle sums up our ongoing reports on events, right up to the opening of the entire building complex.



The Jakobsplatz prior to the construction of the Jewish center: merely a centrally located car park, on the right the former *Waffenhalle*, today part of the municipal museum, on the left the *Ignaz-Günther-Haus* and the *Orag-Haus*, between the museum and both houses the *Oberanger*.

(photograph: Susanne Rieger)

Summary of the history of the Jakobsplatz

The St.-Jakobs-Platz played an important role in the historical development of Munich. Although the bombing raids during WW2 had flattened much by way of historical value, an at-

tempt was made during reconstruction to maintain the irregular shape of the square in the midst of the quarter of the old town called *Angerviertel*. The oldest part in the northeast corner, the *Waffenhalle* (armory), is part of today's municipal museum and dates back to the 15th century. The new *St. Jakob am Anger* church is in the southwest corner of the square, with the *Ignaz-Günther-Haus*, the last of the original prewar buildings, beside the new-baroque style *Orag-Haus*.

The municipal hay weighing scale, the municipal construction department and a fire station were originally in the St-Jakobs-Platz. In 1670 the *Seidenhaus* (silk house) was built for weaving silk cloth, as well as another and larger fire station.

There is documentary evidence that a regular and for Munich's economy very important fair, the *Jakobidult*, was held there since 1310. Many people visited the three-day church fair on *Jakobstag* (St. Jacob's day, July 25) held in front of the monastery church dedicated to St. Jacob. Trade was in goods for daily necessities. Over a period of time, several annual market days evolved. The *Jakobidult* fair relocated in 1791 to the Kaufinger- and Neuhauser Straße. The wide destruction caused by WW2 bombs led to the Jakobsplatz being turned into a centrally located car park. The most awful example of postwar rebuilding was a multi-storey car park at the southwest side of the square.

The project of a Jewish center at Jakobsplatz, considered at the end of 1990, presented a double challenge, from a city planning point of view as well as for its spiritual and symbolic aspects: Christian Ude, Munich's Lord Mayor, declared that "with the new buildings at the Jakobsplatz, Jewish culture will receive a worthy location in Munich's inner city". Early in 1999 he announced, that the municipality would donate the construction site free of charge to the Jewish community.

Jewish culture took center stage for two days on the Jakobsplatz for the first time on November 25 / 26, 2000. Charlotte Knobloch, President of the Jewish Religious Community (*Kultusgemeinde*) in Munich, announced on this occasion that the new synagogue would bear the name of *Ohel Jakob* (Hebrew for Jacob's tent). This common namesake connected the synagogue to the already existent church and by that to the historical location.

Financing the project

A finance plan has existed for the ambitious project since July 3, 2001: the City of Munich sold the land on which the main synagogue stood on the Herzog-Max-Straße until July 1938 to the Karstadt corporate group for the extension of its *Oberpollinger* department store. The entire proceeds of the sale, around EUR 20 million, were donated by the City to the Jewish

community. A memorial to recall the wanton destruction of the synagogue by the Nazis had stood on a grassy patch on this piece of land right up to the time of the start of the store's extension. It was relocated in the new building's foyer at the corner of Herzog-Max-Straße and Maxburgstraße, in November 2006.

The State of Bavaria accepted responsibility for the remaining EUR 7 million to cover construction costs. The estimated shortfall of EUR 10 million was intended to be covered by donations. An important brief of the board of trustees for the promotion of the Jewish community and cultural center was to continue with fund-raising activities throughout the planning and construction stages to ensure the timely completion of the facilities.

Development of the budget

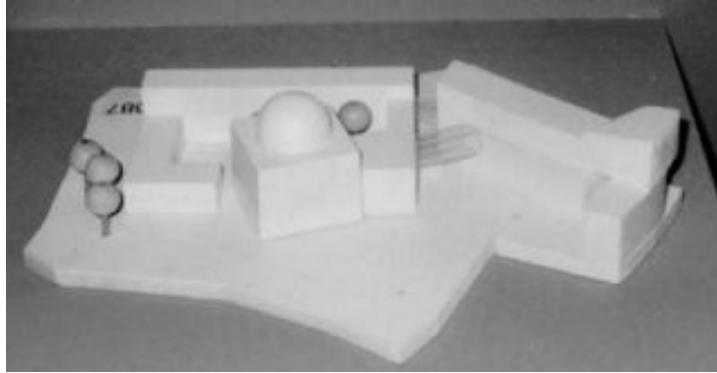
Contrary to earlier projections the total costs were estimated in 2003 to amount to EUR 50 million, without taking into consideration the differing obligations between the Jewish community and the City. The doubling of the original costing for the total project from DM 50 / 60 million to the same sum in EUR was justified by the explanation that the financial ramifications of the designs and the costs arising from taking the necessary safety precautions, could not have been anticipated earlier. On the occasion of laying the foundation stone on November 9, 2003, only Lord Mayor Ude referred to the start-up financing aspect. He indicated that the donation of the proceeds from the land sale and the financing of the Jewish museum, totaling approximately EUR 15 million, were the local administration's immediate contribution to the project.

New figures emerged during extensive reporting on the event in the local media: for the project to be completed by 2007, sums ranging between EUR 57 to 60 million were estimated to be required. During the live broadcast by Bavarian TV of the foundation laying ceremony, the commentator even suggested a total cost as high as EUR 72 million. The EUR 72.1 million were to be allocated, EUR 57 to be the responsibility of the Jewish community for the synagogue and the center and the balance of EUR 15.1 million to be the responsibility of the municipality for the museum. This information was shortly afterwards also quoted in the local media. The total cost involved was finally confirmed on the occasion of the dedication of the synagogue on November 9, 2006 as EUR 57 million for the synagogue and the community center and EUR 13.5 million for the museum. No details were given as to the appropriation of costs between each responsible entity.

The construction project itself was preceded by several years of detailed discussions on the configuration of the new buildings in the square.

The “competition of ideas” for the development of the Jakobsplatz

A “competition of ideas” took place in 2000, which attracted 273 entries for a building site covering 5500 square meters. Twelve designs were chosen by the jury under the chairmanship of Professor Max Bächer (Darmstadt) in October 2000. Six of these were each awarded a prize and the remaining six received commendations. With the announcement of the winning entries, the Jewish community expressed a preference for a design incorporating the shape of a classical dome.



Awarded design by Padoplan

(photograph: Susanne Rieger)

The twelve price winning design models were exhibited in the foyer of the municipal museum from the end of November 2000 until January 5, 2001. The exhibition enabled visitors to gain an impression of the diversity of the designs as they affected the square.

At that time I took photographs of some of the designs which I considered to be particularly suitable for the purpose of documenting the range of the contributions. The museum employees were initially astonished by my interest. Subsequently this changed to practical assistance by being offered a chair to enable me to take birds-eye photographs of the display cabinets. It was not the last time I visited the *Stadtmuseum* in my function as *rijo*'s photographer to keep an eye on the Jakobsplatz development.

It was noteworthy that all architects endeavored in their exhibits to lessen the sin of the ugly car park building by covering its sight from St.-Jakobs-Platz. This priority subsequently became baseless because that concrete block was later demolished (see below). Additionally, the architectural designs closed the gap between the building at the *Ignaz-Günther-Haus*.

Notwithstanding the attractive and aesthetic appearance of some of the designs, they were bound to fundamentally change the post-war shapeless square. It seemed questionable to the writer as early as in 2001 how the multifunctional center for the growing Jewish community, including the Jewish museum, could be permanently accommodated within the square's limited dimensions. Only the future can tell for how long the capacities now available will keep

pace with the growth of the community. There is no building land in the vicinity to allow for expansion.

Conclusion of the architectural competition

It was surprising that, when the final decision on the design competition for the Jewish center was made on July 6, 2001, none of the twelve previously displayed proposals stood a chance. The winning design and unanimous choice originated from the architects Wandel Hoefer Lorch in Saarbrücken.

They only entered the competition after five additional architects were invited to take part in it. Amongst these were Wandel Hoefer Lorch, the designers of the new synagogue in Dresden. They had previously received commendations for designs of memorials in Frankfurt and Berlin. The jury did not comment on the fact that none of the participants in the “competition of ideas” had, from the start, been considered including the initially favored design of incorporating a cupola for the synagogue within the community center complex.

Instead Wandel Hoefer Lorch proposed three separate buildings for the Jakobsplatz, which were to conform to the given architectural situation. The new community center structure, which was to include a school, a library, a gym, a kindergarten, administrative offices and a kosher restaurant, was intended to close the gap between the *Parkhaus* and the *Ignaz-Günther-Haus* on the *Oberanger*. Sited behind the community center, the Jewish museum, with a glass fronted ground floor, was to emerge, parallel to the St. Jacob’s church. In our observation on these plans, dating back to 2001, we noted that the location of the synagogue with the glass dome atop was perplexing: as supported by today’s reality, the synagogue’s building structure directs the view towards the junction of Sebastiansplatz and Jakobsplatz, which has the effect of creating a funnel-like appearance in conjunction with the long frontage of the *Stadtmuseum*. It is debatable whether the location of this sacred building, as seen by visitors to the square, meets with the wishes of the Jewish community’s supervisory board, who wanted the synagogue’s appearance to be “unobtrusive”.

The majority of the award winning designs of the “competition of ideas” placed the synagogue in the center of the complex. This was logical, considering a synagogue’s functions as well being the spiritual focus. It would have had a less exposed position, if it had been located parallel to the *Stadtmuseum*.

The winning entry differed also substantially from those submitted by the other competitors in another respect: the jury unanimously praised the open space between the three buildings creating room at the rear of the synagogue towards Corneliusstraße for green areas and a chil-

dren's playground. In fact, this solution to the problem of the Corneliusstraße appears today to have been particularly successful, which cannot be said to be the case in respect of the Sebastiansplatz. It is surprising that in the preceding competition, designs envisaging a park-like ending on this side of the square were almost inevitably preferred. The attempt to create a visual and functional 'green' balance between the old and new structures was abandoned with the choice of the plans from Saarbrücken. Although the green spaces now created at the intersections of the three new structures are in the center of the square, they are modest in size and appear to be visually insignificant in front of the synagogue and the community center.

On basis of the implicit precondition to conceal the hideous visual appearance of the *Parkhaus* and also to fill the gaps between the existing buildings, the architects decided on height of the new constructions towering above the ornamental *Ignaz-Günther-Haus*. Other competitors displayed considerably more imaginative ideas in relation to the surroundings than Wandel Hoefer Lorch, with their fortress-like square towers and the attempted gradation of building heights in the direction of the *Oberanger*. *rijo* raised an additional shortcoming even during the earlier discussion stage of the project: the limited utilization of the largely windowless block immediately in front of the *Parkhaus*. We suggested to hide the *Parkhaus* monstrosity behind a planted wall, in front of the future schoolyard. For any compromise affecting this area which had to remain unsatisfactory the architect was not to blame because the competition did not include the privately owned *Parkhaus*.

Presentation of the state of planning in March 2002

The people of Munich were once more able to keep track of the planning stage of the St.-Jakobs-Platz project in the municipal museum from March 12 - 24, 2002. For me, it made necessary a second photographic session in this location.

November 9, 2003 was the specified and subsequently kept date for the laying of the foundation stone for the community center, the synagogue, the kindergarten and the school. A new development arose in that the bomb shelter below the square could be incorporated within the future Jewish museum.

Both exhibited models showed how the planned buildings would be distributed over the area. The models confirmed our earlier doubts whether the "dispersion" of the new structures, much praised by the jury, would satisfactorily blend with the existing buildings. The orientation of the museum and the synagogue appeared to be at odds with the attempt to co-exist with the given building lines. It was not possible at this stage to form an opinion of how the choice of the Travertine plates covering the synagogue walls, with their spectacular rough

finish, would go with the golden gleam of the glass and metallic netting over the dome, but it became emphatically clear that by its angular position the synagogue had become the focal point of the project. The reservations expressed by the author, later vindicated by the construction itself, were confirmed by the plans and models.

Furthermore, the apprehensions expressed by *rijo* in respect of the visually awe-inspiring aspect of the community center became reality, when viewed into the direction of the *Oberanger*. There was no architectural dialogue with the curved frontage of the *Stadtmuseum*, but it was simply confronted by the rectangular - cubic shaped community center. The overall impression was one of many corners, angles and edges.

Based on facts and with the benefit of hindsight, it can now be succinctly said “if you like it”. This will, however, do neither justice to the city’s architectural heritage nor to the historical importance of the “Project Jakobsplatz”. The architects entrusted with this project obviously interpreted their task as license to dominate the area with the new buildings. Maybe this also met with the expectations of the client. In such a case, it might have been fairer to the public as well as to their competitors, to spell out from the beginning legitimate and contractually binding clear terms and conditions of what was to be the ultimate objective.

First public reactions in March 2002

Entries in the *Stadtmuseum*’s visitors book show the discomfort felt by the public as the consequence of the discrepancies, apparent as early as 2002, between the officially declared intention of a “city facelift” and the apparent lack of consideration given to this aim, as evident in new constructions. Such skeptical comments read:

“Another cube, another dream made of concrete, steel and glass! The magic word ‘transparency’ was again interpreted to excess. [...] How to win an architectural competition since the mid-1990s? Take a concrete framework (in cubic form, of course), place a glass structure around it (it has to be transparent), express a few thoughts about the interior design to justify the project and - voila!”.

“The high dome atop of the synagogue’s roof overwhelms the surrounding buildings. One gets a suffocating impression of the square.”

“I am aghast at the architectural brutality, the total soullessness in relation to the surrounding architecture and the absolute blighting of the square [...] Why is the building between the *Ignaz-Günther-Haus* and the garage so high? Why was so little sensitivity shown towards the *Ignaz-Günther-Haus*?”.

Along the way to the laying of the foundation stone: excavations and discoveries

The local media took little notice of apparent criticism. Decisions having been made, these were not seriously challenged and work began. Initially, from October 2002 to June 2003, archaeological excavations were undertaken within the construction “site clearance” stage. Exposed remnants of walls were measured, photographed and cartographically recorded. The experts hoped to learn more about the history of the buildings surrounding the square and the people who lived there.



Excavation of area 1: background right - the subsequently demolished *Parkhaus* at the *Oberanger*

(photograph: Susanne Rieger)

Three locations were chosen for archaeological purposes: One of these, the dig between the *Parkhaus* and *Ignaz-Günther-Haus* at the *Oberanger*, showed the outline of former houses. In the remaining two locations, archaeologists were also able to reveal other historically interesting finds, such as traces of a large and a small fire station. In addition, foundations of a building were discovered, originally erected in 1670, in which the Elector Ferdinand Maria intended to initiate a local silk cloth manufacture in Bavaria. The collection of items recovered during the excavations could be viewed in the *Stadtmuseum* in 2004, including “Bavarian Ivory” (bones for the manufacture of rosaries, ceramics and buckles for shoes).

The *Parkhaus* vanishes into history

An unexpected development happened whilst the excavators were hard at work on the *Jakobsplatz*: the demolition of the *Parkhaus*, an objective materializing out of the blue. This took place after the original private owner had sold the property to an investor. The latter planned to construct a building complex consisting of private apartments and commercial offices. The new *Parkhaus* owner most likely had speculative considerations as his motive

why this demolition could not have taken place two years earlier. At that point in time a readiness to find a solution to the problems of the planned Jakobsplatz / *Oberanger* integration would have influenced the entire construction concept.

The disclosure of the property deal led immediately to a new debate at a City Council sitting in December 2002: in the light of the changed circumstances the SPD-group requested that this opportunity be used to re-examine the plans for the community center. The politicians had correctly concluded that completely new design possibilities had now been created. Those responsible lacked the readiness however to review the building plans for the largest structure, the more so, since construction was already under way. Thus another building complex of apartments and offices will in due course appear under the dull name of *Angerhof*, without having regard to the Jakobsplatz development.

Laying of the foundation stone of the Jewish community center, November 2003

The foundation stone for the community center was laid on November 9, 2003, the 65th anniversary of “Kristallnacht”. This ceremony took place in the presence of the President of the German Republic, Johannes Rau, the Prime Minister of Bavaria, Edmund Stoiber, and the Chief Executive of the German Central Council of Jews, Paul Spiegel. The Chairman of the Jewish Community in Munich and Upper Bavaria, Charlotte Knobloch, referred in her speech to this “historic day for Munich, for Bavaria and for the whole of Germany”. She pointed out that the creation of this Jewish center demonstrated once more a visible and physical presence of Jewish life in the heart of Munich. She reminisced that November 9 served as a reminder of the victims of the days, 65 years ago. A list of the names of Munich’s Jewish men, women and children deported during the Holocaust was encased in the foundation stone as a tangible sign of the bond with the past.

Christian Ude represented the City of Munich in his capacity as Lord Mayor. In his opinion, the project opened up new prospects, “not only for Jewish life in Munich but also for the city itself”. Munich, as a cosmopolitan and tolerant polity, has unequivocally said “yes” to this building project and shown a clear rebuff to “all those hopelessly consumed by hate”.

Like the Lord Mayor, other speakers too referred to the crude but nevertheless serious plans by a handful of Neo-Nazis of a planned bomb attack on the Jakobsplatz building site, prior to or during the foundation stone laying ceremony, which had been thwarted by the police. With the information obtained from a defector of a group of right-wing extremists who had planned the attack, the police raided their apartment on September 10, 2003. They found and made safe the explosives that were to have been used. In the light of these events, Prime Minister

Stoiber confirmed the determination of the State Government that “we will continue to energetically fight this criminal madness with all legal means at the State’s disposal. Anti-Semitic paranoia cannot be allowed to enter thoughts in the first place. It is unacceptable for Jewish life to have to hide from view for fear of attacks”.

Stringent security precautions were correspondingly implemented for the 600 invited guests. Large areas of the inner city were cordoned off and there was a large police presence. Police snipers were present on the roofs of the houses surrounding the Jakobsplatz, with explosive sleuths patrolling the area throughout the festivities. It was afternoon before the barriers were removed and the Jakobsplatz was once more accessible to the public.

“Jewish life in the city’s center” - and questions of security

These events forcefully brought security related aspects to the public’s attention as far as terrorism and vandalism of Jewish institutions around the world is concerned.

The local authorities constantly emphasized that they welcomed the togetherness of Munich’s Jewish center in the heart of the old town, which greatly simplified protective security measures to be taken.

In fact, modern systems will enable security to be assured from all sides of the open square for the three buildings, the synagogue in particular, without obvious visible precautionary measures having been taken. This is very much in line with the feelings of Charlotte Knobloch, President of the Jewish Community, who sees this entire project on the Jakobsplatz as an “open center” for all citizens. It is for this reason that 10 percent of the overall construction costs were set aside for security provisions. Checkpoints, a permanent police presence, walls or barbed wire fences have all been made redundant. Yehoshua Chmiel, the deputy Jewish community president, paraphrased the meaning of the proposed security measures with these words: “We shall open up the square, the buildings and our hearts”.

The construction stage

Excavating work on the site started in May, following clarification of the legal ownership of the developed land between the City of Munich and the *Kultusgemeinde*. The first sod was turned in June 2004. Actual construction work began, as planned, from autumn 2004 onwards. The construction schedule was maintained, perhaps surprisingly so, in view of the track record of public buildings elsewhere, such as the *Pinakothek der Moderne* (modern art gallery). The topping-out ceremony took place on October 28, 2005.

Consecration on November 9, 2006

The consecration of the new main synagogue of Munich, *Ohel Jakob* and the community center took place only three years after the foundation stone was laid in a ceremony worthy of the occasion. Amongst those present was the President of the Federal Republic, Horst Köhler, the President of the World Jewish Council, Edgar M. Bronfman, the Bavarian Prime Minister, Munich's Lord Mayor and numerous prominent public figures. Approximately 1200 guests of honor were present to witness the handover of the keys to the synagogue, including also some Munich born Jewish men and women who had emigrated during the Nazi regime (among them the translator of this text - *rijo*). In his speech, Christian Ude spoke in the main about matters concerning the city area. He stressed the enormous cultural, educational and social boost which the town center was witnessing. Three years earlier, Charlotte Knobloch had already spoken of the visible reappearance of Jewish life in Munich by virtue of this development, reinforced by these words „we have arrived in the center of town and in the hearts of the people“.

Those who had not been invited to attend the festivities were able to get their own first impressions on the November 12, 2006, declared a „Day of Encounter“. Any remaining work to be done in both buildings was completed in the course of 2007.

The synagogue *Ohel Jakob* and the community center

Since then it is possible to visualize the realization of the completed project, a most welcome opportunity for someone like me, who followed the development over the years starting from architectural plans and small models.

Those responsible for the design of the east-facing *Ohel Jakob* synagogue found their inspiration by means of the glass dome on the new building as symbolizing the Tent of Jacob. This, together with the roughly hewn Travertine slabs surrounding the stone base became the vision of the temple in Jerusalem.

The glass dome is 30 meters long, 20 meters wide and 12 meters high. It is covered by a copper colored metallic net. The net has a triangular spatial pattern, forming the core of the Star of David. This theme is continued in the interior by similarly shaped metal plates. The surface of the glass mirrors the buildings of the Jakobsplatz depending on the prevailing weather conditions, with the dome's cubic construction acting as a projection surface for the play of clouds and the light. The most spectacular aspect however is the glass roof when viewed from inside the religious building. It opens the interior skywards and in this way connects to the outer world, or in other words, to God.



View from the interior of the synagogue towards the roof of the synagogue

(photograph: Susanne Rieger)

The effect of sky, glass roof and the metallic net is spectacular. An entirely different impression is created during the hours of darkness, when the interior of the synagogue is illuminated. At all events, this experience more than compensated the writer for her, in her eyes, pretentious position of the synagogue in relation to the ensemble of existing buildings. The effects of the natural changes of light and shadow make the interior design of this house of prayer almost irrelevant, even considering the straight lines of the elegant cedar wood paneling. There is room for 480 people, with benches in rows for men on the left and right and separate galleries for women, according to religious customs.

Following the official opening in 2007, the community center, covering 11,800 square meters on five floors, was occupied in stages. The outside is also clad with Travertine slabs but, contrary to those used on the synagogue, these have a slightly polished surface. Previously spread over the entire city, the center now houses all facilities under one roof: the cultural center, a social department, a youth center, an all-day school with a sports hall for 200 Jewish and non-Jewish children, a kindergarten for 100 pre-school aged children, administrative offices and a kosher restaurant. Still the community center, up to 23 meters high, appears architecturally to be out of proportion with its surroundings. This unfortunately confirms the impression gained from the design models.

The synagogue and the community center are connected through a subterranean 32 meters long “Tunnel of Remembrance”, accessible to the public, designed by the artist Georg Soanca-Pollak. The names of Munich’s Jewish men, women and children murdered during

the Nazi regime are recorded forever on a thrice laminated sheet of glass, illuminated from behind, which is affixed to one of the tunnel's stone walls. Carved into the stone of the opposite wall is the sequence of words "Remember - Grieve - Commemorate - Admonish - Reconcile - Speak of - Live," set within a Star of David. This additional display in an otherwise functional tunnel is particularly effective in a most convincing manner through the simple means of names, terms and symbols.

The opening of Munich's Jewish museum

The Jewish museum, the last of the St.-Jakobs-Platz building projects, was opened on March 22, 2007, after a three-year construction period, costing EUR 13,5 million. Memorabilia are displayed in a cubic shaped exhibition area, with smooth stone clad walls, measuring 900 square meters.

The exhibits had, since 1998, been housed in rooms in the Jewish community building in the Reichenbachstraße, having earlier been moved there from a private collector's premises in the Maximilianstraße, when the latter had to be vacated. Because the museum at Reichenbachstraße with its limited space, but interesting exhibitions had almost gone unnoticed by the public, the attention of Munich's inhabitants was drawn to the opening at its new domicile by an advertising campaign named "Speaking Germany".

The new building offers an enduring forum for discussions of Jewish history in Munich, in the best possible educational conditions. In line with the theme of the October 1999 symposium, a permanent exhibition under the title of "Jewish Life in Munich then and now" was set up in the basement as a "Place of Remembrance". The remaining floors are intended to cater for temporary exhibitions. The former air raid shelter below the Jakobsplatz is used for storage and the technical services required by the museum.

The ground floor area is surrounded by glass walls and accommodates the book shop and a cafeteria. The glass walls display various quotations taken from interviews conducted within the framework of the "Speaking Germany" project. These are intended to catch the eye of passers-by, according to the objective of the museum's director, Bernhard Purin. Mr. Purin's future endeavors are keenly looked forward to, based on his professional reputation gained from launching Jewish museums, the first in Vienna and then in Fürth. In the latter there had been several controversies between Mr. Purin and the political, cultural and media establishment about the interpretation of Jewish history and priorities of his work.

The competition for the design of the open spaces on Jakobsplatz

The final part of the entire procedure was the dedication of the outdoor facilities on the Jakobsplatz in November 2007. In accordance with the requirements laid down under the terms of the competition this area was equipped with water fountains, a children's playground and planted with 22 trees.

In May 2003, the competition jury under the chairmanship of Donata Valentin was initially unable to come to a unanimous decision and nominated two prize winners. On July 25, 2003 the jury announced a winner after the competitors had revised their designs. The submissions were exhibited in the *Stadtmuseum* between July 29 and August 31, 2003. Poor me, as previously, had to compete against dim light and reflections from glass showcases to take my photographs.



Winning design of the outdoor facilities on the St.-Jakobs-Platz

(photograph: Susanne Rieger)

The winning team of Regina Poly (landscape architect, Berlin) and Thomas von Thaden (architect, Berlin) received a commendation from the jury for the appearance of spaciousness achieved through the arrangements of trees and benches, which benefited the buildings, the square and the overall aspect. The children's playground, created between the museum and the elder care home on the eastside of the square, could be covered and converted into an open air theater, on demand. Public thoroughfares were covered with granite plates.

The most conspicuous creation by Poly and von Thaden is an 18 meters long, 4 meters wide and 30 centimeters deep pond in front of the *Ignaz-Günther-Haus*. This feature, costing EUR 290,000, in which the public can wade, will be covered in winter by stone slabs. The fountain will be operational from the summer of 2008 onwards.

The result: the new St.-Jakobs-Platz

After an involvement of more than eight years with the process, my strictly subjective conclusion is that this is one of the most important building projects in the old town of Munich for the foreseeable future. Without reservation, it can be positively affirmed to have been implemented in spite, or perhaps because of its important historical, moral and symbolic content. It was not kicked into the long grass and completed in record breaking time, almost unique for the construction of public projects of such a scale. This fact earns the deciders and practitioners at Jakobsplatz even more appreciation compared to the frustrations connected with the *NS-Dokumentationszentrum* (planned documentation center for the history of the Nazi movement in Munich) on the Königsplatz and the equally unconvincing but prohibitively expensive solution for a new construction on the foundations of the *Braunes Haus* (former headquarters of the Nazi party). From a personal point of view I can add to this the longtime quarrels in Nuremberg relating to the similarly central *Augustinerhof*.

With the location of the *Kultusgemeinde* on Jakobsplatz, a first-class center of gravity has been added to the inner city. Even if I cannot positively evaluate all aspects of the architectural development, it seems obvious that the break with pre-1945 Jewish history has been bridged. The synagogue, the community center and the museum on this spot epitomize Judaism being part of the daily life in Munich as a matter of course. It is preferable to omit any reference to “again” in the context of Munich’s and Germany’s prior to and post 1933 history, since there is no going back in historical development.

It is equally objectionable to overemphasize the now central location of the *Kultusgemeinde* since its previous location on the Reichenbachstraße was by no means on the outskirts of the city. In view of the unnecessarily dominant architectural style of the new buildings, even such well intentioned observations could still provoke anti-Semitic reactions. It was not a case of creating an ominous center of power here, but an urgently required centralized unit for a Jewish community, which, with a 9500 and still growing membership, is the second largest in Germany behind Berlin. The innovation is that the facility can now offer access also to the non-Jewish population, contrary to the services available in the Reichenbachstraße. It will be interesting to watch how this anti-Ghetto concept will in the future affect both communities.

This chance and the implicit triumph over the Nazi politics of destruction do not need the egotistic self praise of the architectural guild who made the ensemble “Building of the Year” in 2006. Phrases coined in this context such as “where there was nothing but emptiness, there is now a delightful ‘choreography’ of open spaces and buildings” might be said about the devel-

opment of any derelict site. The word “choreography” should be reserved for the world of dancing, even though there is a gigantic difference between “Swan Lake“ and *Schuhplatteln*. More might have been achieved for the appearance of the new buildings to blend architecturally better with its surroundings. It might perhaps even have been possible to maintain the local Munich style of architecture in the new constructions. At least, the glass dome of the synagogue links the new buildings inextricably with the Munich sky. Nonetheless, there remains a good feeling for the bystander: a new bit of Munich has been created - and *rijo* was always there.



The new St.-Jakobs-Platz from the *Oberanger*: synagogue, Jewish museum and on the right the corner of the community center

(photograph: Susanne Rieger)

July 2008

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- Symposium on October 24 / 25, 1999 in the Ludwig Maximilians University and in the Old Town Hall.
- Cultural information event on November 25 / 26, 2000 at the St.-Jakobs-Platz.
- Guided tour by Frau Ellen Presser on September 5, 2007 of the synagogue and the community center.

[Index*](#)

[Home*](#)