# Evolution of Embassy Architecture in Berlin

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# Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand how the architecture of embassies has changed since the 19th century. Historically, it was not the building but the ambassador that reflected the state. With the focus moving toward permanent buildings that can undertake the vast bureaucracy of modern diplomacy, the representation of the state has moved from ambassador to building. This has brought into question how a state represents itself in a foreign nation. The focus of this question will examine the US, UK, and Dutch embassies in Berlin. Berlin has been the capital of 5 different states in the last century. With the fall of the Wall, Berlin and Germany sought to reunify themselves not only administratively but architecturally too. Perhaps for the first time, foreign nations did not look to only their own culture for inspiration but toward Berlin and its rebuild. The symbiosis of host and foreign nations is uniquely represented in the embassies of Berlin.

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**Introduction**

Our understanding of embassies today is a relatively modern concept, having only been introduced in the late 19th century. The working role of the embassy has been created by increased globalization and communication between countries. Today we see embassies as a reflection of each country, using architecture to showcase its culture and power. Historically, embassies only referred to the housing of the ambassadors, set in palazzi or mansions that reflected their aristocratic background and monarch. However, it was only the ambassador that represented the foreign nation, the building was of little consequence (Wilkinson, 2019).

With the evolution of microstates into larger empires, and therefore increased bureaucratization, a more working basis for nations became a necessity. The understanding of the embassy changed to refer to both the envoy and the building as a representation of foreign government. This new typology of building was confronted with the question of architectural representation. In 2014, *Architecture of Diplomacy: Representation of European embassy buildings, 1800-1920* by Jakob Hort examines the beginning of this typology and its functions. Embassies are to serve as a political interface between states, as places of national self-understanding as well as being part of an ensemble of international representations. Embassies offer an opportunity for a foreign country to project and validate its national identity through architectural expression. The building must also adapt to local conditions, mentalities and foresee public reactions. In turn, the embassy structures were, for a long time, the most visible cultural testimony of foreign states that the general population of the host country could witness and associate with. Embassies are part of a whole collective of foreign missions in a capital, each occupying a certain rank and vying for influence and prestige (Hort, 2014).

Berlin offers a unique insight into understanding the architectural developments in embassies. Having been the capital of 5 different states within a century, the changing internal political order also affected foreign nations and by extension their embassies. (Silva, 2022). During the 1930s, the National Socialists came to power and sought to reconfigure the spatial configuration of Berlin. The Nazis forced embassies to relocate to the Tiergarten Quarter due to the redevelopment plans of Berlin and created Berlin's own diplomatic quarter (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). Interestingly, the design of the buildings was decided by its host rather than its foreign state. After the war, West Germany's seat of power was transferred to Bonn. Berlin was once again made the capital of Germany upon its reunification in 1991 (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). As a consequence, all embassies in Bonn had to be moved back to Berlin. During this time, both the host country and foreign countries were forced to confront an urban fabric that had been divided for half a century. Germany sought a unified language that referred back to prewar architectural design, known as the Critical Reconstruction Theory by Josef Kleiheus (Rumpf, 2000). This new codex of building regulations would also apply to embassies, the image of a united Germany needing to be stronger than that of individual foreign representation as both a sign of power and prosperity (Maurer, 2011).

The unification allowed foreign countries to rethink their architectural representation that reflected the changing dynamics Germany wished to present. Alberto Alessi in his essay,

"Building identity? Making clichés true", believes that the task of the embassy changed, particularly in Berlin, to that of advertising and selling its country. The contemporary embassies are to be seen as monuments and the role of the ambassador falling into the shadow of it (Alessi, 2006). Intrigued by Alessi's observations, I aim to explore **how the concept of an embassy building has changed since the 19th century to understand how national identities feature in the architecture of embassies.** Using Berlin as the case study basis, I will analyze 3 embassies that varied in their approaches to rebuilding their national representations. The first focus will be the US embassy by Moore Ruble Yudell rebuilt on its historical plot at Pariser Platz. Also rebuilding on its historical plot at Wilhelmstraße 70 is the second embassy, the UK designed by Michale Wilford. Lastly, moving away from historical influence is the Dutch embassy designed by Rem Koolhaas and OMA at a new location on the corner of Klosterstraße/Rolandufer. In order to understand the rebuilding of these embassies, it is necessary to first understand the origins of the typology and the then changing urban fabric and resulting building restrictions in the city.

**Chapter 1 - History of Embassy Architecture**

**1.1 - Embassy Typology Beginnings - 19th Century**

The embassy's architectural typology, both as a representation and functioning institution is an invention of the 19th century. Historically, the word 'embassy' referred to envoys, rather than buildings. The Italian city-states were the first in the 14th. century to send envoys abroad to conduct business in the name of the state. These envoys would be tasked with looking for quarters locally and renting them at their own expense. As a representation of the crown, these quarters were prestigious palazzi or mansions that reflected the status of the monarch (Wilkinson, 2019). These residences had little differentiation between private and public space, unlike in today's embassies. Changes began in the mid-19th century with the rise of nation-states and the sending of resident envoys became a common practice. Long-term solutions were sought that could not only house the envoys but also the subsequent bureaucratization necessary between newly formed foreign ministries. This meant finding a building that could house both the private and public functions of the envoys, a center of operations, usually prestigious villas or Palais that would be renovated (De Maeyer, 2019). While embassy personnel would alternate, the building remained constant and therefore shifted the center of foreign representation from the envoy to the building. Subsequently, our understanding of the word embassy has adapted to also include the building units accommodating the foreign mission. With this shift of power, from ambassador to the building, the typology of the embassy began to take shape.

Berlin has been the capital of various states and empires throughout history and has seen its fair share of envoys. Historically, embassies and foreign dignitaries in major capitals limited themselves to only the closest political allies and interests of the host country. Europe, specifically Germany pre-1871, was splintered into various kingdoms, principalities, and city-states. It would have hardly been possible to exchange permanent dignitaries with all 500 different micro-states and principalities. Other than some German principalities, only the Kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Great Britain, Netherlands, and France had a constant representation within Prussia. By the time of the unification, almost all European states were present in Berlin as well as several non-European countries, reaching 41 embassies by 1914. Germany and specifically Berlin, were in the throughs of modernization, facing a growth in inhabitants and the expansions of the city limits. At the same time, the historical city center was being densified resulting in sociological and functional structural changes. The Prussian state administration until the 19th century had been confined to the palace and its surrounding district. Though, it soon became clear that separate buildings would be needed to handle the growing complexity of political administration and its various tasks. Existing residences were purchased by the Prussian state around Wilhelmstraße and converted for administrative work. Ministries such as Trade, Justice, Foreign Affairs and Commerce were settled into what became defined as the new government district (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). In between the state affairs, aristocratic and prestigious Palais were built alongside the new center of power. This mixture of governmental and residential buildings made this district a prime area for embassies in Berlin.

The embassies in Berlin settled amongst the German administration in the early 20th century in existing buildings. Wolfgang Schäche writes, that in the 19th century, no new buildings had been recorded. The typology of the embassy simply did not exist yet and would only expand with the growing tasks and activities of diplomatic missions (Redecke & Stern, 1997). The reason for the lack of purpose-built embassies was that the existing aristocratic buildings already had a spatial hierarchy that echoed that of the needs of the embassy at the time. The functionality reflects the differences between an envoy and an ambassador; the former simply represents the state while the latter is the personal representative of the monarch. Therefore the ambassador demands greater prestige, reflected in the furnishings and size of the rooms. Envoys, akin to working officials, do not require such extensive rooms. Noble buildings reflected this hierarchy with large apartments and ceremonial rooms fit for the ambassador and servant and storage rooms retrofitted for envoys (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). Noticeable in the old British Embassy, the prestigious rooms of the landlord (Figure 1 - Rooms 3,9,10) are placed at the front facing the street, symbolic of the hierarchy in the house. After the renovations, these rooms became the ambassador's apartments, which included living quarters and his personal office.

A spatial program developed that merged the existing spatial structure of the aristocratic buildings with that of the embassy. The residence of the ambassador and the chancery were to be placed in the same building, requiring a spatial separation of administration and residency. Thus, floor plans took the form of a functional triad, strongly visible in the Italian embassy (Figure 2). The center of the building was always made up of the main representational rooms consisting of a banquet hall, parlors, and men's and ladies' salons which were directly connected to the main entrance. Connected to one side are the residential and guest rooms while the other houses the chancery offices that usually had their own entrance. The ambassador residences would be the only rooms that had a direct connection to both sides of the buildings (Redecke & Stern, 1997). The design of the residence also had clear priority over the chancery and could be seen in the facade design, the ambassador was after all still the main representative of the monarch (Englert & Jürgen, 2004).

After World War I, Germany was in financial ruin and land was inexpensive. Embassies had chosen their locations around the political center of Prussia and the German Reich almost exclusively at Pariser Platz, Unter den Linden, Wilhelmstrasse, and Leipziger Platz (Alessi, 2006). Though, with the demand for individual embassies, a new embassy district evolved in the Tiergarten district. It was an affluent neighborhood with big villas and gardens that allowed for the redesign of the newly forming spatial program required for an embassy. Twenty embassies would settle between 1918 and 1939 in this neighborhood, which is known even today as the embassy district (Englert & Jürgen, 2004).
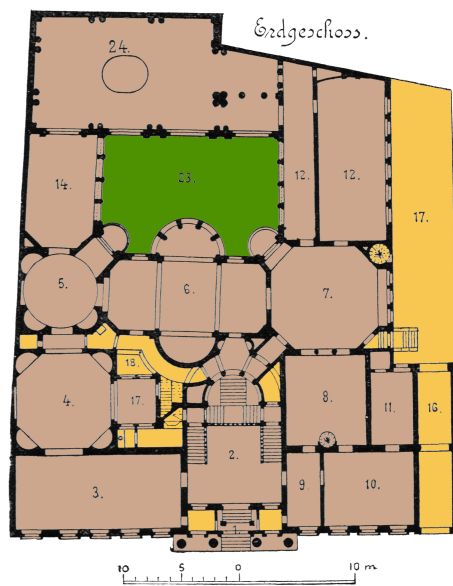
Figure 1 - Floorplan of the old British Embassy in Palais Strousberg
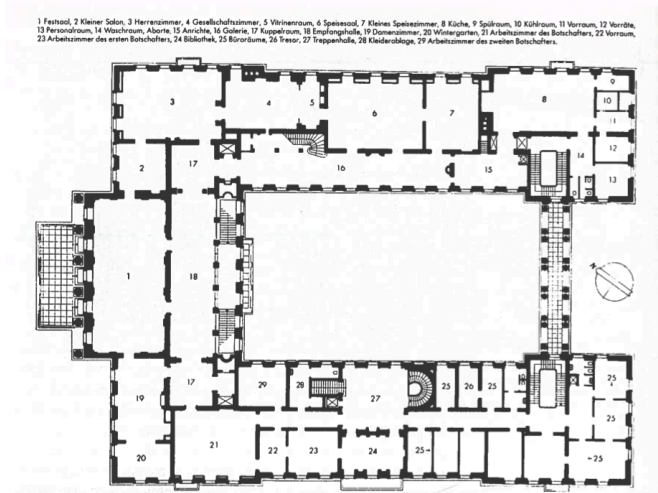Source: Berlin und seine Bauten, Verlag Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn 1896



Figure 2 - Floorplan of the Italian Embassy
Source: Englert, K., & Tietz Jürgen. (2004). *Botschaften in Berlin* (2., überarb. Aufl). Mann

**1.2 Embassy Typology 1930 - 1945**

A peculiar situation took place during the Third Reich. The Nazis had a newly defined vision for Berlin, 'Germania', and sought to restructure Berlin according to its administrative functions. Two main axes were to cut the city, East-West and North-South, meaning the buildings located at Wilhelmstraße were slated for demolition, requiring the existing embassies to relocate. The already developing embassy district at Tiergarten would become the new site for all embassies, creating a diplomatic quarter that could be overseen by the regime. For the first time in Berlin, embassies had to be purpose-built rather than placed in existing buildings. The Nazi administration commissioned 6 new buildings for the administrations of Denmark, Italy, Japan, Spain, Norway, and Switzerland (Englert & Jürgen, 2004).

As is customary today, the foreign nation decides on the form of its embassy, as it is a direct representation of its state. In Nazi Germany however, the appearance of the embassy was decided by the host nation, a rather unprecedented situation (Alessi, 2006). The Reich allocated a generous budget towards the buildings to not only console the foreign nations but to make sure they embodied the architectural style of the Third Reich. The uniformity of style and placement of the embassies also allowed for better security and potential control. In most cases, the existing spatial program was kept, with a clear separation between the functions. Though, consular operations required considerably more space and a separation of buildings would have been appropriate. The new construction had to, on the one hand, comply with the specifications of the general development plan for Berlin, but on the other reference the internationality of the building task. To achieve this 'internationality', the spatial program was tailored to the tenant's needs as well as allowing decorative furnishings to reflect personal culture by foreign artists. In the Italian embassy, artwork and original construction elements such as Renaissance chimneys and door handles were brought directly from Italy. While small adaptations could be made, the overall monumentality still reflected that of the Reich and its claim to power (Englert & Jürgen, 2004).

With the allegiance of Italy and Japan to Germany, both embassies received expedited construction, and the architectural work was emphasized in the attention to detail. However, the ultimate goal of the new diplomatic missions was not to represent the foreign culture but rather to integrate them into the National Socialist worldview (Redecke & Stern, 1997). The superior claim of Germany and its allies was to be the main element, as the Japanese military attaché, Hiroshi Oshima, describes, "a new will" whose "simplicity of line and nobility of attitude" (Englert & Jürgen, 2004, p. 28) were to represent not cultural diversity but the unifying force of a common ideology. Any national references meant to reflect a country are instead reduced to a folkloric representation. It can not be said that the typology changed during Nazi Germany, instead, it was twisted to formulate an expression not of peaceful coexistence but of world power (Englert, Jürgen, 2004). After the war and the subsequent division of Germany and Berlin, the capital of West Germany moved to Bonn. East Berlin became the capital of the German Democratic Republic and foreign embassies were settled in the district of Pankow in standardized

building types. Only in 1991 does a unified Berlin become the capital once more (Alessi, 2006).

## Chapter 2 - Berlin's Urban Development

## 2.1 Critical Construction Theory

In order to understand the building developments of the new embassies in Berlin, it is crucial to understand the urban approach taken in Berlin after reunification. The rigid construction criteria strongly resembling an ideology, found its basis in the Critical Reconstruction theory.   The Critical Construction theory is an architectural and urban theory developed by Berlin architect Joseph Kleihues during the 1970s and codified during his time as director of the 1984 -1987 Internationale Bauausstellung (International Architecture Exhibition or shortened, IBA) (Schmaling, 2005). Berlin had been victim to destructive redevelopment policies of the post-war years that sought to eradicate any historical traces of Berlin, "The dawn of the new era was to transform the Berlin of the past into a new city - socialist or capitalist, but in either case traffic-friendly."(Rumpf, 2000, p. 361). The theory came about as a critic of these development plans and set itself against the radical modernism of the 60s and 70s (Gegner, 2013). Rather than the extreme transformations undergoing both in East and West Berlin, IBA sought a "cautious urban renewal" (Gegner, 2013, p. 109). Kleihues argued that the city does not need to be torn down to be reconstructed, but rather to return to pre-WWII traditional ideas.

The Critical Reconstruction Theory was an interpretative rebuilding philosophy that offered the city a dialectic approach to its past. It promised to restore the historic urban tissue of Berlin, wide avenues and parks reminiscent of Prussian Berlin, that had been damaged by Albert Speer's vision, Allied bombings, and functionalist postwar planning. To bring forth his vision of 'better urbanism', Kleihues used romantic black and white imagery of Berlin in the roaring 1920s set with bustling streets and petit-bourgeois 'Gemütlichkeit' (Schmaling, 2005). In 1968, clashes took place in West Germany between the bourgeois status quo and the new post-war generation, known as the 68er Bewegung ('68 Movement) (BPB, n.d.). The older generation was celebrating West Germany's economic post-war recovery while the new generation demanded a change in the societal ethos of ignoring the past and the raging capitalistic materialism. The theory and its categorical rejection of a utopian future promised to restore a unified physical framework, an urbanization of typological harmony as a backdrop for social stability and was therefore, able to take root in this setting of political upheaval, persistent national fears, and increased political uneasiness (Schmaling, 2005).

After being appointed director of the IBA in 1979, Kleiheus a multiyear building program with 2 different strategies was organized. IBA Alt (IBA Old) dealt with the preservation, renovation and reuse of existing deteriorating housing stock and pursued a sensitive urban renewal approach. The IBA Neu (IBA New) was the poster child for the implantation of the critical reconstruction theory and was used to propose new structures that would mend the holes in Berlin's urban fabric (Schmaling, 2005). Kleiheus instructed its architects

to, "pick up historical traces, respect the traditional layout and conserve existing buildings." (Andersen, 1987, para. 6). Using historical building types as a basis of form such as the Mietskaserene (Hohensee, 2016), he sought to connect the face of the city to its past. His urban goal was to integrate all necessary daily functions: work, living, and recreation, within close proximity without destroying historical landmarks or existing buildings. As he focused on the traditional Berlin typology as his basis, any new development was to follow the traditional Berlin five-story building with courtyards behind (Schmaling, 2005). A catalog of design guidelines was presented during the 1984-1987 exhibition which was later adopted by the Berlin House of Representatives. Rather than shun and hide Berlin's history, the principles sought socially acceptable preservation and the modernization of neglected inner-city neighborhoods through resident-orientated rebuilding. Rather than allowing only the building authority to dictate the planning, as had been the case during WWII, residents were to participate in the realization of the construction projects (Internationale Bauausstellung, n.d.).

## 2.1 Critical Reconstruction in Post-Unification Practice

In 1989, the wall dividing East and West Berlin fell, and with it a world order that had been established for half a century. Each side had followed fundamentally different ideologies which reflected in the urban fabric that had suddenly been reunited. In early 1990, both sides still recognized each other simply as East and West Berlin, the concept of a *central* Berlin having been erased from memory (Rumpf, 2000). On 3rd October 1990, the Treaty of Unification came into effect and both sides were reunited again, at least administratively. Together with the resolution of German unity, Berlin was voted to once again become the capital in 1991. With this decision, all government institutions in Bonn were to move back to Berlin and with it all embassies (Alessi, 2006).

The complexity of reunification was severely underestimated and the eyes of the world were fixed on Berlin. During this time, Berlin's city center saw an abundance of investment and construction which was fueled even further after having been chosen as the new capital. As a result, city officials were pressured to sell off and develop historically significant sites in the city center and to look for the most prestigious international corporate brands to develop them in order to raise the profile of the city. Planners were quick to seize opportunities that they believed would help revitalize the city's economy. They understood that luring such investment required marketing Berlin as having a distinct identity in the midst of a competitive global market. This dilemma meant that new construction had to enrich Berlin's appearance as a world city as well as exhibit some sort of "local" identity. But it was extremely difficult to make accurate decisions on land sale and usage due to the complexity of Berlin's bureaucracy and the complete disarray caused by varying property ownership and restitution claims in former East Berlin. (Hohensee, 2016). Due to overwhelming pressure from investors and time sensitivity, it was decided that the Critical Reconstruction Theory fit under the guise of shaping Berlin's local identity (Rumpf, 2000). Under Senate Construction Director Hans Stimmann, starting in late 1991, a more restricted version of the Critical Reconstruction Theory was applied to the city in order to, "manage the economic, planning and architectural reconstruction of

Berlin's historical center without further damage to the city's identity." (Rumpf, 2000, pp. 363-364).

This new model served as a first guide for investors and planners in the early years in light of the absent or insufficient planning grounds. However, it also served as a significant assessment standard for the numerous urban planning contests that the Senate used as a tool for many group projects, including embassies (Schwedler, 2002). Stimmann's 1991 "Berliner Abkommen" (Berlin agreement) set these regulations and policies as a doctrine for future construction (Gegner, 2013). Traditional street and block layouts along with the old building lines are picked up again. Old roof heights are preserved, block construction is resumed, coupled with densification and the closing of gaps between buildings, and conventional architectural forms are used. This strict protocol was enacted into the new 1994 zoning plan for a united Berlin. It was here that the notion of Berlin as a "European City" first surfaced (Schwedler, 2002). This idea would later become essential for the evolution of urban planning models and procedures.

## 2.3 Critical Reconstruction on Embassy Architecture

The new zoning plan and its regulations affected not only German institutions but foreign embassies too. The embassies were faced with two unique questions, firstly, where to build? Several countries still had claims to historical plots and buildings before WWII, but would they suffice? Italy decided to restore its historic building, while the US and Great Britain built new buildings on their historic plots. The Netherlands chose a new site and the Nordic countries banded together to form one large embassy. New embassies were viewed as opportunities to market the country's image and to rethink the role of diplomatic representation abroad (Alessi, 2006). The second question that needed to be answered was, how to build? Other than purpose-built embassies by the Nazis, no foreign country had built their individual embassies in Berlin before WWII. Embassies had been placed in existing Palais that blended into the city fabric, not recognizable as a foreign mission from the outside. Historically the building was not the important factor, but rather the ambassador and his meetings. Today though, important diplomatic relations are no longer conducted within the embassy but rather on summits or state visits. Embassies have much larger chancellery services today, the embassy not only conducting communication between governments but also serving foreign citizens in the host country (Alessi, 2006). As all eyes were set upon Berlin with its vast redevelopment projects, new embassies projects became a permanent advertisement for foreign countries.

A nation is able to present itself through its embassy architecture and showcase its character, becoming a kind of permanent World Exhibition pavilion (Alessi, 2006). The way in which countries shaped their architecture and dealt with the constrictive building regulations varies based on the location of the embassies. At first, countries looked towards the newly planned government buildings that would represent a new united Germany as inspiration (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). Two distinct approaches to building were seen in the new Federal Republic. The new chancellery by Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank is an architectural showcase of modernity that had a large media interest. The federal ministries on the other hand followed a monument-persevering approach that examined the various phases of German history. Most were based on existing ministries

that were then expanded in their typology and knitted into the existing urban fabric. For the first time since WWII, a reflection on the aspect of national connotations in architecture was begun through embassy architecture (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). The guiding principle for national architecture became "democracy as a client" (Englert & Jürgen, 2004, p. 58), incorporating the idea of democracy through glass as a symbol of transparency and accessibility for all (Zhang, n.d.). The chancellery and the new glass dome atop the Bundestag by Norman Foster were key elements that served as inspiration for foreign nations in the design of embassies.

Many foreign embassies chose to integrate themselves into the urban context of Berlin not just due to German design specifications but as stated by the architects of the US embassy, "[as] respect for the people and culture of Germany." (Redecke, S. & Stern, R. 1997, p. 177). Particularly at Pariser Platz, the location of the US embassy, the guidelines of critical reconstruction were very detailed. The Platz was to bring back its prewar spatial form and echo the historical limestone material through light ocher yellow and brown coloring. It was also advised to avoid mirrored glass to ensure the enclosed atmosphere of the Platz remains (Maurer, 2011). Though, the redevelopment of Berlin's neoclassical routes was strongly contested. Critics claim that the reconstruction of historical architecture evokes an idealized and homogenized past that never existed (Redecke & Stern, 1997). Rem Koolhaas had been a judge in the competitions for the redevelopment of two other important Berlin squares, Potsdamer Platz and Leipziger Platz. In an open letter to the doctrine of Stillmann, Koolhaas denounced the building policy of Berlin stating that the 19th century urbanist guise was a "petty bourgeois, old-fashioned, reactionary, unrealistic, banal, provincial, and above all dilapidated image of the city." (Englert & Jürgen, 2004, p. 183). While the Dutch embassy that Koolhaas designed does follow the major building criteria of the historical layout of Berlin, the references end there. The glass cube is instead a symbol of transparency, echoing the modern take of Norman Foster's design. Thus, Koolhaas presents the Netherlands as a modern nation that is free of any architectural references to Berlin (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). It can be argued that through the building policy seeking to protect Berlin's historic cityscape, foreign nations were forced to not only represent themselves but their understanding of their host nation. It has allowed for unique designs that showcase a symbiosis of the relationship between two nations.

**Chapter 3 - Case Studies**

**3.1 - United States of America**

The USA has had an ambassador in Berlin since 1797. As with other states, no individual building for the express purpose of an embassy had existed yet. The US ambassadors would rent various buildings until 1931 when the decision was made to obtain permanent premises for the US embassy, owned by the US state. The Palais Blücher at Pariser Platz 2 was bought for 1.8 million US$ even after it was nearly destroyed by a fire in 1931 (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). The rebuild took several years longer than expected as the 1929 economic crisis was affecting world powers. The embassy was finally opened on 1. April 1939, though without its ambassador Hugh Robert Wilson, who had been recalled by President Roosevelt out of protest for the November pogroms against Jews of 1938. Diplomatic relationships were kept in place until 11. December 1941 when the German Reich declared war on the US (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). During the war, the Palais was heavily bombed and fell into the eastern bloc of Berlin. The capital of the Federal Republic of Germany moved to Bonn while the building in Berlin was eventually cleared in 1957 by the Democratic Republic of Germany (Englert & Jürgen, 2004).

Only after the reunification of Germany did the plot of Pariser Platz 2 return to the USA, which had kept ownership. The US decided in 1992 to build a new embassy on its original parcel of land after it was made clear by Germany that the capital would move back to Berlin. A national two-tier architectural competition was announced in 1995 for the new embassy. The competition required that the new structure should be a showcase of American design, architecture, and technology as well as honor the history and urban context of the Pariser Platz. The Californian architectural firm Moore Ruble Yudell won due to its strong inclusion of historical references of Pariser Platz and its merging of German and American design. Construction was set to begin in 1998 but was postponed several times due to unresolved financing and new safety measures following the attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania as well as the 9/11 attacks. Berlin dictated that the Pariser Platz was to be kept open and accessible to all while the US demanded tighter safety measures. It was finally agreed to divert the Behrenstraße located at the south side of the building by 8 meters and to place retractable concrete bollards around the building. Construction finally began in 2004 and the building was officially opened on US independence day, 4th July 2008 (Lyndon, 2008).

Keeping in line with the historical spatial developments of Pariser Platz, the building is made up of three main blocks sectioning in the square and creating a continuation of the facade next to the Brandenburg gate.  An inner courtyard allows for light and greenery views to be seen from all sides. The three facades are each individually adapted to their surrounding urban references, the facade blocking in the Pariser Platz is structured to mimic its neighboring building. The west side facing the Tiergarten is buffered by a canopy of trees as well as a small grass strip, allowing the park to edge into the city. Unfortunately, the main focal point here is a large steel fence distancing the building from the city. Service entrances and a secondary entrance for consular appointments are placed along the south entrance, highlighted through a limestone plinth. The choice of

material, light limestone plates, and specific window forms were chosen to echo the architectural elements of the previous embassy Palais and were in line with the reconstruction guidelines (Lyndon, 2008).

Building a representation of a country in an already historically layered plaza comes with stipulations and difficulties. The main points were to restore a strict geometry for Pariser Platz and to create a strong urban boundary to the Tiergarten in the west and the Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe in the south. Interestingly, taking these urban goals on board was of more importance than creating an independent formal identity. These intentions mimic the postwar Marshall Plan, fostering the reconstruction and revival of Germany's urban structure and economy (Lyndon, 2008). While the building does try to place itself within the historical area, it is often criticized for its 'bunker' style, placing security measures above architectural integration (DPA, 2008). For example, the facades were subject to German daylight requirements. A minimum of 30% of the facade had to be glass, whereas the State Department's security guidelines allow for a maximum of 30% glazing (Lyndon, 2008). The embassy website states that the building provides "an open, yet secure, presentation of America." (U.S. Mission Germany, 2021, para. 3). Ambassador Timken at the time stated that the extra security measures were a price to pay for building within the inner city, it would have been much easier to build outside the center, allowing for a spacious buffer zone. Instead, the US wanted to be "a part of Germany" (DPA, 2008, para. 20), at the center of reunification and rebuilding.

While the embassy seeks to integrate and unify itself with its surroundings, architectural elements representing the US are still visible. The main entrance is marked by a large overhanging US flag which is highlighted by direct sunlight breaking through the cylindrical niche in the north facade. The flag in fact shadows the historical limestone facade, setting the Berlin reference behind that of the US. A glass-roofed rotunda covering the main entrance allows for clear daylight and refers back to the state capitol in Washington D.C. (Lyndon, 2008). The roofs have been covered in vegetation native to North America, connecting with the park narrative of the nearby Tiergarten (Yudell, n.d.). The largest architectural element is the state conference room housed in a glass and grey-blue cladded cylinder, iconically placed atop the building. Standing almost at the same height as the Quadriga atop the Brandenburg Gate, it echoes its green copper color scheme and the form of the new Reichstag dome. It seeks to integrate itself into Berlin's skyline, placing itself alongside the most powerful architectural symbols of democracy in Berlin (Lyndon, 2008). It is a clear show of political strength and a potent reminder that America is always watching.



Figure 3 - US Embassy Berlin
Source: Zägel, J. (2011). Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berlin,_Mitte,_Ebertstrasse,_US-Botschaft.jpg

## 3.2 - United Kingdom

The UK has had diplomatic relations with the Prussian state since 1716, a specific building to house an embassy was first rented in 1864. In 1875 the embassy was moved to a prestigious Palais at Wilhelmstraße 70, which was bought by the Crown in 1884. Apart from brief diplomatic breaks during World War I, the embassy was used until the beginning of World War II. The building was strongly damaged during World War II and was subsequently enveloped into East Berlin after the war. The British government retained ownership and were able to reclaim the plot and build a new embassy on the vacant area that had been cleared away by the DDR. In 1990 the British government bought the neighboring plot, Wilhelmstraße 71, and consequently signaled the building of a new embassy on its historical plot (Englert & Jürgen, 2004).

An international architecture competition by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was announced in 1994 which was restricted to submissions from British architects that had worked in Germany or German architects that had experience in the UK (FitzGerald, n.d.). This was symbolic of the relationship Britain wanted to reflect in its architecture. The British firm Michael Wilford and Partners won in 1995. Wilford worked closely with the German Republic's new regulations for Berlin and sought to achieve a building showcasing a balance between transparency and dependability. The embassy is flanked by buildings on three sides and therefore only has one public facade. Wilford uses playful architectural shapes to break open the facade and emphasizes the entrance. The reinforced concrete structure is covered in sandstone panels, a reference to influential architect Friedrich Schinkel and his renowned buildings such as the *Altes Museum* and *Neue Wache Memorial*. Classical architectural elements such as a plinth and perforated façade are taken into a modern context (Englert & Jürgen, 2004).

The entrance of the embassy leads visitors into a paved and open courtyard that embraces an English oak tree grown in Hamburg in the middle of the space (Redecke & Stern, 1997). It is both a symbolic and physical gesture of the diplomatic relations between the two countries. The other end of the courtyard leads to the entrance of the building, complete with a metallic reception counter. Continuing on the right, an almost ceremonial-looking staircase is flanked by columns and narrows upwards towards the foyer of the embassy. The foyer is located in the heart of the embassy, the Wintergarten. Its glass roof is held up by a single column, allowing for a bright and column free space for ceremonies and events. The Wintergarten contains various artworks and sculptures by contemporary British artists with strong ties to Germany. These works are meant to showcase British creativity and were a draw for visitors when the foyer was still available to the public. Wilford sought to forge a symbolic and physical openness with the German public by allowing the foyer, complete with a restaurant, library, and cafe, accessible to the public. At the time, the security zone began on the fourth floor but has now moved to the entrance by the open courtyard. Due to the perceived increased risks from terrorists, the foyer is now completely closed off from the public, but can still be booked for events in advance (Architectuul, n.d.).

Though the building has closed itself off to the majority of the public, symbolic gestures to highlight the relations between the two nations are still evident. Wilford succeeds in creating a relationship between the interior and exterior of the building, between German and British land. The architectural shapes in the facade are accessible through the Wintergarten, the purple cylinder houses a conference room while the blue trapezoid contains the information center. The trapezoid was originally meant to house the ambassador's office, symbolically placed at the junction between German and British territory (Englert & Jürgen, 2004. Wilford successfully transmits the image of "cool Britannia" (Englert & Jürgen, 2004, p. 135) through his design, showcasing the modernity and creativity of Britain along with its answer to integrate Berlin architecture. His goal of, "Germany outside, Britain inside" (Englert & Jürgen, 2004, p. 135), was successfully implemented through various design choices and has integrated itself into the Berlin landscape.



Figure 4 - British Embassy in Berlin
Source: Dalbéra, J. (2008). Retrieved from https://www.flickr.com/photos/72746018@N00/2705382903/

## 3.3 - Kingdom of the Netherlands

Diplomatic relationships with German states reach back to the 17th century, having had close ties due to their proximity to each other. Only in 1894 was a permanent building in *Voßstraße 16* obtained, which was replaced with a new Villa in *Rauchstraße 10* in 1921. This building served as the Dutch embassy until the beginning of World War II and was sold by the Kingdom in 1973. The Netherlands was one of the first countries to move its embassy to the new capital of Bonn, a branch office in Berlin was not set up unlike with various other nations (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). The Netherlands did not have an established tradition of erecting new buildings abroad, instead, it faded into the background of foreign cityscapes. This thinking was changing in the late 20th century, the Netherlands wanted more recognition on the international stage and used its embassies to transmit this (Boorsma & van Zeeland, 2004). After Berlin was once again the capital, the Netherlands were not confronted with a historical plot but could instead design a new embassy without any historical restrictions on new land.

Rather than choosing a plot by the existing embassy quarter near *Tiergarten*, a location was found on the corner of *Klosterstraße/Rolandufer* next to the *Spree*. Even though the location is in an administrative district, *Berlin-Mitte*, the proximity to water was the decisive factor (Englert & Jürgen, 2004). In 1996, a European wide competition was issued for the embassy which Rem Koolhaas and his firm, OMA, won. Given the close economic ties between the Netherlands and Germany, it was seen by the delegation in the Hague of vital importance that the new embassy should not only be functional but representational. The brief required the building to reflect the openness, hospitality, and cultural standards of the Netherlands, hence a European wide competition (Boorsma & van Zeeland, 2004). An outtake from the brief reads as more as a manifest of change rather than a program of requirements:

"The obligation to 'just act normal' is the greatest scourge of Dutch culture; Dutch complacency has resulted in modernism turning into a style purely of reflex. At this very moment, on this spot, the in-depth exploration and reconsideration of a number of technical questions could have a regenerative effect, and create a distinct profile for the Netherlands in relation to the rest of Europe as well - less rhetoric and more action." (Boorsma & van Zeeland, 2004, p. 130).

Originally the building was planned to be placed on the edge of the bank of the River and awake an image of the Amstel in Amsterdam. This though was denied by the Department of Planning in Berlin as it did not follow the standard building block development and should allow for public access between the river and the building. Nonetheless, the site still symbolizes a connection to water and the Netherlands. Koolhaas however still managed to build an embassy that is thought-provoking and unconventional. Rather than build one main structure that holds all necessary programs, Koolhaas split the embassy in two. Attached to the firewalls of the neighboring plot, an L-shaped building holds the residence apartments and flanks a lone solitaire in the middle containing the administration of the embassy. Koolhaas, being critical of Berlin's reconstruction manifest,

breaks up the typical building block development and manages to create a functional separation between administration and residences (Englert & Jürgen, 2004).

Typically, embassies are private spaces with strong boundaries between countries' territories, as seen with the security architecture of the US. While individual architectural elements are used to convey 'openness', the border between foreign territories is still harsh. Koolhaas sought to blend this line of territoriality as a literal interpretation of the Dutch 'openness' mandate (Yavuz, 2006). The entrance to the administration building blends seamlessly into the sidewalk and invites the public realm of Berlin's streets into the building. As a continuum between the urban public realm and Dutch territory, the 'trajectory', the official walk-through of the building, snakes from the ground floor up to the roof. It moves from the public sphere of the ground floor to the private areas of the embassy, connecting all administrative rooms. Communal spaces are organized along the trajectory, acting as a buffer between fully private and semi-public meeting rooms. As the trajectory moves further from Berlin's public sphere, the spaces become fully privatized and only accessible to embassy employees. Not only is the trajectory a spatial organizer of the interior but another architectural element that blurs the borders between the territories, between Berlin and the Netherlands (Yavuz, 2006).

The solitary cube structure conveys an innovative symbol of transparency and openness in its glass materiality. However, the semi-private areas are partially hidden through darker glass panels, allowing the trajectory to stand out during both day and night. Not only can the literal connection between Berlin and the Netherlands be seen from the outside, but it is reflected in the interior too. During the design process, OMA took in the surrounding area to further blur the barrier between the territories. To the north and south, the embassy has a clear view of distinct Berlin and East Berlin landmarks. Koolhaas was able to form an interrelationship between Berlin and the trajectory through a complex combination of unexpected views. Therefore the trajectory further blurs the lines of territoriality through visual senses (Yavuz, 2006). Unlike the British embassy, it is not only limited to one level but seeks to integrate Berlin on almost every level. The glass cube successfully melds the Dutch and German territories through *"openings that invite occupants to look out and passers-by to look in"* (Yavuz, 2006, p. 97).



Figure 5 - Dutch Embassy in Berlin
Source: Rick Janack
Retrieved from https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/embajada-de-los-paises-bajos-9#lg=1&slide=3



Figure 6 - Relationship with Berlin
Source: Christian Richters
Retrieved from https://www.oma.com/projects/netherlands-embassy

## Conclusion

The concept of embassies has changed significantly since the 19th century. At first, embassies were confined to existing aristocratic Palais that represented only their prestige through architectural grandeur. With globalization and therefore increased diplomatic relations between nations, embassies had to incorporate not only living quarters but working areas too. This change took place after WWI and was solidified by the Nazi Regime. Here, the host country built embassies for the foreign nation, allowing for some individualistic design approaches but ensuring that the overall design reflected that of Nazi Germany. The typology of working embassies was set here, containing chancellery and residences combined together within the embassy. The general separation in spatial structure has not undergone many changes since. Instead, the outward depiction of national identity has become the main focus of embassies. After the subsequent reunification of Berlin and Germany, all eyes were drawn toward Berlin and its answer to knitting its urban fabric back together. The critical reconstruction of Berlin sought a conservative approach to restore its historical facade of prewar years which was also applied to embassies. As seen in the US and UK embassies, a design that united German and its own elements was of higher importance than that of its individualistic identity. Here the facade design reflected the historical elements by using the same material and grid structure of neoclassical architecture that was to be restored. While Rem Koolhaas did criticize the theory, he adhered to the main building block lines. Rather than a literal approach of transforming local materials into the design, he sought to integrate Berlin through viewpoints strategically facing important landmarks, putting the embassy in context not only from the outside but from the inside too. The idea of unity and transparency transcended all designs and was found in inspiration by Berlin's reconstruction of government buildings. The restrictive building codes forced nations to find inspiration not only in their own culture but in Berlin's history.

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