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The Berlin Wall

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The Berlin Wall

Introduction:

I represent the Coalition for German Tourism and History. The Coalition for German Tourism and History is a government agency with the intention of recognizing and preserving sites of historical significance and cultural heritage. In addition to preserving sites in accordance with UNESCO's Sustainable Tourism Programme, the Coalition for German Tourism and History occasionally proposes sites to become World Heritage Sites. I propose the installation of the Berlin Wall as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Berlin Wall meets Criteria IV, "to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history." The Berlin Wall represents a significant stage in German and world history. It is known around the world as one of the most prominent symbols of oppression, communism, and the Cold War. Richard J. Samuels writes in his encyclopedic entry about the Berlin Wall: "Due to its position in the middle of a politically divided city, and, by extension, of a divided nation (East and West Germany), the Berlin Wall became one of the most significant symbols of the Cold War."¹ Political division around the world is no stranger in the 21st century, and the installation of the Berlin Wall as a World Heritage Site will ensure that we never forget the severe repercussions of such hatred. Samuels goes on to call the Berlin Wall "one of the most notorious symbols of oppression in modern history."² The Berlin Wall's real and symbolic roles in the division and distrust between not only East and West Germany, but also the United States and the Soviet Union, constitute the need for

¹ Richard J. Samuels, "Berlin Wall," Encyclopedia of United States National Security. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006.)

² Ibid

historical recognition. In this proposal I will discuss the history of the Berlin Wall, the justification of how it fulfills Criteria IV, the stakeholders involved in its establishment as a World Heritage Site, and how the site can sustain quality tourism.

History:

The history of the Berlin Wall began in the post-World War II era. After World War II, the Western Allies (Great Britain, France, and the United States) and the Soviet Union had control of Germany. They divided Germany into four occupation zones, and although East Germany belonged solely to the Soviet Union, Berlin itself was also divided. West Berlin belonged to the U.S., France, and Great Britain.

The visions for West and East Berlins were different: while the Soviet Union envisioned a weakened Germany and a focus on communism, the Western Allies envisioned a liberal market economy.³ Economic opportunities were better in West Berlin, also known as part of the Federal Republic of Germany, and many East Berliners moved to West Berlin for this reason. 20% of East Berlin's population had left by 1961. Thus, the workforce was weakened in East Germany. This concerned the Soviet government.⁴

On August 13, 1961, the construction of the Berlin Wall began to prevent East Berliners from fleeing to West Berlin. Reinforcements were added to the wall through the years, such as more than 14,000 border guards, 600 dogs, landmines, and watchtowers. The wall became a symbol of communist repression. In an article written in December of 1961 in The New York

³ TED-Ed, "The Rise and Fall of the Berlin Wall - Konrad H. Jarausch," YouTube video, 6:25. August 16, 2017.

⁴ Samuels, "Berlin Wall."

Times, James Reston writes: “Divided families that by pre-arrangement through the mails (it takes five days to get a letter from East to West Berlin through the East Berlin censorship) had gathered to wave to one another were stoned in the East.”⁵ Families on either side of Berlin could not see each other easily, and some did not see each other until after the wall had come down. Reston continues, “The wall cannot be imagined: it has to be seen on a cold night with guards swinging sub-machine guns on the East side and West German police carrying Sten guns on the other, fifty and sometimes only five yards apart.”⁶ During this time, the Cold War was being fought on both sides. The tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was thick as both countries used espionage and surveillance on each other.

On June 26, 1963, U.S. President John F. Kennedy arrived in Berlin and delivered one of his most famous speeches: “Ich bin ein Berliner,” which translates to “I am a Berliner.” 1.4 million individuals arrived to watch Kennedy deliver this speech. Through this speech, President Kennedy demonstrated the United States’ commitment to West Berlin. Robert G. Waite writes: “The president universalized the call of freedom, concluding, ‘All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words “Ich bin ein Berliner.”’⁷ Kennedy’s speech symbolized not only the United States’ solidarity with West Berlin, but also the United States’ staunch stance against communism and oppression.

On November 4, 1989, nearly 1 million East Germans took to the streets to protest in demand of economic and political reforms. Afraid the demonstration might become a popular

⁵ James Reston, “West Berlin Lights Shine Across Wall for Christmas: Yule Lights Glow Over Berlin Wall,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1961.

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ Waite, Robert G, “‘Ich Bin Ein Bearleener’ — JFK’s 26 June 1963 Visit to Berlin: The Views from East Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (2010): 860.

revolt, the East German government granted them the right to travel freely. Over the next three days, about 2 million East Berliners entered West Berlin. The wall was torn down piece by piece. On October 3, 1990, the people of East and West Germany voted to unite.⁸

Justification of Criteria:

The Berlin Wall meets Criteria IV in the qualifications to become a World Heritage Site: “to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.” It is an example of architecture that is both literal and symbolic in its importance during the Cold War. The Cold War was a significant stage in world history; it demonstrated how not all wars are fought with guns and armies, but all wars are critical to and determinative of international relations and global peace. The distrust and espionage on both sides of the Cold War created a very tense relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the Berlin Wall is a manifestation of this tension. However, the Berlin Wall represents more than the Cold War; it is also symbolic of division and repression. The German Democratic Republic was held back from exercising true freedom during the Cold War. While the Federal Republic of Germany enjoyed expanded economic opportunities and a free market, the GDR was forced to suffer under a communist regime. When the wall was eventually torn down, East Berliners rushed to see their families and friends in West Berlin, and when Germany voted to reunite in 1990, freedom and unity were restored. The Berlin Wall represents a dark chapter in Germany’s history, but it would be more dangerous to deny the Wall its proper recognition. To forget this critical period in German and world history would be to risk the repetition of it.

⁸ Samuels, “Berlin Wall.”

Sustainable Tourism and the Stakeholders:

The UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme has several objectives for the promotion and implementation of sustainable tourism at the World Heritage Sites. Sustainable tourism is about treading lightly on the environment and benefiting the host community through intercultural exchange and economic development. It prevents damage to the local culture and quality of life. Additionally, sustainable tourism is, as the name suggests, sustainable; it can be continued for generations to come because it actively supports the local community, continues to attract and engage tourists, and has very few, if any, negative impacts.

One of the priorities of the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme is: “Promote broad stakeholder engagement in the planning, development and management of sustainable tourism that follows a destination approach to heritage conservation and focuses on empowering local communities.”⁹ The stakeholders in the Berlin Wall’s establishment are the German population, Berlin’s local government, tourists, and Russia. Germany’s population will reap the economic benefits of increased tourism to Berlin and Germany in general. Additionally, Berlin’s local government will enjoy increased economic development and will be satisfied with the historical recognition of this critical site. Tourists to the Berlin Wall will be drawn to the Berlin Wall even more with its installation as a World Heritage Site, and they will gain new knowledge of history with their visit. Finally, Russia is a stakeholder because the country may be dissatisfied with a negative, although truthful, representation of East Germany. We can ameliorate this by including perspectives from all

⁹ UNESCO World Heritage Site Sustainable Tourism Programme, <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-669-7.pdf>

parties involved, including Russia's. Additionally, we can engage Russia in the development and planning of the Berlin Wall as a World Heritage Site.

We can engage these stakeholders in the planning, development, and management of sustainable tourism. Berliners and the Berlin government will require assistance from UNESCO in their efforts to promote and sustain tourism. We can use widespread advertisements to promote the site and engage tourists. The local Berlin community can enjoy the benefits of tourism by starting or relocating more small businesses around the wall that will attract tourists. The more small businesses that are constructed, the more the community will benefit; one restaurant or hotel will not be overwhelmed and more locals can enjoy the economic benefits. We can manage traffic and parking congestion effectively by building a parking garage near the site. We can engage the German and local Berlin government by increasing public transportation around the site. Additionally, the site will be protected and managed by the local Berlin government. This will cost time and money; however, the benefits far outweigh the costs to the local government, as this site will provide a significant economic boost. Finally, we can engage Russia in a positive way by asking for their input and support in the development of the site. Russia will be less likely to develop negative feelings or attitudes in response to the site's installation if the nation is involved in how the site is presented.

Quality Tourism:

Quality tourism varies from person to person. For some, the experience of quality tourism is about relaxing in a tropical destination. For others, it is about volunteering in a rural village. In the context of the Berlin Wall, quality tourism is the experience of learning about a

destination, visiting the destination, cultivating appreciation for the destination's history and culture, and acting in a way that promotes the region's sustainable development. This last action can include anything from purchasing products from local artisans in order to support the local economy to reducing one's environmental impact on the region. For example, a Berlin Wall souvenir t-shirt made and sold by local vendors can support local businesses and promote the tourist site. Additionally, the use of public transportation and reduction of pollution can help preserve the Berlin region. Quality tourism also encompasses the overall value of the experience to the tourist. What makes a valuable experience for a tourist? That depends on the tourist; however, sites such as the Berlin Wall will attract backpackers, students, families, and retirees alike because of its fame and historical significance. Visitors to the Berlin Wall will have a quality tourist experience because Berlin is already a major tourist destination in Germany. 14 million tourists came to Berlin in 2019, and 794 travel accommodations exist in the city.¹⁰

In addition, the Berlin Wall is already one of the most Instagrammed destinations in Europe.¹¹ Berlin already has tourist infrastructure, including a diversity of restaurants and hotels. Berlin's robust tourism will certainly create a mutually-supportive relationship with the Wall as a Heritage Site. Establishing the Berlin Wall as a World Heritage Site will emphasize the importance of this significant site and may attract more interest from visitors around the world. UNESCO's Sustainable Tourism Program can promote quality tourism products and services such as educational tours of the Wall, as well as direct interested visitors to the Mauermuseum, which is a museum dedicated to Checkpoint Charlie, the famous crossing point of the Berlin

¹⁰ Koptuyug, Evgenia, "Number of tourist arrivals in Berlin from 2015 to 2019, by origin," Statista, November 23, 2020.

¹¹ Dyfed Loesche, "Eiffel Tower is the Most Instagrammed European Attraction," Statista, September 19, 2017.

Wall.

The Berlin Wall demands a tourist experience that allows visitors to empathize with the experience of those who lived in East and West Berlin. Thus, I propose the construction of an attachment to the Mauermuseum that would provide an in-depth and personal experience highlighting the lives of those who lived in Germany during the Cold War. Tourists will enter the museum exhibit and be separated from their groups or families; half would learn about life in “West Berlin” and the other half would learn about life in “East Berlin.” Each tour will feature visual aids, firsthand verbal accounts, and opportunities to engage physically with the exhibit. It will be critical to feature the voices of those who lived this experience; their perspectives will prove to be the most impactful and important as we remember and honor history. Visitors will be able to get a real taste of what it was like to live in a divided Berlin. At the end of the tour, the groups will be able to reunite with their families and groups, just as Berliners did on October 3, 1990.

Conclusion:

The Berlin Wall’s installation as a World Heritage Site is long overdue. This iconic monument highlights the key historic period of the Cold War, communism, and repression. Although the German foreign ministry attempted to register the Wall as a World Heritage Site in 1998, the division of the past prevented its success.¹² My proposal is different because I propose that we provide different perspectives about the Wall, including those from Russia, former East Berliners, and former West Berliners. The site underscores the importance of unity and freedom

¹² Ben Aris, “Berlin Tries to Register the Wall,” *The Guardian*, August 7, 2003.

and clearly has Outstanding Universal Value. Besides fulfilling the necessary criteria as outlined by UNESCO, the site represents pain, fear, and division. Human lives, both in Germany and abroad, were forever altered by the construction and destruction of this Wall. Germany's history (and the world's) is dangerously unremembered without the recognition of the Berlin Wall as a World Heritage Site. A Wall which divided East and West, communism and capitalism, tyranny and freedom, must never be forgotten, lest we repeat such history.

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