

# The fluctuations in the style of German barracks complexes in reference to the national style on selected examples from the 1930s

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Following World War I, a huge transformation is taking place in the formation of barracks complexes all over Europe. In terms of layout, military architecture starts to use the achievements of functionalism. However, it was not long before German military architecture diversified from this trend. The Third Reich, under the influence of the National Socialist Party, briefly before the outbreak of World War II, abandons modernism in favor of vernacularism in the style of Heimatstil. Cosmopolitanism was rejected in favor of the cult of the spirit. The Heimatschutzstil prevails, reintroducing historical forms and regionalisms leading to a unique retreat from modernism in that period.

Today we treat national affiliation as a given. To us nations seem to be entities beyond time and history. However, as noted by Tomasz Kizwalter [1], an attempt to formulate a general definition of the terms “nation” and “nationalism” is difficult. Some scholars have found it impossible to define the concept of “nation” [2], while others tried to soften the problem by dividing the definitions into “objective” and “subjective”. “Objective” definitions assume that a shared territory, language, culture or economy determine the existence of a nation. “Subjective” ones assume that people’s awareness plays a decisive role. Here one can find the sources of the non-classical, constructivist concept of the nation, which justifies the close link between nationalism and architecture. Ernest Gellner [3], Eric Hobsbawm [1], as well as John Breuilly [4] argue that the impression of “naturalness” of nations is an illusion. Hobsbawm sees the nation as an artificial construct, created as a result of 19th and 20th century social engineering. John Breuilly draws attention to the role the modern state played in nation-building. Gellner believes

that nation-building processes are an inevitable and natural reaction to urbanization – a longing after a preconceived primal commonwealth. Pre-industrial societies, characterized by significant social stratification did not show promise of creating culturally coherent nations. By the early 18th century, however, cultural unification had become a sine qua non for the continued existence of societies. On the one hand, it resulted from the insurgence of ethnic groups that partook in empires. On the other hand, it resulted from the shaping of modern industrial social order. Period writers, such as e.g. Karol Libelt, discussed these factors [5], pointing out both the necessity to educate the nation in the spirit of positivist progress, but also by cultivating tradition on the way to regaining independence. The advocates of the “objective” definitions look for the roots of national identity not in modernity but in the “ethnies” formed centuries ago, assuming “ethno-symbolist approach” towards nationalism [6]. All these factors lend themselves to elevation of vernacular stylistics as the national style. The nation is therefore a modern phenomenon, the result

of actions undertaken by political and influential elites, creating “invented traditions” for this purpose. It is not far from here to Gellner’s thesis that “nationalism creates nations, not the other way around” [7].

## The homeland and the national style

As a result of the above, the nation seems elective in nature [8], an “imagined community” [9], i.e. one that is believed in, and supported by an “invented tradition” [10]. These traditions are to some extent fictional, but based on authentic phenomena and symbols. These symbols are stoked or downplayed by the leading actors in the national discourse. Konrad Górski draws attention to the dichotomy: nationalism vs. patriotism [11], eg in Germany “Heimat” and “Vaterland”. “Heimat”, connects with the land where we were born. We are dealing here with the attachment to a regional small homeland. This kind of patriotism, based on emphasizing nativeness, is important in the absence of one’s own statehood, when the nation becomes the object of adoration. “Vaterland” defines the homeland in a political sense. The challenge in creating

devotion to the state is to unite these two in an ideological sense. From the outset, homeland was a volatile cultural-political term, arising from the dramatic shift in the way of life, which triggered the sense of loss and a longing for the bygone world order, however correctly or incorrectly interpreted as “idyllic”. Homeland was a romantic concept for mental refuge: a manageable, traditional world. It was born from the polarity of national and international, rational and irrational, craft and industry, town and country, nature and decadence, healthy and sick, tradition and progress, social security and anonymous mass society [12]. After Karol Libelt, we can generalize the concept of homeland as a fellowship in the face of an adverse power.

Therefore, the “national style” was a way of manifesting an affiliation. It associated itself with the shapes and ornaments related to the past of a given nation. The “nationalization” of architecture initially involved arbitrary defining certain forms from high styles, i.e. Romanism, Gothic and Renaissance as national and their deliberate use in newly erected buildings. Emperor Wilhelm II enlisted Franz Schwechten to devise a national architecture, which matched the ambitions of a united German empire. The henceforth developed national romanticism (the neo-Backsteingotik, Rundbogenstil) was inspired by the imperial Romanesque monuments of the 12th century, for instance the Kaiserpfalz at Goslar, stipulating continuity between the medieval monarchs and the Hohenzollern dynasty [13]. Therefore, the early barracks, from the first period of barracks-building spree [14] in Germany were neo-Gothic [15]. On the other hand, “Heimatstil” was an invention of the metropolitan industrial society – an attempt towards taming the city landscape, making it more familiar. It was the decorative embellishment of the new building types of the late 19th century: hotels, spa houses, train stations. The cladding consisted of sparse rural motifs (or those that were perceived as such), which, however, did not influence the plan or change the basic structure of these new, brutally rigorous building types. Buildings erected in the Heimatstil were to create an environment infused with homely national elements [16]. This explains its use in the 1930s after the National Socialist Party came to power. Unable to use the historicizing stylistics of the empire who was co-responsible for the Armistice of 11 November 1918 due to the Dolchstoßlegende [17] the decision makers turned instead to the familiar stylistic known to the members of the working class in either its pure vernacular form or city variation – Heimatstil. Used on judiciously selected buildings the consciously utilized vernacular stylistics became “Heimatschutzstil” uniting the people as a society and the society with the state. The stylistics



Fig. 1. Allmend Kaserne in Lucerne aerial view; source [22]

and rhetoric of Heimatstil, however rooted in the Arts and Craft movement, was unique for Switzerland, Germany and its dependents, while Heimatschutzstil was an exclusive specificity of the Third Reich. Hence, the names is not translatable into other languages, representing this very local phenomenon.

All nationalisms are associated with politically engaged art, “patriotic” art, or the issue of nativeness in art [18]. The researcher of minority cultures, Homi K. Bhabha, notes that the idea of a nation is often the product of an appropriate narrative [19]. The equivalent of party circulars or socio-national journalism in architectural terms are government, administrative and military buildings. As the architecture of power, they reflect the official style of the state at a given stage of its development. The monumental architecture of each nation accentuates those features that the ideologues of the group consider important. Such architecture is often the field of creation of the abovementioned “invented tradition”. For this creation to be successful, it is necessary to generate a sense of alienation of a group in relation to the surrounding reality, in order to then unite it with some common denominator with which it can easily identify [20]. C.S.Lewis believes [21] that, above all, there is the love of one’s own family home. Such local patriotism becomes militant only when

it defends what it loves. This seems to be crucial for the creation of Heimatschutz costume of military facilities, which “serve not only the best possible training in the use of weapons, but also the education of cadets” [22]. It is important to remember, that Heimatstil was not perceived as atavistic; it was innately the product of a modern industrial economy and was seen as a form of individualized modernization, therefore it was conservative and progressive at the same time [23]. The folkish, archaic stylistics of Heimatschutz reflected the opposition of “us and them”. It was based on an attitude of defensiveness, operating in opposition to all international tendencies and backed by frenetic research into folk art [24].

### Modernism as a pan-European fashion in barracks building

At the beginning of the 1930s sombre historic barracks give way to objects derived from modernism: ascetic, functional, cubist, with a functional layout solved with attention to ventilation and insulation. This trend is tangible all over Europe. For example in Poland occurs a change in the perception of the national style: from manorial to Modernism, which is reflected in the barracks. Yet it took years of try and error approach before a stylistically and functionally satisfying type of modernist barracks could be attained there







Fig. 2. Allmend Kaserne in Lucerne; source author



Fig. 3. General Command edifice in Wrocław; source author

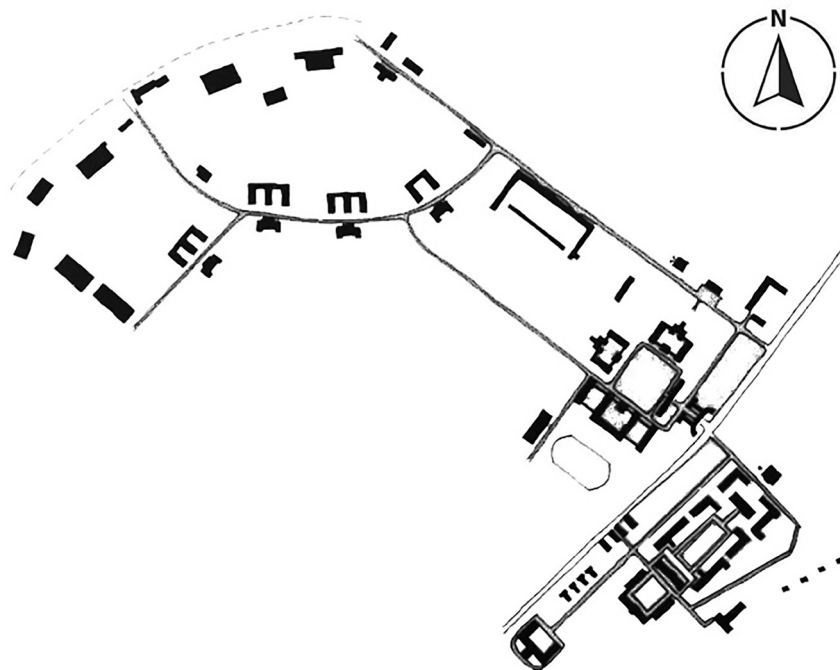


Fig. 4. A scheme of the Air War Academy and the Air Technical Academy in Gatow elaborated by author on the basis of [26]

[25]. Perhaps the best example illustrating this pan-European fashion comes from Switzerland, where the modernist trend is taken up and realized right away as it appears. The article advertising the new barracks in Lucerne highlights its merits: “A clear and economical division into rooms, combined with a well-measured floor plan as well as careful, clean and understandable construction affect the soul of a young soldier probably as much as proper military training”[22]. The complex opens to a vast plot and consists of only two edifices: a multi-purpose building and an outbuilding (Fig. 1.). The barracks building is different from the earlier ones in every aspect. It is shaped to the design by Armin Meili almost like Malevich’s suprematist sculpture (Fig. 2.). The main building consists of four parts: a porch, the main gauge, a tower and the staff wings in the north, which are arranged in a comb-like manner. It is compact and all bedrooms and day areas face south. A grid of windows dominates elevations making the massive building complex appear filigree. The upper floor of the main building is accentuated with an offset, which precedes one-story-elevation of the tower. The main entrance – a twelve meter wide granite staircase, framed by striking concrete ribs forming two-story porch – is situated on the eastern side. Both the supporting structure and the facades of the barracks are made of exposed concrete. The only superficial decoration consists of two clocks facing south and east, indicating the military order.

There are very few new-build German barracks from the years 1919–1935 due to the limitations placed upon German Army by the Treaty of Versailles and even less in the modernist style. It seems symptomatic that a Swiss architect – Otto Rudolf Salvisberg – designed one of the examples of modernist military buildings – General Command of the VIII Silesian Army Corps in Wrocław. It was built in 1928 in a style integrating expressionism and modernism. It consisted of a corps logis and two slightly lower side wings arranged around an inner courtyard that provided bilateral insolation and ventilation. The additive composition of simple, cubes had a brick facing and a flat roof. Standardized windows were arranged in evenly spaced rows (Fig. 3.). The elevations were free of decoration, but in 1929, the Monument to the National Defence Corps was erected in front of the building, depicting a knight leaning on a shield and a sword, representing the heroism of the army and its leading role as the basis of the state’s power.

### German break with modernism and return to vernacularism

In Germany, however this trend was revised while other countries still abode by modernism [25]. After coming to power, the



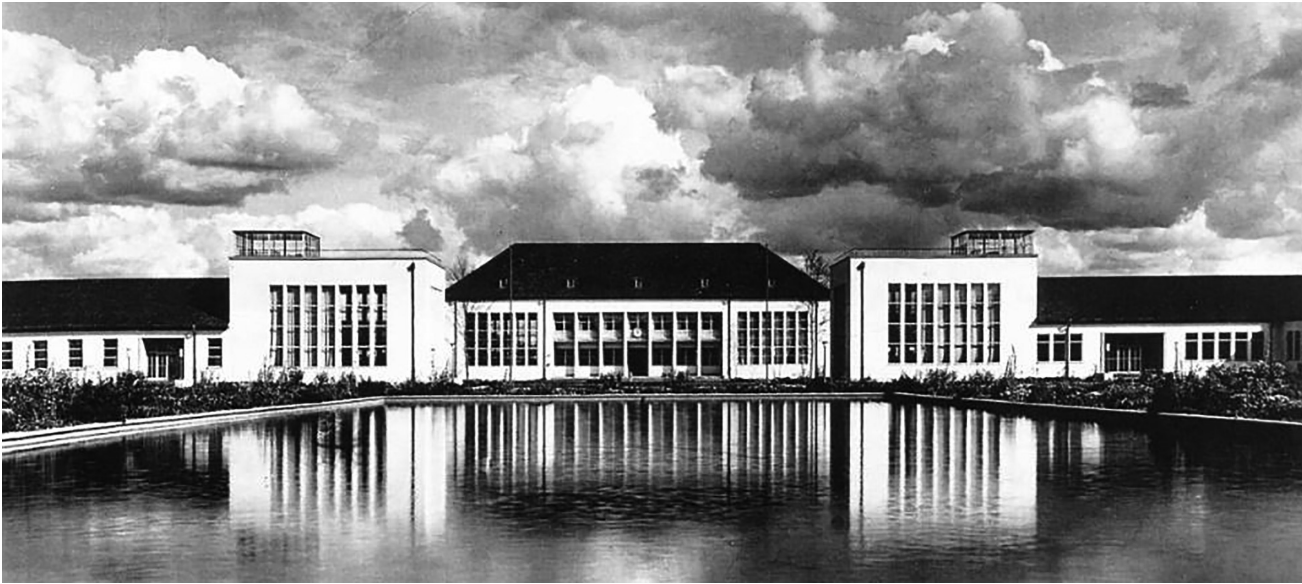


Fig. 5. Laboratories and gymnasium at Lufttechnische Akademie; source [27]

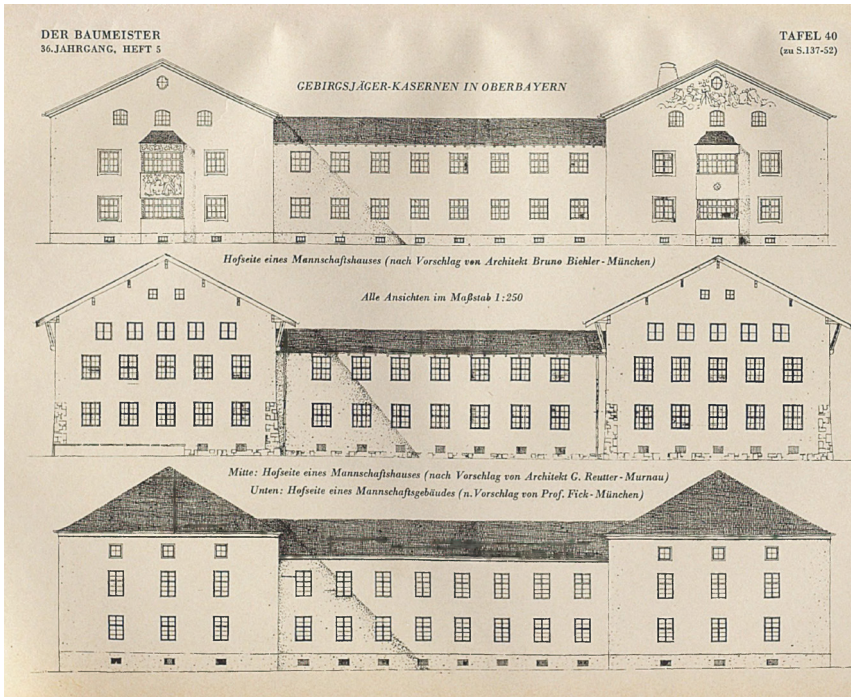


Fig. 6. Variations for elevations in a typical Bavarian barracks; source [29]

National Socialist Party transformed the army's Department of Military Aviation into the headed by Göring Ministry of Aviation, in charge of constructing the Luftwaffe. On behalf of the ministry, the Air War Academy and the Air Technical Academy (Luftkriegsakademie and Lufttechnische Akademie) were built in Berlin-Gatow under the management of Ernst Sagebiel in the years 1934–1935 [26]. Two years after praising the modernity of Allmend Kaserne, Guido Habers hails the spirit that fills the complex: "It is the spirit of venerable German traditions and myths (...) spiritual values and the ability to resist" [27].

The complex is divided into two parts. In the south: the accommodation, lecture and sport halls are organized in two

separate groups, each around a square (Fig. 4). In the north: the technical area has the runway at its heart. The accompanying aircraft hangars, command post, etc. are laid out in a loose arrangement in a forested surrounding. The architecture of the actual airport buildings, which depended less on the architect who designed them and more on technical requirements - is functionalist. The residential and training facilities show an outmoded conventional barracks type with blocks arranged around a courtyard. Yet the stylistics constitutes a blend of functionalism with tradition (Fig. 5), characterized by simplification and an abundant use of glazing combined with the use of relatively high, hipped roofs with dormers.



Fig. 7. The Jägerkaserne in Lenggries – gable detail of a stable; source [29]



Fig. 8. The guardhouses in Ludendorff-Kaserne in Mittenwald; source [29]

In the 1930s ensued construction of barracks for mountain military detachment (Gebirgstruppen). New barracks were to be constructed along the whole mountain range of Upper Bayern: from Bad Reichenhall, through Bad Tölz, to Garmisch. The design of the typical barracks (by Emil Schardt and Karl Maisch [28]) (Fig. 6.) was a result of a closed competition. It provided for two







Fig. 9. Oriel in Jäger Kaserne in Lenggries, source [29]



Fig. 10. Airport in Ainring; source [27]

parallel, two-story wings of dormitories linked by a slightly lower connector. This design was repeated in a few of the new complexes, e.g. Jäger Kaserne in Degernsdorf, Krafft-von-Delmensingen Kaserne in Garmisch and Jäger Kaserne in Lenggries. The buildings reflect the broadly understood Alpine style in the Laubsägenstil [29] type. Slightly inclined (between 16 and 25 degrees), far protruding roof was covered with interlocking tiles. The roof was

supported by visible purlins braced by struts. Walls were made of natural conglomerate rock and covered with raw or stippled plaster. The outbuildings, like the stalls, had half-timbered gables. (Fig. 7). The guardhouses took the form of a traditional arcade, as for example in Ludendorff-Kaserne in Mittenwald (Fig. 8). Some of the dormitories, e.g. in Hötzingdorf Kaserne, Oberammergau, had balconies running along the southern elevation. Many of the buildings bore

patriotically-themed frescoes and sgraffito designed by local artists above door lintels or on the oriels (Fig. 9). Even the nearby airport in the village Ainring near Bad Reichenhall was designed in the international Swiss style (internationalen Schweizerhausstils [27]) with wall fresco by artist-painter Georg Demmel (Fig. 10).

This fashion for use of vernacular stylistics continued not only in mountainous regions, where typical three-story barracks would seem out of place, therefore the use of regional stylistics seems somewhat justified. Between 1935 and 1939, the south of Sylt was developed into a military complex with an air base. During this time, two settlements were built for soldiers, civilian employees and their families with modest houses, along the air base installations. These were the so called Red Settlement with brick buildings for the basic personnel and the White Settlement for senior employees of the air base. Both settlements were designed by Ferdinand Keilmann [30] in the Frisian style. These were clinker brick buildings, while the facilities for senior staff were additionally plastered. All the buildings, even the technical facilities had thatched roofs (Fig. 11.).

## Conclusion

In the 1930s, the style of barracks complexes in Germany changed from modernist, utilized by all surrounding countries, to vernacular. This is largely the result of the burgeoning political rhetoric of the ruling National Socialist Party. Efforts were made to create a sense of threat from the outside and to transform the natural defense of the small homeland into a patriotic reflex towards the state as for example in Gerdy Troost canonical work [31]. In order to tighten the nation's attachment to the state and de facto create a nationalist bond, the Heimatschutz style was used on military facilities. Clad in a conceptualized costume, the barracks resembled local Alpine homesteads or Frisian villages, thus arousing greater sympathy and blending better with the local cultural landscape. Cosmopolitanism was rejected leading to a unique retreat from modernism in that period.

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Fig. 11. Weather service radio station on Sylt; source [27]

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**Abstract:** The national-socialist movement widespread in Germany in the 1930s influenced all areas of life. Investments in facilities related to the military were of particular ideological significance. At the same time, regardless of the state ideology and propaganda, in the period following World War I,

a huge transformation is taking place in the formation of barracks complexes. In terms of the distribution of rooms in accordance with cross ventilation and insolation requirements, as well as the urban arrangement on the plot, military architecture uses the achievements of residential architecture: social housing, patronage estates, prefabrication and functionalism. In formal terms, it is also influenced by the international style. For example, in Polish military architecture (during the Second Polish Republic), the use of cosmopolitan modernism progressed, being a manifestation of patriotic care for the modernization of the country in accordance with the example set by the world powers and Western countries. However, it didn't take long before German military architecture diversified from this trend. The Third Reich, under the influence of the national-socialist movement, briefly before the outbreak of World War II, abandons modernism in favour of a specific local form of vernacular national style - Heimatstil. In the field of construction of government buildings, its nationalist variant prevails – „Heimatschutz” – which is a retreat to tendentious historical forms and regionalisms. This transformation is illustrated by three examples of barracks from 1935–1938. The historical barracks from the 1880s represent a style saturated with romanticism. They are multi-storey blocks full of gloomy interiors spanning deep from the corridor, which encompasses the building. At the beginning of the 1930s, they are being replaced by objects derived from the white modernism: ascetic, functional, cubist, with a functional layout solved with attention to ventilation and insolation. However, with the tightening of the rhetoric of the ruling NSDAP, evidenced by the exhibition of modern art under the depreciating title „Degenerated Art”, organized in Munich in 1937, a strong nationalist course in Germany's politics leads to the rejection of cosmopolitan patterns. This results in the return to the simplified vernacular style in the design of barrack complexes. This then gives way to objects in an approachable native style.

**Keywords:** nationalism, Heimatstil, Heimatschutz, military architecture, 1930s architecture

**Streszczenie: PRZEMIANY W STYLISTYCE NIEMIECKICH ZESPOŁÓW KOSZAROWYCH W NAWIĄZANIU DO STYLU NARODOWEGO NA WYBRANYCH PRZYKŁADACH Z LAT 30.**

Panujący w Niemczech w latach 30. ruch narodowo-socjalistyczny wpływał na wszystkie dziedziny życia. Szczególnie ważny wydzźwięk światopoglądowy miały inwestycje w obiekty związane z wojskiem. Równocześnie, niezależnie od ideologii państwowej, w okresie następującym po I wojnie światowej dokonuje się ogromna przemiana w kształtowaniu zespołów koszarowych. W kwestii rozkładu pomieszczeń pod względem przewietrzania i nastoniecznienia oraz aranżacji urbanistycznej na działce architektura wojskowa korzysta ze wzorców budownictwa społecznego, osiedli patronackich, prefabrykacji i funkcjonalizmu. W kwestii formalnej wpływa na nią także styl międzynarodowy. O ile jednak np. w polskiej architekturze wojskowej (w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej) zastosowanie kosmopolitycznego modernizmu postępuje, będąc przejawem patriotyzmu: dbałości o modernizację kraju na wzór stosujących go potęg światowych i państw zachodnich, o tyle III Rzesza pod wpływem ruchu narodowo-socjalistycznego na krótko przed wybuchem II wojny światowej porzuca modernizm na rzecz specyficznej lokalnej formy wernakularnego stylu narodowego – „Heimatstil”. W obszarze budynków rządowych przeważa jego nacjonalistyczna odmiana – „Heimatschutz” – będąca odzwierciedleniem tendencyjnych form historycznych i regionalizmów. Przemianę tę ilustrują trzy przykłady koszar z lat 1935–1938. Wyściowo historyczne koszary z lat 80. XIX w. reprezentują styl przesycony romantyzmem, stanowią wielopiętrowe bloki złożone z wnętrza o głębokim trakcie w układzie korytarzowym. Z początkiem lat 30. XX w. zaczynają je zastępować obiekty w stylu białego modernizmu: ascetyczne, funkcjonalne, kubistyczne, o rozkładzie funkcjonalnym rozwiązaniem z dbałością o przewietrzanie i insulację. Jednak wraz z zaostrzeniem retoryki rządzącej NSDAP, czego świadectwem stanowi urządzona w Monachium w 1937 r. wystawa sztuki nowoczesnej pod deprecjonującym tytułem *Sztuka zdegenerowana*, wyraźny kurs nacjonalistyczny prowadzi w Niemczech do odrzucenia wzorców kosmopolitycznych. Skutkuje to w projektowaniu zespołów koszarowych powrotem do uproszczonej stylistyki wernakularnej. Ta ustępuje następnie miejsca obiektom w tendencyjnej stylistyce rodzimej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nacjonalizm, Heimatstil, Heimatschutz, architektura wojskowa, architektura lat 30.