

Bridging the Border

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Fritz Wenzel, born 1930, received his engineering and PhD degrees from the University of Braunschweig. Research and teaching at the University of Karlsruhe. Practice in BfB · Büro für Baukonstruktionen GmbH, Karlsruhe · Dresden · Schwerin. Preservation of historically important buildings.

This is not a usual lecture. I would like to speak to you about a period in time when IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE was difficult between West and East, and when BRINGING PEOPLE CLOSER meant BRIDGING THE BORDER here, right in the midst of Germany.

The time was April 1971. For a train trip to the German Democratic Republic, or GDR, I needed three things as a citizen of West Germany: A visitor's permit, an entry visa, and an exit visa. The visitor's permit was valid for Jena only; in order to be able to travel to Weimar – a 25 km bus trip, to get this university that was then the College of Architecture and Civil Engineering – an extra permit was required from the Volkspolizei, and it had to be entered in my passport. To get it, I had to make a written application, which, in turn, required a written invitation. To make sure that they couldn't refuse my application, my colleague Speer from Weimar wrote that he was inviting me to see the so-called *Nationale Forschungs- und Gedenkstätten* or, in other words, the former concentration camp at Buchenwald. They could not very well refuse to grant a request like that – neither to him, nor to me. So, we first went there before we sat down for our technical discussions here at the university.

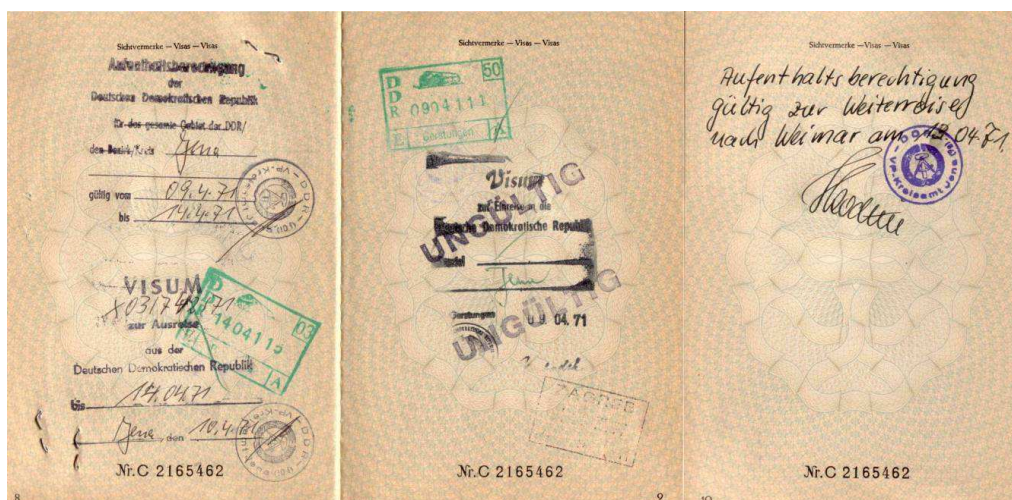


Fig. 1 Visitor's permit, entry visa, exit visa, extra permit. 1971