Werkbundpolitik and Weltpolitik
The German State’s Interest in Global Commerce and “Good Design,” 1912-1914

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Cologne, Berlin, and German Government Policy, 1912–1914

The Deutscher Werkbund Congress of 1914 produced a showdown of fundamental importance to the subsequent history of twentieth-century German architecture and design.¹ Held at Cologne’s First Werkbund Exhibition on 3–5 July, the annual meeting of Germany’s leading association of progressive architects, artists, craftsmen, light industry manufacturers, and cultural critics pitted the Berlin architect Hermann Muthesius and his supporters against a faction represented by the Belgian artist and architect Henry van de Velde.

Muthesius, in ten forcefully worded “guiding principles” (Leitsätze), charted a new course for the organization and its membership: Henceforth, Muthesius argued, standardized “types” in architecture, industry, and applied arts would enable German manufacturers to boost radically their production of consumer products and exports.² This would not only improve the nation’s domestic economic welfare and enhance Germany’s international standing but would simultaneously introduce a cohesive, self-conscious, and qualitatively superior “German style” into global commerce. Werkbund member companies such as Bayer, Daimler, Benz, and Bosch would benefit, in short, from new levels of collaboration among artists, craftsmen, architects, engineers, and product manufacturers. Henry van de Velde, by contrast, defended Werkbund artists’ perceived absolute rights to individual creativity—rights he and his strongest supporters, the architect Walter Gropius and the museum director Karl Ernst Osthaus, felt would be trampled if the Werkbund were to dedicate itself to the generation of high-volume, high-quality, export-oriented industrial “types.”³

Although the conflict between Muthesius and van de Velde has been well documented in the annals of modern architectural and design history, far less understood is the extent to which domestic political crises and new policy departures in Berlin served as preconditions for the Werkbund conflict in the first place.¹ Prominent Werkbund members—men such as Werkbund Managing Director Ernst Jächk and Werkbund Vice President Hermann Muthesius, but also including such national political figures and Werkbund members as Friedrich Naumann of Württemberg and Gustav Stresemann of Saxony—used institutional affiliations and their multiple professional identities to forge unprecedented linkages between the Werkbund leadership, industrial interest groups, and powerful German state interests. Specifically, and at the national level, new policies articulated by German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg and key German ministries in Berlin, strident national interest group politics, and an evolving state outlook toward Weltpolitik (geopolitical strategy) combined to reshape Werkbund policy in fundamental ways between 1912 and 1914. Without these forces, and without developments that followed the lopsided and highly contentious Reichstag elections of January 1912, the Werkbund likely never would have risen to the prominent position it came to occupy with state authorities by July 1914.

Seen from this perspective, Muthesius’s new articulation of a program for the making of “types” may indeed remain a breakthrough moment for architectural historians interested in the rise of industrial design, the notion of an early twentieth-century “functionalist” aesthetic, and its role in “modernist” thinking generally. But it was also a great deal more than that. Seen historically, Muthesius’s Werkbund proclamation and “guiding principles” were the leading, aesthetically inflected edge of sweeping new national policies, policies designed to reorganize large segments of private industry and global commercial distribution along state-led lines. But for the outbreak of World War I scarcely one month after the Werkbund Congress of July 1914, Werkbundpolitik and Weltpolitik
bundpolitik stood poised to become a central component of a late Wilhelmine German imperial Weltpolitik. Architectural historians and members of the architectural profession who remain unaware of this important political context forego the opportunity to understand, in our current phase of globalization, a case study of groundbreaking importance from the early twentieth century—an instance in which architects and designers proposed to make history not simply by designing characteristic objects or buildings but by placing themselves at the center of national policy debates concerning pressing issues of political, economic, and industrial organization.

The Werkbund Debate and Ministerial Politics in Berlin

There is a long-standing consensus among historians of architecture, art, and design about what took place during the annual congress at the First Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne. The congress, the association’s seventh since its founding in 1907, featured familiar keynote speakers: Hermann Muthesius gave the conference’s first major address, and, as was also customary, Friedrich Naumann closed the conference with a rousing speech on the final night. At the conclusion of Muthesius’s speech on 3 July, titled “The Future Work of the Werkbund” (“Die Werkbundarbeit der Zukunft”), the artist Henry van de Velde rose to read a statement prepared the night before opposing virtually every recommendation Muthesius had just made. The ensuing storm of controversy dominated the remainder of the conference: Various speakers rose to attack or defend the apparent heart of Muthesius’s speech—his advocacy of “types” in design and industry—whereas others supported van de Velde’s impassioned defense of artists’ individual creative freedom. When it finally came time for Naumann’s closing address, titled “The Werkbund and the World Economy” (“Werkbund und Weltwirtschaft”), the charismatic politician did his best to rally his audience around a common goal by assuring them that the Werkbund, despite its differences, was destined to raise the status of German exports and cultural production to unprecedented heights. Increased exports were a national necessity, Naumann reminded his audience, for Germany’s great good fortune, its ever-growing population, required a steady expansion of exports to sustain the health and wealth of the nation.

As soon as the conference closed, Werkbund members who had been in attendance began writing articles and letters in a contentious, drawn-out effort not only to determine what, exactly, had transpired but also to try to influence subsequent developments. It was clear to all that van de Velde had countered Muthesius’s presentation of ten “guiding principles” (Leitsätze) justifying “types” (Typisierung) in design with ten “counter-principles” (Gegenleitsätze) defending artistic individuality against the encroachment of industrial and economic imperatives. Ten days before delivering his lecture, Muthesius circulated his ten principles among the fourteen speakers scheduled to address the conference. Whereas Muthesius’s keynote speech traced the development of types as an historical process, his ten theses distilled the address into a set of principles that the Werkbund—in concert with industry and the state, and virtually by decree—would use to set new standards for exports and for industry.

Muthesius appears to have kept intentionally his theses general, sweeping, and maddeningly unspecific with regard to execution or to specific, practical implications for artists, industry, retailers, and the state. He avoided using the word “standardization” (Standardisierung), although his coinage of the term Typisierung (“making of types”) left room for listeners to infer that; he also never outlined the new structures of authority that would be needed to put such a comprehensive scheme into place. Muthesius’s first priority, it seemed, was to steer the organization toward acceptance of the new direction, and one thing appeared certain: if the Werkbund followed the new course, the nature of its activities would be altered forever, enlarged to an extent that the Werkbund would henceforth work closely with industry and the state to establish readily identifiable, artist-designed “types” for seemingly every scale of product manufactured by Werkbund industries. If Muthesius had his way, typical, “tasteful” products of high quality would be made available in unprecedented quantities for coordinated, worldwide distribution as German national exports in an expanding Weltwirtschaft, or global economy. Architecture would continue to lead the way in coordinating the applied arts and ensuring Germany’s continued development toward a contemporary “harmonious culture.”
What the Werkbund membership would gradually come to know in the weeks between the congress of 3–4 July and the outbreak of the First World War in early August is that Muthesius and Naumann—with Werkbund members such as Gustav Stresemann and Ernst Jäckh, in key supporting roles—represented forces at work in German politics and in the Werkbund that far exceeded the ability of individual artists or small, private institutions such as Karl Ernst Osthaus’s German Museum for Art in Commerce and Industry (Deutsches Museum für Kunst in Handel und Gewerbe) to mount effective, meaningful resistance.10

Muthesius and Naumann, as two of the Werkbund’s most influential founders and leaders in 1907, came to represent two even more formidable factions joined in alliance in the radically charged political environment that was Wilhelmine Germany between 1912 and 1914. Muthesius represented the interests of his long-time state employer, the Prussian Commerce Ministry, for whom the architect had facilitated a reform of the state applied arts education system, stretching across two-thirds of Germany, beginning in 1903.11 By 1912, Muthesius and the Prussian Commerce Ministry joined a constellation of ministerial and governmental actors whose behavior reflected the unique political circumstances of these increasingly tension-filled, jingoistic years. Specifically, Chancellor Hollweg and three powerful ministries—Minister Clemens von Delbrück’s Imperial Interior Ministry, Reinhold Sydow’s Prussian Commerce Ministry, and Arthur Kiderlen-Wächter and Gottlieb von Jagow’s Imperial Foreign Office—gradually aligned themselves with increasingly risky, aggressive bids to expand German foreign trade and territorial influence. They lent new and emphatic support to commerce, exports, and the finished-goods industries, in spite of the continued political dominance of coal, iron, and steel producers in concert with agrarian Conservatives. In the nomenclature of the powerful but fractious industrial interest groups, the chancellor and these three ministries grew more receptive to light industry’s Association of Industrialists (Bund der Industriellen, or BDI) and the Hansa League for Commerce, Trade, and Industry (Hansaabend für Handel, Gewerbe, und Industrie), relative to their traditional backing of heavy industry’s Central Association of German Industrialists (Centralverband Deutscher Industrieller, or CDI).12

Naumann, for his part, was no creature of the ministerial bureaucracy, but the left-leaning progressive mouthpiece of an expansionist program for a German-led trade zone in Central Europe and the Balkans, a region he called “Mitteleuropa.”13 Yet Naumann was anything but alone in promoting plans that reflected Germany’s bid to rise into the ranks of such global powers as Britain, France, Russia, and the United States. Werkbund Managing Director Ernst Jäckh, a long-time Naumann disciple, emerged as the forceful advocate of a German-led alliance stretching “from Berlin to Baghdad” via the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Balkans, and Turkey. Naumann, Jäckh, and Stresemann, a National Liberal Reichstag member and the galvanizing head of the Association of Saxon Industrialists (the BDI’s single largest corporate member), were all aggressive promoters of imperialism at a time in Germany when, as the historian Klaus Wernckel noted, “the word imperialism had no negative associations for its proponents.”14

In domestic policy, Naumann was a hopeful advocate of ever-elusive representative democracy as a safeguard against violent socialist revolution and, simultaneously, as a weapon against heavy industrialists and feudal landowning Junkers allied in their stubborn maintenance of tariff rates favorable to Germany’s purveyors of “iron and rye.” Although Muthesius and Naumann had never been able to agree on a proper Sozialpolitik for the treatment of Germany’s workers, trade expansionism and imperialism provided an unlikely common ground for the Prussian Commerce Ministry privy councilor (Geheimes Regierungsrat) and Württemberg’s leading progressive politician.

To men such as Muthesius, Naumann, and Jäckh, then, the Werkbund operated at the intersection of art’s claims to represent a civilizing German Kultur and industry’s demands for political influence commensurate with its growing preeminence in German economic life. Like other organizations top-heavy with a membership drawn primarily from the Wilhelmine bourgeoisie, the Werkbund embodied what the historian Geoff Eley has discussed as a growing Wilhelmine bourgeoisie push for “equality of status” (Gleichberechtigung) in a political system singularly ill-prepared to brook compromise, or to embrace new and increasingly powerful bourgeois and working-class interests.15
Given the imperial Wilhelmine political system’s unwillingness to broaden the franchise or alter the fundamental structure of government, leading Werkbund figures such as Naumann and Muthesius adjusted their views in ways that remained loyal, in the end, to the conservative power structures they served. Their advocacy of “types” in 1914, occurring as it did in the context of larger political efforts to accelerate trade, concentrate production, and increase Germany’s colonial and global influence, can hardly be considered apart from the political programs that began working their way through ministries as diverse as the Imperial Interior Ministry, the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the Prussian Commerce Ministry, and the Reich Chancellor’s Office after 1912.

The first storm clouds began to gather over the Werkbund Congress when, ten days before Muthesius’s scheduled address, he distributed his ten guiding principles to the fourteen scheduled congress speakers. Back in 1907, a controversial lecture by Muthesius on “The Significance of the Applied Arts” at the opening of the Berlin College of Commerce had culminated four years of intensive, state-supported design reforms by challenging traditional applied arts producers to join a national, modern applied arts production system; the result, a split between conservative and self-proclaimed progressive applied-arts forces, had effectively called the Werkbund into being in October of that year. This time, in 1914, Muthesius threw down the gauntlet to the organization’s own membership.

From the state’s point of view—and with the help of Muthesius’s interpolation of trends in economics, art, culture, and politics—national priorities dictated that only a concentration of Werkbund efforts on the development of “types” in architecture, the applied arts, and finished goods industries could ensure German economic competitiveness and the emergence of a coherent, readily identifiable German “style” worthy of representing German culture both at home and abroad. In essence, and dating at least as far back as the spring of 1912, Muthesius supported increased government efforts to involve its huge bureaucratic and imperial apparatus in organizing export industries and promoting Germany’s bid to assert itself as the world’s newest international power. Treating the Werkbund less like a voluntary association and more like a semiofficial guardian of quality in production, Muthesius approached the 1914 exhibition as a place to display German productive capacity as a collective achievement in need of further disciplined organization.

Cooperating with Henry van de Velde in the resistance to Muthesius’s proposed “new course” were such figures as Karl Ernst Osthau, Walter Gropius, and the architect August Endell. Osthau, the most influential member of the anti-Muthesius faction, was an independent-minded reformist missionary with consummate “individualist” credentials. He had used a private family fortune in his Rhineland hometown of Hagen to open the Folkwang Museum to promote avant-garde art in 1900. As the applied arts section of the Folkwang Museum expanded, he converted it in 1909 into a separate institution, the German Museum for Art in Commerce and Industry. Muthesius, for a time, had supported the efforts of the latter museum, and the Werkbund made a modest contribution to its budget. As Frederich Schwartz has persuasively argued in his account of the Werkbund’s evolving attitudes toward form in the increasingly complex German economy, “For Osthau the artist always preceded the organization”—whether it was the German Museum or the Werkbund.

Specializing in advertising and staking a claim for the modern artist in the commercial economy’s domain of circulation and exchange, Osthau assumed an important role as a patron, promoter, and organizer, and is therefore sometimes referred to by historians of the Werkbund as the artist-individualists’ “mentor.” Osthau received the support of the Werkbund for his museum and its traveling exhibitions of modern German products; their success prompted him to appeal for further support to the German Foreign Ministry to continue sending exhibitions of German products abroad. Not averse to the idea of government support for his personal projects, Osthau only objected when it became apparent that government priorities concerning industry and export production were beginning to dictate the agenda of the Werkbund’s 1914 exhibition. This process, which culminated in the confrontation between Muthesius, van de Velde, and their respective supporters, began just more than two years before the opening of the exhibition.

When studied chronologically and in some detail, the exhibition planning process confirms the congruence of Muthesius’s proposals for the Werkbund and the specific, yet sweeping political and economic goals being pursued by men such as Delbrück, Sydow, Strese-
mann, Naumann, and Jäckh. Of particular interest here, and as we
will see, the radical new course projected by Muthesius for the
Werkbund coincided with efforts by German light-industry interest
groups and ministerial sponsors of expansionist economic policies
to gain unprecedented new governmental influence in the months
leading up to the Werkbund exhibition of 1914. Seen from this perspec-
tive, Muthesius’s 1914 Werkbund theses are far more than just a
poignant moment in the history of twentieth-century industrial
design and in the emergence of a nascent twentieth-century grand
narrative of “modernism.” They are at the same time a crystalliza-
tion and unique manifestation of the German state’s shifting national
and international economic, cultural, and political priorities.

Redirecting the Werkbund: The Organization
Expands

The first day of April 1912 marked two major changes that placed
the Werkbund on a new course: its headquarters were moved from
Dresden-Hellerau to Berlin, and a new managing director, Ernst
Jäckh, assumed managerial duties in the Werkbund’s offices at
Berlin’s Schöneberger Ufer 36a. Leaving his close friend and fellow
Württemberg “Naumannite” Theodor Heuss to assume his post as
editor of the liberal Heilbronn newspaper, the Neckar Zeitung, Jäckh
appeared to rejoice at the prospect of relocating to the center of
Prussian and imperial power. Quite unlike the first, idealistic, long-
time Werkbund managing director, Wolf Dohrn, Jäckh took virtually
no interest in artistic matters. His passion was politics, at which he
excelled, even though his memoirs and other writings betray an
occasional tendency to inflate his importance and closeness to the
Kaiser and other top government officials.21

Known as an able manager and a well-connected political insider
in Berlin, Jäckh was thrilled to exercise his influence as “an adept
of the Foreign Office” to build on international connections at the
German mission in Turkey, to which he had been assigned, and to or-
organize a powerful network on behalf of Werkbund-related causes.22
A more effective organizer, recruiter, and propagandist than politician,
Jäckh enthused to associates at the Foreign Office about the long list

of German and Austrian journals and newspapers “with whom I am
employed ... with which I have influence, [and which] I favor
depending on the theme and the situation.”23 In its new, expansion-
ist phase, the Werkbund would rely more than ever on aggressive
press propaganda to advance its domestic and foreign goals.

Yet the appointment of Jäckh and the relocation of the Werk-
bund’s headquarters to the imperial capital were only the beginning
of fundamental organizational changes. At the fifth annual congress
of the Werkbund in Vienna in June 1912—the first to be convened on
foreign soil—several other important measures heralded what Jäckh,
in the organization’s official report, called “a high point in the de-
velopment of the Werkbund,” as well as “a promising point of depa-
ture” for its future growth.24 To begin with, Prussian and German
government officials attended the meeting in greater numbers than
ever before, and they were joined by their counterparts in the Habs-
burg Imperial administration. Among German ministries represented
were the Prussian Commerce Ministry, the Imperial Foreign Min-
istry—with whom Jäckh enjoyed particularly strong ties—and the
Ministry of the Interior. Clemens Delbrück, who as Prussian minister of
commerce had defended Muthesius in the Prussian Chamber of
Deputies during the “Muthesius Affair” of 1907 (precipitating the
founding of the Werkbund), had been promoted to imperial interior
minister in 1909.25 From this position, he became Chancellor Holl-
weg’s successor in command and “most-trusted” ministerial colleague,
as well as a strong Werkbund advocate.26 Fritz Dönhoff, Muthesius’s
main government correspondent while the architect reported from
the German Embassy in London from 1896-1903, came to Vienna
representing the Prussian Commerce Ministry.27 The Heilbronn
entrepreneur, city councilman, and voluble Werkbund President
Peter Bruckmann, in his address “On the Next Tasks of the Deutscher
Werkbund,” repeatedly emphasized that, though “the Werkbund is
the leader of the new movement in the applied arts,” it must “in the
next few years be recognized and respected by the imperial and state
authorities as the official representative of the German applied arts.”28

Internal changes to the Werkbund affecting the organization far
more directly included a resolution adopted in Vienna to enlarge the
executive committee from six members to twelve. Harnessed enough at
first glance, this enlargement in fact put executive committee members
Osthaus and van de Velde—later of "individualist" faction fame—at a considerable numerical disadvantage for important committee votes. The executive committee was henceforth dominated by such pro-government and pro-industry figures—and future Typisterung advocates—as executive committee chairman Bruckmann, vice chairman Muthesius, Nautmann, Jäckh, the craftsman-entrepreneur Karl Schmidt, and the architects Bruno Paul, Richard Ricnerschmid, and Carl Reborst. 

Bruckmann's presidential address in Vienna took pains to emphasize the reputation and respected abilities of the newly appointed Ernst Jäckh. To Bruckmann, Jäckh was to be the key figure in helping the Werkbund obtain official government recognition, along with dramatic increases in funding and membership. Muthesius seconded Bruckmann's high opinion of Jäckh, to whom Muthesius wrote directly:

We in the Werkbund...agree completely with the Foreign Minister that you should continue the promising Middle East policy and foreign policy work you began in Heilbronn and Constantinople, and that, alongside your management of the Werkbund, you should carry on with this work in Berlin. I have understanding for this type of honorary position and the extension of one's professional duties, and am convinced that your energy and initiative will do complete justice to both of these tasks. I will speak quite openly: we know of no one whom we can trust more than you to rescue the Werkbund and restore it from its ash-heap existence in Hellerau and to develop it into a German center of culture.

Muthesius naturally saw greater state involvement in Werkbund affairs as a blessing for the organization. Others, of course, would shortly see it as a curse. But from the government architect's perspective, the Werkbund stood positioned to become the linchpin of an overarching plan according to which powerful German industries, heavily influenced if not controlled directly by government, would deliver German products of high quality in a commercial economy defined by an unprecedented degree of organization.

The Werkbund between Ministerial Policies and Interest Group Politics, 1912–1914

The radical alteration of course Muthesius sought to impose on the Werkbund cannot be understood apart from changes taking place in German politics between 1912 and 1914—years that historian Thomas Nipperdey has described as a time of "stable crisis." Perhaps the defining event for these years was the Reichstag election of January 1912, which yielded results that shook the German Empire to its foundations: the Social Democratic Party captured an unprecedented 34.8 percent of the vote. With its 110 delegates, the party formed the Reichstag's largest bloc, a feat all the more considerable in view of the party's illegality between 1878 and 1890, and the discriminatory three-class German voting system that allotted votes on the basis of property ownership.

The resulting intensification and radicalization of German politics affected virtually every party, interest group, and political association. Changes in the organization of the Werkbund fit into this matrix of larger shifts, in which government ministries and interest groups struggled to make progress on constructive domestic and foreign policies amid anti-socialist agitation that ranged from mild to hysterical. For the next two years, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg swung between two equally problematic poles in domestic policy. Appeasement of the socialists’ loud calls for a just social policy (Sozialpolitik) was impossible, as that was anathema to Prussia’s controlling Junker and heavy industrial interests, to say nothing of the Kaiser. On the political right, heavy industry’s central association maintained repeated hard-line calls for the dissolution of the Reichstag, the banning of public demonstrations, and resurrection of Bismarck’s anti-socialist laws. Heavy industry and agrarian leaders alike attacked Bethmann Hollweg and Delbrück for refusing to disband the Reichstag and crush the socialists. The chancellor and his interior minister, for their part, would disappoint moderates and especially the left as well, paying only lip service to the idea of greater recognition and support for workers in 1912 before backing off entirely from the development of a social policy by early 1914.

If the government of Bethmann Hollweg was not experiencing complete paralysis in these areas of domestic policy, then it certainly had very little maneuvering room. For groups that represented commercial, trade, and finished-goods manufacturing interests, however, the dilemmas being faced by Bethmann Hollweg and Delbrück actually opened an unprecedented—if by no means assured—window of opportunity. Light industry's union, for one thing, emerged as a natural partner to Werkbund interests. It formed...
initially in 1895 to unite small- and middle-sized finished-goods industries, which typically did not belong to cartels, in an effort to break the overwhelming influence and domination of well-organized, cartel-style heavy industry.15

For another, the BDI enjoyed gradually increasing ties to the Hansa League for Commerce, Trade, and Industry, a second, even younger interest group dominated by light-manufacturing industries. The Hansa League formed in 1909 during battles over the reform of imperial finances and represented a further important step in the organization of Wilhelmine commercial, banking, and white-collar employees (Privatangestellten) interests. Active members and leaders of these groups, such as Stresemann, Naumann, and Emil Rathenau, rallied against the government's unfavorable treatment of finished-goods industries as compared to its sustained support for tariff agreements favorable to the old alliance (Sammlung) of heavy industry and agriculture. 16 In fact, the BDI and its closest political ally, the National Liberals of the “broad middle” of Bismarck and Stresemann, had been agitating for years to gain fair representation for commercial, banking, and light-manufacturing interests in the Imperial Interior Ministry's Economic Commission for Industry (Wirtschaftliche Ausschuss beim Reichsamts des Innern).17 Complaining about the stubborn and ongoing refusals of Conservatives to accept inheritance taxes and to roll back finished-goods tax hikes that were damaging to German commerce and consumers, Naumann had protested, “Liberals pay the most taxes, but get little say [in government]. Social Democrats provide the most soldiers of all the parties and get even less.”18

Bethmann Hollweg and Delbrück did not expand light-industry representation on the Economic Commission, just as they refused either to ban the socialist party outright or appease it with a meaningful social policy. They did, however, step up calls for imperialist expansion and initiatives promoting Germany's commercial success. A “gunboat diplomacy” dimension of this policy shift fell short, as the brinkmanship of Bethmann Hollweg and Foreign Minister Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter during the Morocco Crisis of 1911 raised the ire of the French and British and failed to produce the hoped-for wave of nationalist fervor that would carry Conservatives to victory in the elections of 1912. Kiderlen-Wächter, a close friend of Jäckh's from their Constantinople days, worked closely with Bethmann Hollweg on foreign policy until his unexpected death on 30 December 1912. 19

A second dimension of this policy of central interest to the Werkbund—a bid for expanding Germany’s trade territories to compete effectively with such global powers as Britain and the United States—seemed to offer greater prospects. For example, the Foreign Office responded well to calls from the BDI and Stresemann, its most influential member, to mobilize Germany’s worldwide network of diplomatic consulates as energetic facilitators of German commerce and foreign trade. German diplomatic outposts in Rio de Janeiro, Beirut, Calcutta, Genoa, and other cities received official notice of the Werkbund and its bid to improve the quality of German products and support German culture through the cooperation of artists, manufacturers, and merchants. The chancellor’s office also requested that consulates furnish it with addresses of all German businesses and professionals operating in foreign territory who could serve as appropriate conduits for Werkbund propaganda, which the ministry wished to have businesses disseminate as widely as possible in these countries.20

In a related effort, the Chancellery and Foreign Office arranged free passage on a luxury steamer from South America to Germany for Major João Simplicio de Carvalho, Brazil’s incoming minister of transport and onetime War Ministry attaché, so that he could tour the Werkbund Exhibition of 1914. He was to be shown German industry’s finest examples of locomotives, passenger train cars, automobiles, and planes, and was to be treated as an honored minister of state throughout his visit. As the chancellor noted in a letter to the German consul in Brazil, the Krupp Company, one of Germany’s only heavy industries to join the Werkbund, would also take Major Carvalho on one of its tours through the legendary Krupp steelworks; the Krupp company’s vast national and international holdings encompassed eighty factories in nearby Essen alone.21 In Essen, the family patriarch Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach would usher the Brazilian dignitary through detailed explanations of the Krupp steel-production process, followed by a visit to sales displays of Germany’s finest steel-plated armor, naval guns, artillery field pieces, and railway components.22 Between the Werkbund Exhibi-
tion and the Krupp tour, Foreign Office officials were confident that
Major Carvalho's "far-reaching influence would soon be of benefit to
German commerce, German industry, and shipping."

As the Foreign Office was given to understand through documenta-
tion submitted by Ernst Jäckh and Carl lathom, the Werkbund Exhi-
bition Planning Committee had decided that the best products of
German industrial firms in Cologne would encounter the best products of
Western industrial firms that are in the Werkbund and have already been
sold to them.

In other words, the Cologne Exhibition committee was opening its doors to all German industries and products
that are in the Werkbund and already have been
drawn attention to its ideas." In other words, the Cologne Exhibition committee
was opening its doors to all German industries and products
deemed to be of sufficient quality. This move cast the Werkbund as a
kind of umbrella organization whose principles stood to become those
of the invited, non-Werkbund German industries as well.

None of the Foreign Office's measures, of course, proceeded in a
vacuum. Interior Minister Delbrück, for example, assured Foreign
Minister Gottlieb von Jagow that the Werkbund Exhibition had his
full support. The Imperial Colonial Office (Reichs-Kolonialamt), too,
signed on to display Germany's colonial products in its own Werk-
bund Exhibition pavilion. Colonial Office officials laid particular
emphasis on exhibiting examples of Germany's colonial architec-
ture, which they felt was in dire need of improvement given the
sophisticated colonial buildings of the rival British Empire.

The Prussian Commerce Ministry, too, arranged for its applied-
arts schools to exhibit in Cologne. At the same time, and more
important, the Commerce Ministry engaged in unprecedented levels
dependent economic reorganization between 1910 and 1914. Com-
merce Minister Reinhold Sydow, appointed in July of 1909 following
Clemens Delbrück's accession to imperial minister of the interior,
enlarged the influence of the Commerce Ministry to a far greater
degree than either Delbrück or Theodor von Möller before him.

Significant for the Werkbund, the Commerce Ministry asserted
particular authority over aspects of the electric power industry and
the coal industry after 1910. For example, a ministerial decree of
July 1912 ordered state-led, public private associations to assume
control of the generation and distribution of electric power in the
name of serving the public and preventing "private exploitation."
Likewise, Commerce Minister Sydow reenergized ministerial efforts
began under Theodor von Möller to purchase a controlling interest
in the Hibernia Coal Co., one of the largest firms in the Rhine-
land Coal Syndicate. The commerce ministry was not interested in an
outright state takeover of the coal industry; rather, and as the histo-
rian Hans-Heinrich Borchardt has shown, Sydow "wanted to enlarge
the state's financial possessions only to an extent that would allow
the state to exercise influence over price, production, and supply.
The ministry's actions with respect to the electrical and coal indus-
tries suggest that what may well have been planned for the Werk-
bund—had the outbreak of war superceded all other plans—was a
way to convert it, as well, into a form of state-led, public-private
association. In this guise the Werkbund could oversee design and
production quality in an array of finished goods industries that
would be subjected to increasing discipline and concentration, much
as the Commerce Ministry was already doing with the electrical and
coil industries.

Light industry interest groups, too, mobilized to urge greater
recognition of their importance to the German economy on the part
of government. Naumann and Stresemann strengthened ties
between the HANSA LEAGUE and the Hanse League to the point where the two as-
sociations formed a special "industry council" (Industriekol
for non-
cartellized German export industries in late 1912. Hartmann Oswald
Freiherr von Richthofen, a banker and National Liberal who
assumed the post of business manager for the Hanse League in May
1912, proclaimed to a Hanse League audience in Dresden on 17
November 1912 that a new "mercantile imperialism," a "healthy -nót
chauvinistic-imperialism," was henceforth to serve as the inspiration
for Hanse League activities. Here, and as the historian Dirk
Stegmann has noted, von Richthofen was following a course set by
in the second "Hansa Week" in Berlin on 11 November, where Naumann
and Professor Hans Delbrück, a “socialist of the lectern” and editor of the Prussian Yearbooks (Preussische Jahrbücher) had also spoken, Stresemann asserted: “The success of a people’s global economic policies (Weltwirtschaft) is dependent on the global politics (Weltpolitik) of that people. The times have changed ... and if the world outside is being divided up [among established colonial powers], then Germany must also participate.”

Such remarks went hand in hand with the Hansa League’s domestic policy efforts. As commentator Emil Lederer observed in 1912: the Hansa League sought for the first time ever, and “in a consequential manner,” to bring the “small tradespeople and small merchants into a state of economic and political solidarity with the entire urban upper-middle class (städtischen Bürgertum).” That was congruent with Stresemann’s own campaign to encourage group identity among private industrial and commercial white-collar employees, known as Privatbeamten. Stresemann specifically targeted the Privatbeamten so as to stimulate a middle-class political awareness disinclined to support trade unions.

The closer ties between the BDH and Hansa League underscored the suspicion of these two associations toward the so-called cartel of productive estates (Kartell der schaffenden Stände), an alliance viewed with distrust given its support for the anti-commerce tariff positions so clearly favored by the agrarians and heavy industry. The BDH also approached selected leaders of heavy industry in an effort to establish a German Society for World Commerce (Deutscher Gesellschaft für Weltwirtschaft), but negotiating efforts fell apart. Regional associations such as the Foreign Society Ltd. (Auslands G.m.b.H.), however, formed smaller coalitions of heavy and light industry in parts of Germany. This effort succeeded particularly well among industries in the Rhineland and Westphalia, where Cologne, significantly, was a major industrial and financial center. As Carl Rehors, the Werkbund Exhibition Planning Committee chairman, proclaimed in 1911: “The Rhineland is economically on the rise—it is with Westphalia the site of our largest and most important industries. Together they yield thirty-eight percent of Prussia’s taxes, and in relation to the size of the rest of the state and its provinces, the West nourishes the East.”

In concert with official policies and with measures being taken by interest groups and associations, Friedrich Naumann and espe-

pecially Ernst Jäckh stepped up measures to sketch a prewar road map for German imperialism. Naumann’s Assistance (Die Hilfe) generally “took a strongly imperialist line,” whereas Jäckh, a regular contributor, launched a series of additional publishing projects to spell out the terms for a bold, expansive, German-led alliance. The foundation of the German Austro Hungarian Economic Association in September 1913, only a year after the Werkbund’s Congress in Vienna, lent fuel to Jäckh’s vision of a gigantic trading bloc dominated politically and economically by Germany. Such programs for customs unions and various degrees of unification of Eastern Europe under German hegemony were certainly part of a long tradition of discussions among pan-Germanists and colonialists such as Albert Ritter. Heinrich Class, Paul Rohrbach, and others; it seems significant in this context that Jäckh, as the Werkbund managing director, propagandist, and close liaison to the Foreign Office, pushed so strongly for such a program at a time when the Foreign Office and other ministries were acting especially favorably toward the Werkbund as an official representative of German export ideals and cultural values.

Jäckh optimistically and perhaps naively assumed that a German challenge to the British Empire at two of its “soriest spots,” namely Egypt and India, could succeed without provoking outright hostilities. He was certainly not alone among factions of German industry in advocating a “Berlin to Baghdad line”—a rail line and axis of trade projected to stretch well beyond Germany, Austria-Hungary, through the Balkans and Turkey, and ultimately to Baghdad, Basra, and the Persian Gulf. Cultivating Germany’s alliance with the Ottoman Empire had been one of Jäckh’s and Kiderlen-Wächter’s specialties, and though skeptics divided Turkey as the “sick man of Europe,” Ottoman territory represented to many Germans the Wilhelmine Empire’s last and best hope of dominating a portion of the globe that had not yet been effectively “claimed” by any other colonial power. Jäckh would continue efforts to draw the Ottomans and Germans closer together as head of the German-Turkish Union, which, with funding from Werkbund firm owner Robert Bosch, would hold an invited architectural competition in 1916 for a “House of German-Turkish Friendship” to symbolize the coming together of the two empires.
In the plans of Jäckh, Naumann, and Stresemann, as well as Pan-Germanists such as Paul Liman and Heinrich Class, Germany would be able to purchase badly needed raw material supplies from new markets in the Balkans, Turkey, and beyond. In exchange, these allies and trade partners would receive products from Germany’s burgeoning finished goods industries. Commercial, banking, and industrial interests in the BDI, Hansa Bund, and Association for Trade Agreement Negotiations generally backed these types of measures, whereas Jäckh’s patriotic propaganda publications detailed ambitions for challenging England’s “Pax Britannica” with an alternative “Pax Germanica.” To promote this cause, Jäckh produced such publications as Germany in the Near East Following the Balkan War of 1913, Greater Germany of 1914, The Rising Crescent: On the Path to German and Turkish Union of 1915, and Werkbund and Mitteleuropa of 1916. Jäckh’s program was notably more expansive than Naumann’s calls for a pan-German and East Central European Mitteleuropa, although Naumann’s book of the same name, published in 1915, espoused similar economic ambitions.

Jäckh’s prewar publications are just the furthest projection of a pan-German global economic and political power scenario that squared with the evolving policies of government and the lobbying efforts of Germany’s largest industrial associations between 1912 and 1914. They are also of a piece with Muthesius’s July 1914 lecture, “The Future Work of the Werkbund,” and with Naumann’s address a few days later, “The Werkbund and the World Economy.”

Immediately following the contentious Werkbund Congress, Jäckh, Muthesius, Naumann, and Bruckmann would unilingually use the power of the press, and particularly Rudolf Mosse’s newspaper, the Berliner Tageblatt, to dissipate and eventually to dismiss entirely the dissonance arising from Werkbund “individualists.” Well into World War I, the Werkbund leadership’s propaganda and policy efforts pointed the way toward a far-reaching program of “types” for manufacturing, production, and export. However, wartime prerogatives, a militarized economy, and growing international isolation would preclude the realization of the prewar Werkbund’s ambitious plans.

Nearly a century later, what is important to realize is the degree to which divergent disciplinary interests have kept both historians of modern Germany and historians of German architecture and design from considering the interpenetration of political history, economic history, and architectural and design history surveyed briefly here. The unique character of the Wilhelmine era—a time that Kaiser Wilhelm II himself privately described in 1903 as “an infinitely difficult period of history” requiring “the reconciliation of traditional and modern times”—calls on historians and architectural historians to at least do this much: to employ current interdisciplinary methods, in other words, to capture the layered, nuanced dynamics of the Wilhelmine era and its particular, and likewise interdisciplinary, times.

Notes


4. See the literature cited in note 1.

5. For reasons of length, this chapter frequently refers readers to existing literature detailing the internal workings of Werkbundpolitik in the crucial years preceding the outbreak of the First World War. The main effort here is to synthesize new archival research findings with existing historical literature in order to assemble a new and more complete “back story” of the political crises, ministerial machinations, and developments in German Weltpolitik that redirected the Werkbund leadership, if not its entire membership, between 1912 and 1914.

6. Muthesius (see note 3); Naumann (see note 3), 341-50.
16. The historian Kevin Repp has analyzed the widespread participation of the Wilhelmine Burgerwert in extra-governmental voluntary associations and interest groups, a phenomenon he characterizes as a particular Wilhelmine form of "anti-politics." See Kevin Repp, Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and of the Search for Alternatives, 1890-1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
20. See Bundesarchiv Berlin, He Rfo 18206 ("Förderung der deutschen Kunst im Ausland durch Ausstellungen - Deutsches Museum für Kunst in Handel und Gewerbe in Hagen, 1914").
21. The contentious exhibition planning process is examined in detail in Matanza (see note 1), chapter seven.
22. See Ernst Jäch, Der goldene Pflegg: Lebensgeschichte eines Weltbürgers (Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1957); also Klaus Wernerne, Der Wille zur Weltmacht: Außenpolitik und Öffentlichkeit in Kaiserreich am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1970), 68, and Campbell (note 1), 95-47.
23. This is the characterization of Jäch by Wilhelm Arnbom, writing to the Pan-Germanist Heinrich Clos in February of 1914, as quoted in Wernerne (see note 14), 380.
24. Ernst Jäch to Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Alfred Zimmerman, 29 May 1913, as quoted in Wernerne (see note 14), 300. This letter included the Berliner Tageblatt, Volkszeitung, Berliner Morgen-Post, Vienna's Neue Freie Presse, and many others. See also the fascinating study by Peter de Mendelsohn, Zeitungstadt Berlin, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Ulstein Verlag, 1982).
26. For details of the Matthesius Affair (Der fall Matthesius) see Maciuika (note 1), chapter four.
27. On Foreign Ministry and Interior Ministry support for the Werkbund see, for example, Staatssekretär des Innern (Dellbrück) an Gottlieb von Jagow, Staatssekretär des Auswärtigen Amtes, 27 February 1914, in Bundesarchiv-Berlin, R 901/18350, 7a-8b. Also Hans Borchardt, 50 Jahre Preußisches Ministerium für Handel und Gewerbe, 1879-1929 (Berlin: Reichsweg H. Kauff, 1929), 58; Thiektzter, Hermann Matthesius im Werkbund-Archiv, 67. On Delbrück's status as
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“most trusted” colleague of the Chancellor see Dirk Stegmann, Die Eichen Burmards, 415, 430; quoted here, 420.

28. Deutscher Werkbund, 5. jahrestagung, 7. The Matheus-Dohnhoff correspondence is in the files of the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin Dahlem; see the discussion in Marińska (note 1), chapter two. Muthesius, as vice president and vice chair of the Werkbund executive committee, naturally also represented the Russian government at the Vienna meeting, but because that was considered coincidental with respect to his Werkbund duties, he was never mentioned in his capacity as a ranking government civil servant. This appears to be typical for the Wilhelminian government’s behavior in forgoing ties with associations through overlapping memberships on the part of its civil servants.

29. Deutscher Werkbund (see note 25), 10–11.

30. A second resolution allowed the Werkbund’s bylaws to permit supporters or “patrons” (Förderer) to join the Werkbund as either individual or corporate members. This step was taken explicitly to boost Werkbund revenues, membership, and prestige. Deutscher Werkbund (see note 25), 10.

31. Undated letter from Hermann Muthesius to Ernst Jäckh (mid-1912), as reprinted in Ernst Jäckh, Der goldene Ring (Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1957) and cited in Angelika Thekötter, “Vorbereitung der Deutschen Werkbund-Ausstellung Köln 1914,” Herrmann Muthesius im Werkbund-Jeugd, Eckard Stegmann and Angelika Thekötter, eds., (Pub City: PK, pub. year TK), 67. Just as he had written in earlier treatises such as Style-Architecutre and Building Art, Muthesius remained completely convinced of the state’s role as a promoter of German culture. Concerning Muthesius’s stated low opinion of the Werkbund’s “ash heap existence,” see Marińska (note 1), chapter six.


34. Stegmann (see note 12), 216, 269–73; 415–20.

35. Hans-Peter Ullmann, Der Bund der Industriellen, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft 21 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 273; Stegmann (see note 12), 33.

36. Ibid., 214–16; Stegmann (see note 12), 128–81.

37. Stegmann (see note 12, 148–38; 218–21). Chancellor Bihler resisted 80 attempts to enlarge its presence in the Wirtschaftsberatung from the dismal proportion of 5 out of 35 members increases in 1939 and 1941 to the total number of members making up the commission, Stegmann shows, also neglected to accord the Bihler a significantly larger proportion of representatives.

38. Friedrich Neumann, „Von wem werden wir regiert?“ in Die Neue Rundschau 20, Nr. 2 (1909): 336, as quoted in Stegmann (see note 12), 160.

39. Jäckh first met Kiderlen-Wächter in Constantinople on 6 August 1908; see Kiderlen-Wächter to his wife, Hedwig Kypke, 2 August 1908, in Ernst Jäckh, ed., Kiderlen-Wächter, der Stuttgarter und Metzsch: Briefwechsel und Nachlass (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1924). See also Stegmann (see note 12), 241–45. V.R.


40. Bundesarchiv-Berlin, file R 100/18350, Replies from German Consulates in Gemaa, Jazz, Brunei, Singapore, Calcutta, and Batavia to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 10 April 1913; 4 April 1913; 16 April 1913; 24 December 1913; 24 January 1914; and 7 February 1914, respectively; German Consulates in Beirut, Krist-Aufsichtsamt, Deutscher Werkbund Geschäftsstelle, 16 April 1913; 29 April 1913; 53–142. The correspondence and attached lists of German firms active in foreign soil are interspersed in this file with Werkbund documentation and a site plan by Rehorst of the Cologne Exhibition grounds. For a discussion of Krupp and other industrialists at the Werkbund Exhibition see Jeffries (note 1), 218–9.

41. Correspondence between Imperial Foreign Officer and Freiherr von Stein, German Consul at Porto Alegre; between Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg (Im Auftrag gez. Johannes) und Freiherr von Stein; and between Bromberg & Co. Hamburg and Foreign Office, numerous letters all related to Carvalho’s arrangements and dated between 4 May 1911 and 30 June 1914, Bundesarchiv-Berlin, file R 100/18350, 117–151b.

42. Whereas the Werkbund would enter into a hopeful new phase by welcoming foreign dignitaries to an exhibition for the first time in 1911, the Krupp “Cannon King” (Kanonenchöfe) was merely adding to a long list of foreign customers: Krupp sold arms, artillery, shells, and other materials to fifty-two foreign governments before World War I, and sold 21,000 artillery pieces to the German military as well. See William Manchester’s exhaustive study, The Arm of Krupp: 1587–1969 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1983), 263–64.

43. Freiherr von Stein, German Consul in Porto Alegre to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, 8 April 1914, Bundesarchiv-Berlin, file R 100/18350, 184b.

44. “Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Plenar-Vorstandsitzung der Ständige Ausstellungskommission für die Deutsche Industrie am 29 April 1913 ... in Verbindung mit mündlichen Ausführungen der Geschäftsführers Herrn Dr. Jäckh,” in Bundesarchiv-Berlin, file R 100/18350, 59–64, quoted here, 63.

45. The Foreign Ministry further used the Werkbund Exhibition for training and education of its diplomatic and consular staff. Its trained attended the exhibition and heard lectures on various national efforts to promote quality in Germany’s export industries. See clipping from Kolnische Volkszeitung, in. In Bundesarchiv, R 301/616, 33.

46. Staatssekretär des Innern (Diplomatic) an Gottlieb von Jaup, Staatssekretär des Auswärtigen Amtes, 27 February 1913, in Bundesarchiv-Berlin, file R 100/18355, 7a 8b.


49. Sydow was to be the longest-serving commerce minister after Bismarck. He trained as a lawyer and served both as a judge and as a director of the telegraph section of the Imperial post. Borchard (see note 27), 64–66, 69–70.

50. Borchard (see note 27), 58.

51. Like Möller before him, Sydow faced considerable opposition from several quarters. But unlike Möller, Sydow emerged victorious in the take-over battle, in war circumstances of course, achieving full recognition of the state’s take-over in February 1917. Borchard (see note 27), 67.

52. Stegmann (see note 12), 114–51, quoted here, 342.

53. Ibid., 347.

54. Emil Leederer, Die wirtschaftlichen Organisationen und die Reichstagswahlen (Tübingen: 1912), 54, as quoted in Stegmann (see note 12), 344.

55. Stegmann put pressure on Interior Minister Delbrück to back the BDI in the context of what Stegmann called Germany’s Weltpolitik (global politics). See Ullmann (see note 45), 215–20.

56. Stegmann (see note 12), 392–93.

57. The Saar region also saw the successful collaboration of heavy and light industries in a regional coalition. Ibid., 437–38.


60. Fischer (see note 59), 237.

61. Werneck (see note 14), 298–310.

62. In 1913, Jäckh wrote, for example: “Heligoland and the fleet can protect Germany and hold England at bay. Baghdad and the railway can threaten England at its sorest spots—both the Indian and Egyptian borders. This is what England has to fear.” Ernst Jäckh, Deutschland im Orient nach dem Balkankrieg (Strassburg: Verlag Singer, 1913), as quoted in Werneck (see note 14), 292.

63. See Fritz Fischer’s discussion of “Groups and Associations aiming at Berlin–Baghdad as the ‘New German Objective’” in War of Illusions (see note 59), 446–58. The historian Karl Erich Born calls the Berlin-Baghdad railway project, which was first conceived by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid I in 1867, “the most spectacular enterprise undertaken abroad by German banks.” See Karl Erich Born, International Banking in the 19th and 20th Centuries, trans. Volker R. Bergbahn (Warwickshire: Berg Publishers, 1983), 138–46.

64. For a discussion of this competition, to which Jäckh invited twelve Werkbund architects, including Peter Behrens, Bruno Taut, and Paul Bonatz, see Wolfgang Behn, Expressionist Architecture (New York: Praeger, 1978), 71–2; Jäckh discusses the project in several places in connection with the larger goals of the Werkbund and German foreign policy; see Werkbund und Mitteleuropa (Weimar: Gustav-Kiepenhauer, 1916), 16–18; Der goldene Pflug, 202, 322–34; and especially Deutscher Werkbund und Deutsch-Türkischen Vereinigung, eds., Das Haus der Freundschaft in Konstantinopel, ein Wettbewerb für deutscher Architekten (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1930).

65. Ernst Jäckh, Deutschland im Orient nach dem Balkankrieg (Strassburg: Verlag Singer, 1913); Ernst Jäckh and Paul Rohrbach, Das Grösse Deutschland, as described by Paul Rohrbach in “Zum Weltvolk hin durch!” Preussische Jahrbücher (1914), 4, as cited in Fischer (see note 59), 448–49 n. 20; Ernst Jäckh, Der aufstrebende Halbmond: Auf dem Weg zum Deutsch-Türkischen Bundes (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1915); Ernst Jäckh, Werkbund und Mitteleuropa.

66. Naumann’s Mitteleuropa was to become the politician’s best-selling, most translated, and most-discussed publication. Friedrich Naumann, Mitteleuropa, in Friedrich Naumann, Werke, 4: 385–835.