



COMPLEX PROJECTS

ECHOES OF TOMORROW

A PARLIAMENT OF NATURAL THINGS IN BERLIN

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Reflection paper

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COMPLEX PROJECTS
Bodies and Building Berlin
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REFLECTION PAPER

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Project description

The research endeavors to redefine the conventional notion of “Parliament” as a space dedicated to discussion, voting, and law-making. Traditionally, parliaments serve as fundamental institutions within the framework of governments, fulfilling specific functions and embodying meaningful values. They stand as tangible representations of democratic ideals and authoritative governance. Their architecture usually symbolizes the character of the governance both internally and externally, playing a relevant role for the State.

As an integral part of this exploration, the project addresses the evolving needs of the Parliament in response to contemporary challenges. Climate control and management, gender equality enhancement, civil rights, international cooperation, peace, and the formulation of effective local policies emerge as crucial considerations. The Parliament’s role is expanded to accommodate these pressing concerns, thereby becoming a dynamic institution that actively addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by the states.

Furthermore, the thesis delves into the concept of the Rights of Nature, exploring the legal frameworks that grant non-human entities the right to exist and flourish. Drawing inspiration from instances such as The Tree That Owns Itself, the Whanganui River, the Amazon rainforest, and the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, the project considers the modern trends of recognizing and upholding the rights of the natural world, reshaping the conventional understanding of legal rights and representation.

By looking at the limitations of existing paradigms, the project aspires to take a bold step by infusing some of the theoretical concepts of the Parliament of Things into the design process. This theoretical framework, as expounded by Latour, challenges the idea of modernity and the

conventional boundaries between human and non-human entities, emphasizing the interconnectedness of society and nature. The Parliament envisioned for the future is intended to transcend the traditional divide, providing a space where both human and non-human natural elements actively participate in the legislative dialogue.

As a result of these considerations, the thesis contemplates the transition of government systems from “democracy” to “rescracy,” which means from a system of government by the whole population to a system of government both by human and natural entities. This ambition aims to a more inclusive and comprehensive form of governance that accommodates both human and non-human voices within the legislative process.

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The relationship between research and design

The research and design phases of this project were deeply linked, providing several inspirations, challenges, and practical considerations since the beginning. Given the complexity and ambition of reimagining the concept of Parliament to include both human and non-human entities, the timeline of a year given by the Complex Projects Graduation Studio was appropriate. This duration allowed for a thorough exploration of theoretical concepts, providing a solid foundation upon which to build a clever design.

The project’s theoretical basis posed significant challenges in the design phase. While the research provided a profound understanding of the Rights of Nature and the conceptual framework of a “Parliament of Things,” translating these abstract ideas into a tangible, functional design required a link between theoretical aspirations and the feasibility of political systems. This struggle was at the core of the design process, requiring innovative thinking to create a

space that could realistically embody these advanced concepts while remaining realistic.

Not every aspect of the design was directly informed by the research. The theoretical exploration heavily influenced the understanding of natural entities and their rights but did not always provide clear ideas for specific design decisions. For instance, while the research delved into the importance of integrating natural elements into the legislative process, it left open the question of how to spatially and functionally achieve this integration. This necessitated a creative interpretation of the research findings, allowing for flexibility and innovation in design decisions.

The client aspect of the project focused on Berlin and offered valuable insights into the city's political system and ecosystem. Understanding Berlin's unique context helped shape the project but did not result in specific design directives. Instead, it provided a contextual backdrop that influenced the overall approach, ensuring that the design was sensitive to the local political and environmental landscape without dictating precise architectural solutions.

The programmatic design of the building was heavily influenced by the detailed program bar developed in the last semester. This phase was crucial in ensuring the project's practical viability, as it involved careful dimensioning and allocation of spaces. The accuracy of this programmatic planning was evident in the proportions of key environments such as the plenary hall and confrontation room, which matched the envisioned scale and functionality. This precise programmatic work provided a concrete framework on which the positioning of the different functions in the building could happen.

The site analysis played a particularly significant role in informing the design. The choice of a circular building shape was a direct response to the site features and limitations, reflecting a careful consideration of the location's characteristics. Despite the site's context being a large park with minimal

external influences, the analysis of the site's specific attributes, such as topography, natural features, and spatial dynamics, was instrumental in shaping the overall design. This ensured that the building harmonized with its environment, respecting both the natural landscape and the theoretical principles of integrating human and non-human entities.

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The relationship between your graduation topic and studio topic

The central emphasis of the Complex Projects Graduation Studio revolves around the concept of Buildings and Bodies. The Building is seen as a creator of space, light, and shelter, defining the environments where people work and reside. Architecture, influenced by its time and context, embodies the culmination of various physical and functional necessities of the Bodies, dealing with dimensions, mobility, and comfort.

In my project, Bodies and Buildings are reflected by the interest towards a design solution for the Parliament of Things by Bruno Latour, in particular for the natural things of the city-state of Berlin. The Parliament, conceived as a space where people gather to debate, is put into discussion as an old and outdated institution. On the other hand, the Bodies are not only the citizens of the community of Berlin but also the non-human (natural) entities that constitute the ecosystem of the city.

Moreover, the graduation project reflects several of the topics I studied during the entire master's programme, especially the political values of architecture I deeply analysed during my history thesis. In fact, in the thesis, I analysed the symbolic messages conveyed by Casa del Fascio in Como designed by Giuseppe Terragni, and this study was fundamental to introducing to the concept of political symbolism in architecture.

Research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio

The methods of research for my project were developed, according to the studio guidelines, with a specific focus on program, client, and site. For this reason, these three sections are divided to explain in detail how the process was conducted and what results were expected from the research.

Program

The definition of the building's program encompassed several key aspects. Initially, I conducted a thorough analysis of program elements in diverse case studies worldwide. Six exemplary projects were selected about three analytical features (government type, democracy index values, number of seats in the plenary hall) and personal preferences.

The chosen case studies for the comparison were:

- Reichstag Building in Berlin, Germany;
- North Rhine-Westphalia State Parliament, Germany;
- Old Royal Palace in Athens, Greece;
- Louise Weiss Building in Strasbourg, France;
- National Congress Palace in Brasilia, Brazil;
- Jatyia Sangsad Bhaban in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

For each case study, external and internal appearance, project details, floor plans, and sections were collected. In addition to this, the program proportions were calculated in about six primary analytical categories: Committee, Assembly, Administration, Recreation, Visitors, and Functional, based on the square meter size of various rooms within each project.

Subsequently, the results of this analysis informed the calculation of an average program bar for parliamentary buildings. Also, my exploration extended to include the evaluation of two parliament student projects from last year. By measuring the differences between the average program bar and the student projects, I defined six

± personalization margins, offering valuable guidelines for the future personalization of my project's program bar.

However, the program bar is not the only aspect I focused on. Together with a qualitative comparison of views, photos, floor plans, and sections, a comprehensive analysis of the plenary hall shapes protocol was conducted. This examination sought to understand how the size (from small to large) and the shape (opposing benches, semicircle, horseshoe, circle, and classroom) of the plenary hall influence the democracy index, providing critical insights into the spatial considerations that impact democratic processes within parliaments. This investigation provided me with the fundamental notions for imagining the plenary hall of the new Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin.

Client

The identification and analysis of the client involved three interconnected aspects: users, clients, and stakeholders. These facets collectively shape the goals and objectives of the design project.

To initiate the client analysis, an examination of the current clients of the Abgeordnetenhaus was conducted to grasp the existing client dynamics within this specific Parliament. Subsequently, a detailed analysis of Bruno Latour's theory of the Parliament of Things was undertaken to identify possible diverse figures involved in the project.

The process of client definition commenced with outlining the potential users of the project, categorized into two groups: private users and public users.

For private users, the classification was further segmented into three distinct fields:

- Politics-Encompassing the Abgeordnete (Parliamentarians), government officials, technicians, and the Mayor;
- Berlin - Inclusive of citizens and residents, students and teachers, and community activists;
- Tourism - Encompassing visitors and tourists.

On the other hand, public users were organized into the following three main

areas:

- Media - Involving journalists and photographers;
- Things - Inclusive of citizens and residents, students and teachers, and community activists.
- Science - Involving environmentalists, students and professors, and scientists and researchers.

This user classification and description laid the foundation for targeting the primary clients and stakeholders aligned with the project's concept. The interplay between these diverse entities will guide the design process toward the project's overarching vision and objectives.

Site

The process of site selection was underpinned by a mix of group and personal criteria, creating a comprehensive set of requirements to guide the identification of the most fitting location for the project.

Group criteria centre around the overarching themes of health and mitigating overstimulation. These criteria were adapted based on the group strategy, which currently necessitates:

1. Highly Stimulated Area - Within 100 meters of the most stimulated areas concerning air pollution, noise pollution, thermal burden, and traffic congestion.

2. Absence of Category-Specific "Cabins in the City" - Ensuring a distance of 100 meters from existing cabins, which means existing places where people can recover from the overstimulation of the city about mental, social or physical health.

Conversely, personal criteria were grounded in the chosen architectural typology (the Parliament), aligning with the project concept and the context of Berlin. These criteria include:

- Relevance - Clear visibility from public places and natural areas.
- Organisation - Closeness to institutional areas and things associations
- Mix - Positioning integrated into a various context
- Logistics - Proximity to main public transportation hubs.
- Gathering - High footfall and visibility to

a diverse audience.

- Openness - Absence of physical and visual boundaries on the sides.

To do this, several tools and methods were employed to formulate a viable set of locations, including:

- Satellite Image Study, for a comprehensive view of potential sites;
- Line Vector Drawing, for precise representations through DWG files;
- 2D Diagrams, providing insights into the contextual layout of the sites.
- 3D Diagrams, for evaluating massing options and their potential impact;
- Table of Comparison, to evaluate different locations against the requirements for a systematic comparison.

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Relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific relevance

The exploration of a Parliament of Natural Things in Berlin emerges as an innovative attempt in architectural research, dealing with creative ideas that redefine traditional paradigms. The significance of this topic lies not only in its unprecedented nature but in the potential implications that extend far beyond the immediate context.

Embarking on a project without a previous reference poses a distinctive challenge, provoking questions that defy conventional norms. Is it a bicameral system, a tricameral system, or an entirely new configuration? How is the plenary hall designed, and does it conform to existing models, or does it transcend canonical shapes? And also, is it a plenary hall, a market hall, or an entirely new type of space? These questions not only stimulate architectural imagination but also challenge the very essence of parliamentary spaces, pushing for a reevaluation of their form and function.

The need to design a plenary hall that has never existed before calls for a questioning of preconceived notions and a reimagining of the spatial and functional attributes of parliamentary chambers. It becomes an invitation to architects to envision spaces that go beyond historical constraints, fostering an environment conducive to the active participation of both human and non-human entities.

Beyond its immediate impact, the project catalyses a potential global shift. The start of a process that could witness the proliferation of Parliaments of Things worldwide carries immense implications for the future of governance. It introduces an innovative form of democratic expression that accommodates a more comprehensive representation, fostering conversations about inclusivity, rights, and legalisation.

Moreover, the concept's versatility is a key driver of its relevance. The application of the Parliament of Things can be scaled from the

local to the international level, presenting opportunities for adaptation to diverse contexts. Whether implemented within the confines of a city-state or expanded to address global issues, the concept introduces an innovative framework for modern governance.

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Ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered during graduation

Throughout this graduation project, several ethical issues and dilemmas arose, presenting significant challenges in balancing innovation with practicality and integrity.

One prominent ethical choice involved incorporating natural elements into the design without falling into greenwashing or commercial exploitation. The intention was to authentically integrate natural entities into the legislative process, respecting their intrinsic value rather than using them just as symbols of environmental consciousness. This required a careful approach to ensure that natural elements like trees, the Spree river, or ecosystems were genuinely represented and their rights upheld, rather than being superficially included to create green areas inside the building. The challenge lay in designing a framework where these natural entities could actively participate and influence decisions without reducing them to aesthetic or promotional tools.

Another significant ethical issue was the practical implementation of the transition from democracy to "rescracy." The concept of rescracy envisions a government system that incorporates both human and natural entities in the decision-making process. While theoretically interesting and motivating, translating this vision into a realistic political structure created considerable difficulties. It was essential to found the project on current political realities to ensure feasibility into the context of Berlin. This involved reconciling

innovative ideas with existing legal and institutional frameworks. The dilemma was to propose changes radical enough to inspire progress, yet pragmatic enough to be considered seriously by policymakers and the public.

The challenge of genuinely “giving a voice” to natural entities was another core ethical challenge to face. In the project, natural entities were symbolically given a voice, but practically, it was the technicians and human representatives who spoke on their behalf. This limitation highlighted a gap between the ideal and the actual execution of the project. The ethical dilemma here was how to move beyond symbolic representation to actual empowerment of natural entities within the legislative process.

Increasing public engagement with the proposed new model of public institution also presented ethical issues. Engaging people with the concept of a parliament that includes non-human voices required fostering a deeper connection between the public and natural world. The ethical question was how to encourage meaningful engagement without imposing ideas or overwhelming the public with complex concepts. In this sense, a lot still needs to be done, even beyond the architectural level.

In conclusion, the ethical dilemmas encountered during this project highlight the complexities of innovating existing systems while maintaining integrity and respect for the topic. Balancing the integration of natural elements without commercial exploitation, proposing feasible political changes, authentically representing natural entities, and fostering genuine public engagement were all critical challenges.

