

# NIGHT TRAIN HUB BERLIN



# REFLECTION

## REFLECTION

### **Aspect 1: the relationship between research and design**

During graduation the first semester is dedicated to research, while the second semester is dedicated to design. Because of this I was able to develop a conceptual framework using the concepts sustainability, comfort and time-specificity. These concepts proved to be helpful in the first part of the design phase when making conceptual design decisions. However, leading up to P4, when the production phase was in full swing, these concepts could get in the way.

In the research phase I formulated a research question to explore if night train stations are a typology that differs from standard train stations. This led to the following research question: Does contemporary Europe need night train hubs? To answer this question I used three concepts: sustainability, comfort and time-specificity. Moreover, sustainability was a condition as well as a design concept, because night train stations are necessary to be able to travel long-distances in a sustainable way. It seemed strange to me to leave this concept out of the design equation. I chose comfort as a concept because it is a reason for people to choose a certain way of travel (Witlox et al., 2022), which meant comfort could convince people to take the night train. Time-specificity was not a chosen concept, but a characteristic of night train travel, meaning night trains have specific arrival and departure times. Especially sustainability and comfort created a dilemma, because they oppose each other in many ways. For example, adding a lounge or wider platforms is more comfortable, but it uses more energy as well as building materials.

However, I was interested in confronting these dilemmas during the design phase. Moreover in the beginning of the design phase these dilemmas helped me to make conceptual design choices. By expanding the concept comfort to encompass architectural comfort I had a lot of space to work on the architecture of the building. Among other things, this led to the decision to hang a capsule hotel in the middle of the station hall. The main reason for expanding the concept was a sustainable one. Namely, good and beautiful buildings will last longer, and thus are more sustainable. However, leading up to P4 the complex dilemmas as well as the large scale of the building were complicated to work with.

### **Aspect 2: the relationship between graduation topic and studio topic**

This project is part of the graduation studio named Complex Projects: Bodies, Buildings, Berlin 2023/2024. In this studio different typologies are explored by researching the program, site and client of large scale public buildings. This leads to large scale and complicated designs, hence the name complex project. As the last part of the name suggests these designs are located in Berlin. By having the location as a given a preformulated research method was applied. This research method consisted of program, site and client. This was helpful, because it enabled me to look at specific municipal documents that expressed the need for a night train hub.

The studio has nine typologies of which the train station is one. This typology is part of the subdivision flows, which meant that the building's functionality had to be based on the different possible flows. Because of this theme of flows I attempted to create a clear design. Being a night train traveler myself I know how difficult it can be to navigate in a busy unclear station. Clarity was a subject where comfort and architecture collided, which answered my questions surrounding the how of comfort in a design.

The decision to design a night train station instead of a standard train station was based on municipal documents which explored the possibility of a night train station in Berlin. A combination of an interest in sustainability and the specific demands for the location Berlin guided me in this.

### **Aspect 3: the research method chosen by the student in relation to the studio**

As said in the last paragraph the studio was, among other things, structured by a preformulated research method consisting of program, site and client. This three-tiered system led up to a design brief, which helped me to make the step from research to design.

The analysis of the program was divided into three categories: research on the numbers of travelers, train station research, and research on additional facilities. The first category led to an estimation of the amount of passengers, which helped me to decide on the size of facilitations as well as on the size of the building as a whole. The second category was composed of mixed research types such as benchmarking and visiting other train stations, which helped me to gain insight in how train stations function. The third category consisted of literature research on the facilities a night train station might need, because this allowed me to specify my typology.

The second tier is site. By researching different areas based on the requirements of a night train hub I found a site which had a former international train station. Moreover the surrounding area could be further developed. The site-tier was especially helpful, because it allowed me to be precise in the hows and whys of the chosen location. On top of this, this research method gave me the opportunity to visit the site, which was nice.

The last tier is the client-tier. The analysis of this tier is divided into three categories. These categories are users, initiators, and partners. Users are people who will use the building when it is finished. Initiators are parties or people who will initiate the project, thus shaping the design. Partners are important institutions or people who are involved in the project because of their expertise or other reasons. I analyzed these different categories through literature research, which allowed me to create a future scenario in which everybody travels by night train.

### **Aspect 4: the relationship between graduation project and wider social, professional, and scientific relevance**

Despite the demand for a night train station in Berlin, there is only a list of facilities that should be included in a station for night trains (Ramboll, 2022). With my graduation project I tried to contribute to this debate. This shows scientific as well as social relevance. Moreover, as the world is trying to deal with global warming and climate change, questions surrounding more sustainable ways of life arise. This project tries to deal with these questions in two ways. The topic of night train hubs connects to these societal questions. Night trains can replace flying for distances within Europe (Ramboll, 2022). Next to this I attempted to make sustainable design choices. In my opinion this is inherently part of the nearby as well as the far future of architecture. So, this does not only show societal relevance. It shows professional relevance as well. This was confirmed by an expert I talked to during my research. However, I do see many challenges on this part. Sustainable design production is a paradox in itself, and producing buildings in a sustainable way often ends up to be similar to green washing.

This leads me to my next point, sustainable design and ways of living seem to have a hippie-like reputation. Many people see sustainability as stopping short on things like luxury. By combining comfort, which encompasses luxury, with sustainability I explored the possibility of a palace for sustainability. A place where people could get impressed and be convinced that sustainability does not necessarily need to have a tree-hugging reputation. However, with this idea I bit off a bit more than what I could chew.

### **Aspect 5: ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered during graduation**

The biggest dilemma I faced was a paradoxical one between comfort on the one hand and sustainability on the other, with comfort leading to more sustainable travel while, on a design level, impeding on sustainability. I tried to face this dilemma head on, but I doubt if I fully succeeded.