Architecture as a Sounding Board

Friedrichshain, Berlin

Yaren Kopan
5507472

Mentors:

Henk Bultstra, Architecture
Florian Eckardt, Building Technology
Stefano Corbo, Research

Introduction

The democratic space is an essential aspect of urban architecture that can promote community interaction and social cohesion. However, according to Davis (2007), Berlin has struggled with conflicts and contradictions regarding the identity of the Commons, resulting in violent incidents between locals and foreigners. As power structures and capitalist formations push people further apart, future architecture must focus on promoting living together.

The proposed project, Sounding Board, aims to address the relationship between architecture and communication by recognizing architecture as an urban collective infrastructure that generates diversity in every sense. The Public Condenser of the 21st century is envisioned as an active infrastructure that plays an urban role serving various forms of expression and ideologies. The representation and imagination of the Commons, as well as the expression and transmission of knowledge, are associated with communication organs and their employment in the city. In recent history, however, necessary information has been transmitted through a top-down mechanism that reflects the agendas and ideologies of specific communication bodies and institutions.

In the 21st century, people have more freedom to discover and compare information. Therefore, the "old" needs to adapt to the "new" to remain relevant to the public. Existing media organs, such as Neues Deutschland located on our site, may no longer be able to respond to the needs of the public as they represent the old, authoritarian, top-down media.

Old - Top Bottom - Authoritian Communication Model

New - Bottom Up - Diverse Communication Model

When I started the design process, I analyzed Berlin on both the city and global scales. Then, I continued my analysis on the neighborhood scale in Friedrichshain to decode the traces of my findings on these larger scales. During the process, the assignments of our studio under the concept of "research by design" made me realize the importance of democracy in the expression of the people and communication with institutions, which I found on a large scale, and shaped my subsequent design decisions. The culture of unrest and conflicts, which are identified with the people of Berlin, has shown itself throughout the history of the city in different forms of expression, mostly with protests. However, with the addition of new communication channels to our lives, the opportunity to express oneself has diversified and evolved. Therefore, when examining Berlin, it not only suggests large squares that host protests but also, as can be observed on a global scale, allows people to express their voices in the virtual environment without the need for physical space. The desire of individuals to express themselves is no longer limited to spaces but has become a supra-spacial and more complex structure. The traces of this desire can also be seen in the neighborhood-scale analyses. It has been observed that some express themselves with art and reflect their thoughts on surfaces by graffiti while others do it by personalizing their balconies. As a result of all these studies, the following research questions emerged:

"How can the Public Building be a stage for people to realize various forms of expression?",

"Can architecture contribute to the creation of bottom-up programs (media)?",

"In what ways can the virtual environment collaborate with the physical (architecture) and serve to increase the public's freedom of speech and participation?", and

"How can architecture aim to give voice to people with opposing and common views under the same roof, and what kind of spaces can respond to this diversity of views?"
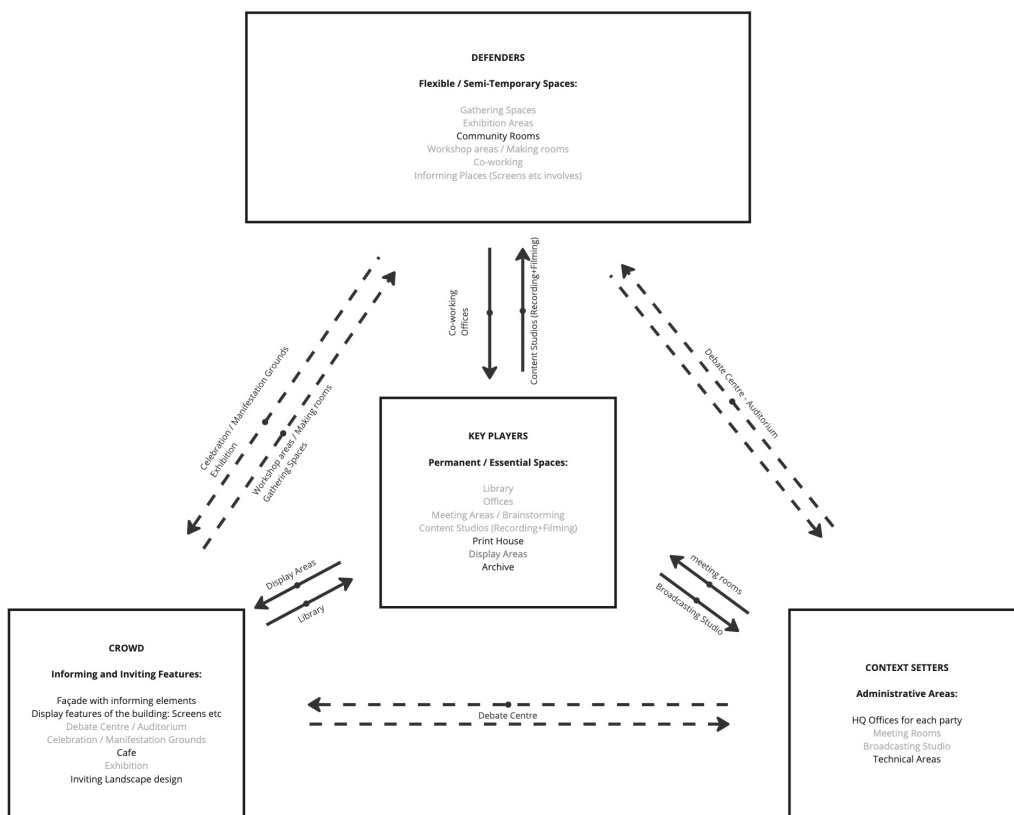
The idea emerged that media and architecture can intersect and be used as tools to support inclusive, diverse, and participatory bottom-up movements. To achieve this, I attempted to combine these two powerful tools under a mutually beneficial relationship. Architecture serves as a free platform for testing ideas (a sounding board), and media shapes the program of this platform.

The Public Condenser aims to generate expressions through various media functions such as broadcasting news, radio, social media, publishing, and participatory activities. The program spaces are categorized as "Display" and "Production" spaces. Each space serves a display function to enable transparent and direct dialogue between different media actors. By creating such a dialogue, a more honest and multifaceted communication can be achieved. To enable such a dialogue, the spaces are arranged in the most flexible way possible. The ground is cleared of all obstructions, and the masses are raised to the upper levels, similar to Arata Isozaki's (1962) "City in the Air" proposal. This arrangement enables a more open and collaborative environment, conducive to sharing and exchanging ideas. (Figure 1)

Overall, The Public Condenser seeks to create a space where media and architecture intersect, serving as a platform for testing ideas and fostering transparent and direct dialogue between different media actors. Through its flexible arrangement and multifaceted media functions, The Public Condenser aims to promote inclusivity, diversity, and participatory bottom-up movements.

The diversity of media creates new forms of expression where different media meet and/or overlap, providing opportunities for users to present their ideas. The ND building seeks new interventions to modernize it and establish a connection with the "new," with the current function of the building being considered one of the main functions of the program. The functional connection needs to be physically reflected in the design of ND so that users can experience the flow between different media and their applications. The design strategies taken for the ND were guided by the principles of rehabilitation to transform the building into a more inclusive and urban integrated element while making it part of the overall program. Additionally, the building is planned to have an underground floor where "display" activities take place, and people are invited to experience what is happening in the Public Condenser as part of the urban fabric.

After receiving feedback on my project in P2, I realized that I needed to establish a better relationship between my structural choices and the program itself. Thus, I started recoding my program in detail, with a focus on defining the actors of my project. This shift in perspective allowed me to see my project not only as an architectural project but also as an interdisciplinary initiative. With a clearer understanding of the collaboration that could be achieved between the actors, I was able to translate this into program spaces and the flow between them. As a result, my research on form resulted in a more rational form with a clear understanding of the structure and circulation. The feedback and my attempts to recode the program of the building led me to a more grounded design.

DEFENDERS

Flexible / Semi-Temporary Spaces:

Gathering Spaces
Exhibition Areas
Community Rooms
Workshop areas / Making rooms
Co-working
Informing Places (Screens etc involves)

Co-working
Offices

Content Studios (Recording+Filming)

Celebration / Manifestation Grounds
Exhibition
Workshop areas / Making rooms
Gathering Spaces

Debate Centre - Auditorium

KEY PLAYERS

Permanent / Essential Spaces:

Library
Offices
Meeting Areas / Brainstorming
Content Studios (Recording+Filming)
Print House
Display Areas
Archive

Display Areas
Library

meeting rooms
Broadcasting Studio

CROWD

Informing and Inviting Features:

Façade with informing elements
Display features of the building: Screens etc
Debate Centre / Auditorium
Celebration / Manifestation Grounds
Cafe
Exhibition
Inviting Landscape design

Debate Centre

CONTEXT SETTERS

Administrative Areas:

HQ Offices for each party
Meeting Rooms
Broadcasting Studio
Technical Areas

miro

With these changes, my previous design scheme also evolved. In my first attempts, I proposed to attach "production" spaces to the injected cores of the building. However, I realized that this approach did not provide a clear relationship between the display and production spaces, which hindered possible scenarios of interaction between the actors. Through revised design decisions, I integrated the display and production spaces and made them more accessible to users. This was achieved by connecting the production hubs to the project's habitable roof, supported by four structural cores. This scheme allowed me to suspend most of the spaces and clear the sunken floor, where the main participatory activities could take place, including protests. Gradually, users are taken to the Neues Neutschland building, where the rest of the story continues with more traditional media practices such as publishing. Thanks to the structural choices, the overall space is user-defined, flexible for possible future interventions, and highly adaptable for future uses where the advocacy of democracy can become something other than media.
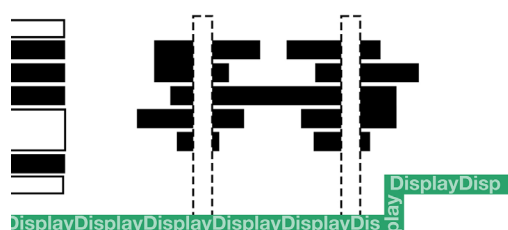
Scheme before P2
Production Hubs attached to the Cores
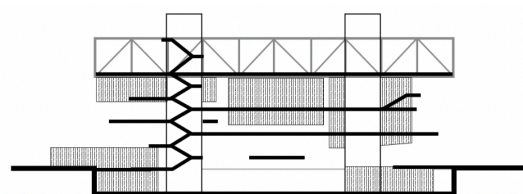
Scheme after P2
Production hubs attached to the roof

In conclusion, this project demonstrates the potential for architecture to serve as a tool for sociological exploration, particularly in relation to communication and expression. By providing structural and functional flexibility, the design can accommodate diverse bottom-up programs that promote inclusivity and dialogue. This inclusive approach allows for a wide range of individuals and organizations to participate in transparent and accountable expressions, fostering an environment that questions and challenges restrictive practices in freedom of expression. Overall, this project offers a powerful example of how architecture can contribute to the promotion of diverse and participatory societies.

Davis, B. (2005). "everyday" protest and the culture of conflict in Berlin, 1830-1980. Berlin -Washington, 1800–2000, 263–284. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139052412.011

Diego Hernández. "Why It's Important Architects Make Things Move" 29 Jan 2022.ArchDaily. Accessed10 Nov 2022.

Urban development. Programme Social Cohesion, NeighborhoodManagement / State of Berlin. (n.d.). Retrieved November 10, 2022, from https://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/wohnen/quartiersmanagement/index_en.shtml