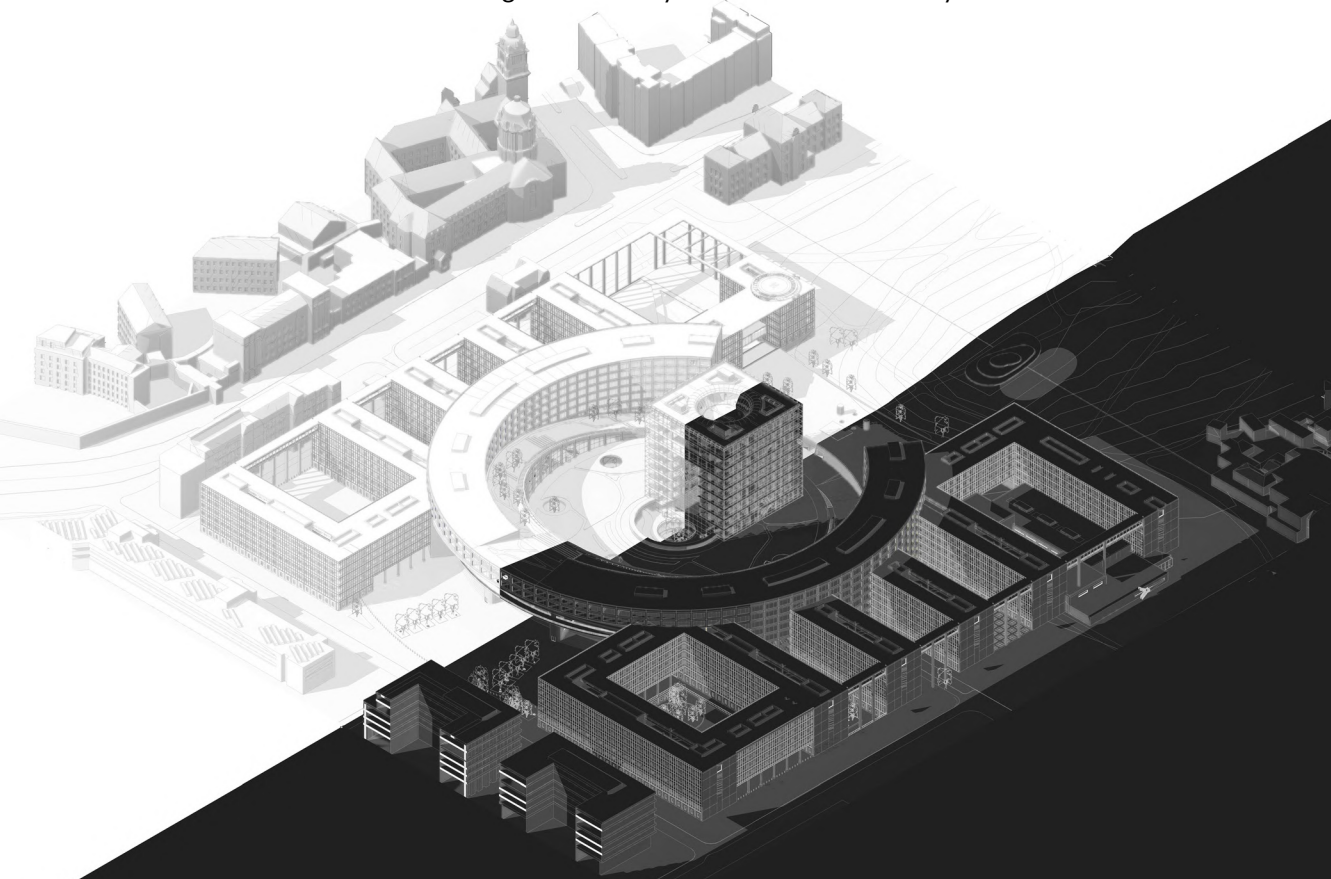


Thesis Reflection

Fortress Without Barriers

Maintaining Accessibility in the Face of Security



Complex Projects Graduation Studio
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Project Description

In an era when rising threats put increasing pressure on security demands in state office buildings, the public trust in these same governmental institutions is on the decline, owing to a sense of detachment and lack of transparency.

This detachment partially stems from the functional and physical separation of people's civic and political lives, leaving public officials as uncountable, a separated class unresponsive to the everyday people, who in turn can glance little of the everyday working of their government.

In other words: it is easier to pass unfavourable legislation when you never interact with the common people and sit in your fortress hidden from protests.

For these reasons, the future must see the creation of new governmental spaces that are public in nature, but also safeguarded from new dynamic threads.

New design approaches in established typologies need to be sought to answer these relationship questions that stem from new state, societal, and technological developments.

The Graduation Project 'Fortress Without Barriers' seek to explore these issues of security and accessibility by using a scenario involving the design of a new Federal Ministry of Defence headquarters in Berlin.

At first glance this typology might be perceived as ill suited to the integration of public life, even agitative. But rather the project places it as the ultimate test for whether these values can be effectively expressed in an urban context. Defence Ministry being the most prime domain of security, on the scale of city within a city, and placing the most private and secured programme imaginable alongside the proposed public functions.

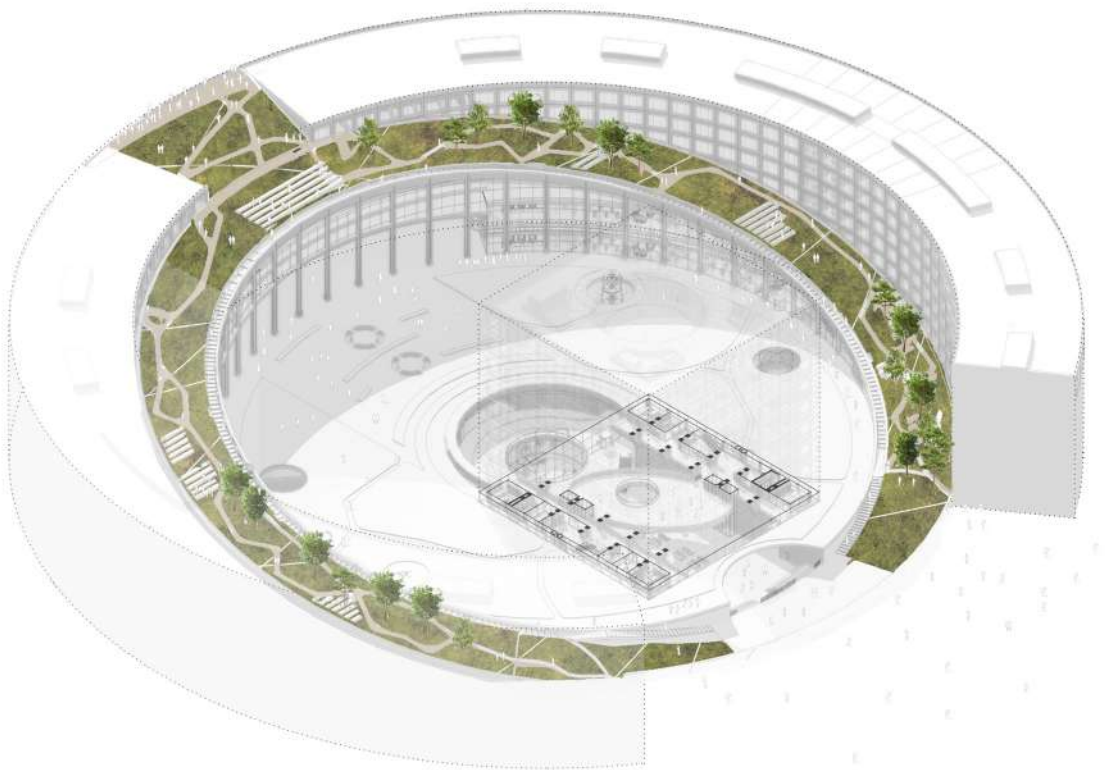
The site is located at the border of Fritz Schloss park, surrounded by the Moabit neighbourhood which remains on the underdeveloped side of Berlin's districts, yet a walking distance away from the federal government district.

Newly constructed and potential plans for transit connections, alongside with the available space and amenities related to the park itself, offer one of the few sites in the city suitable for a building of this scale and programme.

The project's approach to the neighbourhood is to act as a hub of activity between the adjacent city court complex, park recreational areas, and new social and commercial offices. Furthermore, by bringing thousands of employees in the area there is potential to kick-start new developments owing to geographical rebalancing.

To achieve integration of public and ministry users, the project proposes a public Agora at the hearth of the complex, with shops and retail for both the public and ministry employees to mingle. The whole space is then overlooked by an inclined park which provides views of the city and , by focusing views on the Ministry leadership at the centre, reflects inwards upon the government.

Through this integration of the public commercial functions within governmental office spaces, a unique new typology is created, which taken as a whole breaks the public - state barrier.



1. Relationship Between Research and Design

In retrospect, the research phase and the design phase turned out to be more of a loop than a direction. The research process was often coming back to research due to new design decisions, and without the continuous and gradual accumulation of analysis and building-up of complexity, the final project would have been extremely difficult to achieve.

At the begging of the assignment, the task expected of us seemed immense and incomprehensibly complex. However the gradual formation of the project from large to smaller scale, conceptually narrowing down from a typology, to a specific building type, to this specific project, followed by large scale massing, structural and material decisions, and detail and diagram creation, offered us a framework to both accumulate and dismiss various types of graphs, drawings and schemes. These, in the end, resulted in a comprehensive and multi-layered understanding. Never has the saying: 'trust the process' been so true.

Additionally, much of the knowledge we've found out over that process is now so tangentially relevant it no longer appears in the presentation materials, nonetheless it was key to some early and lasting project decisions. Unfortunately, there was also the opposite effect: making a key decision on the aspect of the project that later turned out to be, in fact, untenable. This required a level of reinterpretation, redesign, and giving up of ideals, that would in real life practise be at best avoided and at worst require a nearly complete redesign of the scheme.

It seems to follow than an experienced architect would have avoided these mistakes because they completed such analyses before, and can draw on them to speed up and streamline their decision making processes.

2. The Relationship Between Graduation Topic and Studio Topic

The Complex Projects 2023 semester continued with the Bodies & Buildings topic. Giving us the task of creating "One of Berlin", e.g. a large Complex Building which is functionally specific and therefore a one-off within the city. It is then perhaps ironic that Berlin, with its history of separation, is known as the city of "Twos".

As outlined in the project description, the thesis's topic is public accessibility in the context of secured government buildings. The assumptions of this thesis are that, as Berlin recovers as Germany's capital and the government finalizes its move to Berlin, the demand for more office space will only grow, while the German way of integrating public life with the state offices will further develop. This means both reinterpreting old governmental offices, as can be famously observed with the Reichstag building renovation, and creating and consolidating into new office spaces as this project's design brief proposes.

3. Research Method and Approach Chosen in Relation to the Graduation Studio

The studio provides a clear step-by-step methodology through its structure, which served as a guideline for the duration of the research and design phases. Personally, I felt comfortable with this research based on rational, analytical and gradual progression from larger to smaller scale. And is the type of research I aspire to adopt into my repertoire, having struggled with thorough applicable research in past projects.

Specific to the typology, given the inaccessibility of information, the research utilized a reconstructive approach to determine the size of the programme and benchmarking. This process was in the end adequate but often did not arrive at solid conclusions, reflecting in the inability to make timely decisions on several key aspects of the project, which then had to rely on looping back into research once certain issues were explored through design. One can only expect that in real-world practice this inadequacy would be mitigated by receiving baseline data and access to proprietary information from the client, an working in a team of people with various background and experiences.

The research of the site, history of Berlin, and government of Germany played a role in helping to understand the unique and unsteady context this project would find itself within. From an emic, insider perspective, the research followed the opinions of the public and statements of the government on the various problematics of state buildings, the deign competitions and reuse or old structures. But perhaps the most helpful informations from this perspective was gained from the site visits and urban context on the ground level. The etic outsider approach comprised more of analysis of comparable situations in history leading that led to similar requirements and programme. Its applicability to this context remains questionable, its however allowed for objective findings that helped to expand and evolve the typology in question.

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

As a proponent of the idea that architecture is not just a reflection of our society's values, but it can in turn help to shape said society. The exploration of theses ideas in even just a theoretical project becomes worthwhile by itself. And although the project is probably not a realistic proposal were the government's move to Berlin be finalized, it nonetheless illustrates the outlining issues such a project would have to address.

Perhaps its relevance can be described best in the form of an existing, but antithetical project currently under construction: The new headquarters for the Egyptian Ministry of Defence, which along with the rest of the new capital district are located far from the centre

of the population. Its (lack of) urban integration could be interpreted as making it safe from public protests, an enclosed system that hopes to separate leadership and officials from public scrutiny and accountability.

This thesis would then represent the opposite approach to governing, which is in line with the apparent aims of the German government and its approach to (literal) transparency and accessibility in Berlin's Federal Ribbon.

5. Ethical issues and Dilemmas

It is perhaps ironic the main ethical concerns for this project are those that arise from its urban implementation. We must first suspend our disbelief by accepting the need for consolidation of multiple Defence Ministry branches existing across several cities into this one enormous office complex in the centre of Berlin.

Contrary to the democratic themes of the project, it is hard to believe such grand construction project would be approved of by the locals, especially since it technically calls for demolition of several low-density housing structures on site and is co-opting the park and public facilities there for its own purposes.

The project works on the big scale but would it actually, meaningfully, contribute to the living experience of a passerby? Would the public commercial programme not only further create a separate environment for the bureaucrats? The duality of forcing the projects integration with the public. The fidelity of the project is therefore primary determined by the public perception and support for it.

In today's political climate, it is perhaps the case that the time of big, grand state projects has passed, as people nowadays are concerned more with social services and standard of living.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the whole graduation project, I found it was very motivating, and a good cumulation of all I have learned in my education so far, leaving me eager to start gaining actual experiences in real life practice. Given the urban context, I found it a most thorough example on the awareness of public-relation issues and the actual difficulty of appeasing all potential parties with often conflicting requirements.

Conversely, regrettably I have not achieved one of my primary goals: to manage a smooth design process from start to end. One that doesn't disappear in the details and doesn't lose focus and direction due to continually adding new design elements. As a result, as in previous semesters, the final product is in my opinion intricate and well worth the time, but not an example of a "holistic design solution". Given the gradual accumulation of complications of this project, in retrospect I should have just made the initial building massing a simple geometric shape.

