

Bau(m) BERLIN

Building the Future Commons
Building Connections
Building Things

introduction

This graduation project sets out the task of creating a 'New Urban Lounge & Urban Commons' in Friedrichshain, east Berlin. This public building should function as an urban condenser, and thus bring people from the neighbourhood together. For me, such a space should allow for interaction and connection between the people living in/ passing through Friedrichshain. It should be a place that is able to connect people from different backgrounds so that, in particular social minorities, are included and can become part of the Friedrichshain community.

Being formerly part of East Berlin, and thus East Germany, Friedrichshain used to be under communist rule, something which is still visible today due to its urban plan and architecture. The selected area of the Bezirk (District) is divided into three smaller neighbourhoods. It is divided by the Straße der Pariser Kommune with Andreasviertel on the West and Weberwiese and the Wriezener Bahnhof on the East. Due to post-war development, Friedrichshain, like many other areas of Berlin, is greatly characterised by the 'plattenbau' typology.

Preliminary research and a visit to Berlin made clear that the area is lacking qualitative public spaces and places whilst there being great potential for development. On top of that, it appeared that people were rather disconnected with their environment and some social minorities were left out. This made clear to me that a place for people to come together and connect was indeed vital.

In general, it is my belief that the social issue of disconnection in neighbourhoods and the exclusion of minorities is not limited to Berlin. For that reason, the concept of a public social connector for Berlin could function as a prototype for other places.

Other research on connections and routes in Berlin allowed me to map out key routes and places of Friedrichshain (Fig. 1). As a consequence, these studies gave insight in valuable green spaces and public buildings in the area and how they were used (Fig. 2). During my visit to Berlin, this ended up being particularly useful in finding a valuable site for a public condenser in Friedrichshain.

The design site I have finally chosen is located along the route I took when walking from the Ostbahnhof train station to my hostel along the Str. der Pariser Kommune. It is a longer park zone that could use a lot of improvement on the way it is designed, especially when taking into account its central position in the area and location along the busy main road. Upon arrival, the connection to the long stretching park was so bad that I ended up walking on the narrow pavement along the street instead of the park next to it. The poor connection was one of many things that should certainly be improved.



Fig. 1.: Friedrichshain: urban routes and spots

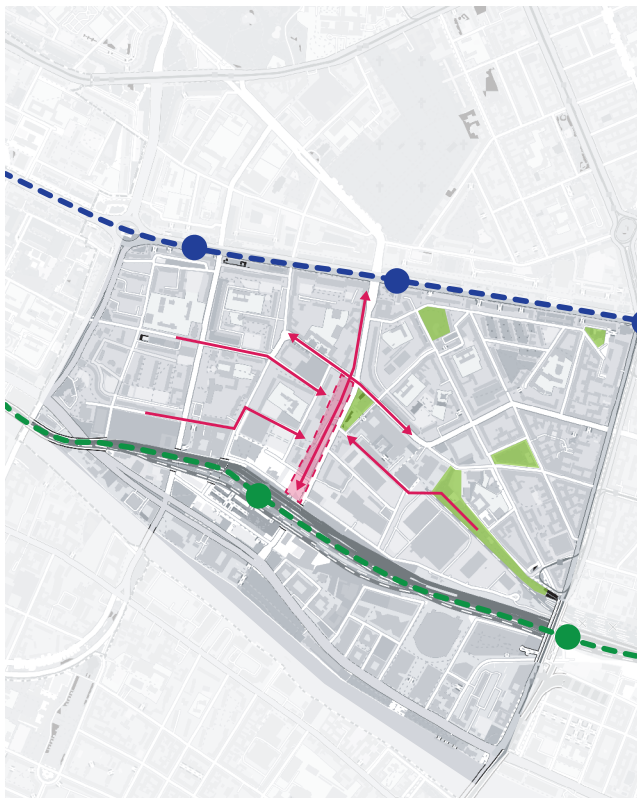


Fig. 2: Friedrichshain: urban parks and neighbourhood routes

A more social note that was visible, not just in this park, but in green areas throughout the neighbourhood, was the huge number of homeless people living on the streets. Even though the area has a few homeless shelters, a place for social minorities to (re-)enter society seemed to be missing.

Upon my return from Berlin, I started to look into social spaces in The Netherlands, mainly my hometown Rotterdam, that work on social reintegration. An effective method for this, was found to be the act of making, so crafts and used at 'Pluspunt Rotterdam'. Here, making, thus creating, things, gave these people a sense of belonging, a belief they do matter.

All this combined, my conclusion was to design a maker's space that could be used for a much broader set of activities. Therefore, I added various other programmatic functions, creating an overlap in the type of user, thus a reason to interact. This public building will be positioned in the formerly mentioned park zone, opposite the Neues Deutschland building, at the corner of Rùdersdorfer Str.

research & design

As the 'Public Building studio' is based on research by design, a lot of my process founded on trial and error. However, especially at the start of the project, reading papers on social integration and visiting social workshops, such as 'Pluspunt Rotterdam', helped in shaping the program of my building. Consequently, the input given allowed me to find other reference projects that could help with understanding typologies, such as wood workshops. Later in the design process, this allowed me to visit the design and craft studio of Piet Hein Eek in Eindhoven (Fig. 3). This visit gave extra insight in ways to design a workshop space.

Secondly, the act of designing (as this is a research method within Research by Design), allowed me to test different spatial ideas by seeing if they work. An example of this is the passage in my building that works as a way to get close interaction between people and function as a meeting space for its users. At first however, I designed this passage as cut through my people and thus outside and open to weather condition. For this I mostly looked at the way OMA designed their cut through the 'Rotterdam Kunsthal'. As I would like this space to be used as a central axis in my building for people to gather, I realised this would much better if this were a space inside the building. For that reason, I chose to make this passage part of the interior building climate and close it at night (Fig. 4). This 'feedback loop-approach' was also the primary method of research and design, in addition to reading literature.

In trying to create a building that allows for social inclusion, the program tries to cater a wide array of people by having different type of functions for people to interact. At first, the main function of the building is a work-



Fig. 3: Central corridor, design studio Piet Hein Eek (Eindhoven, NL)

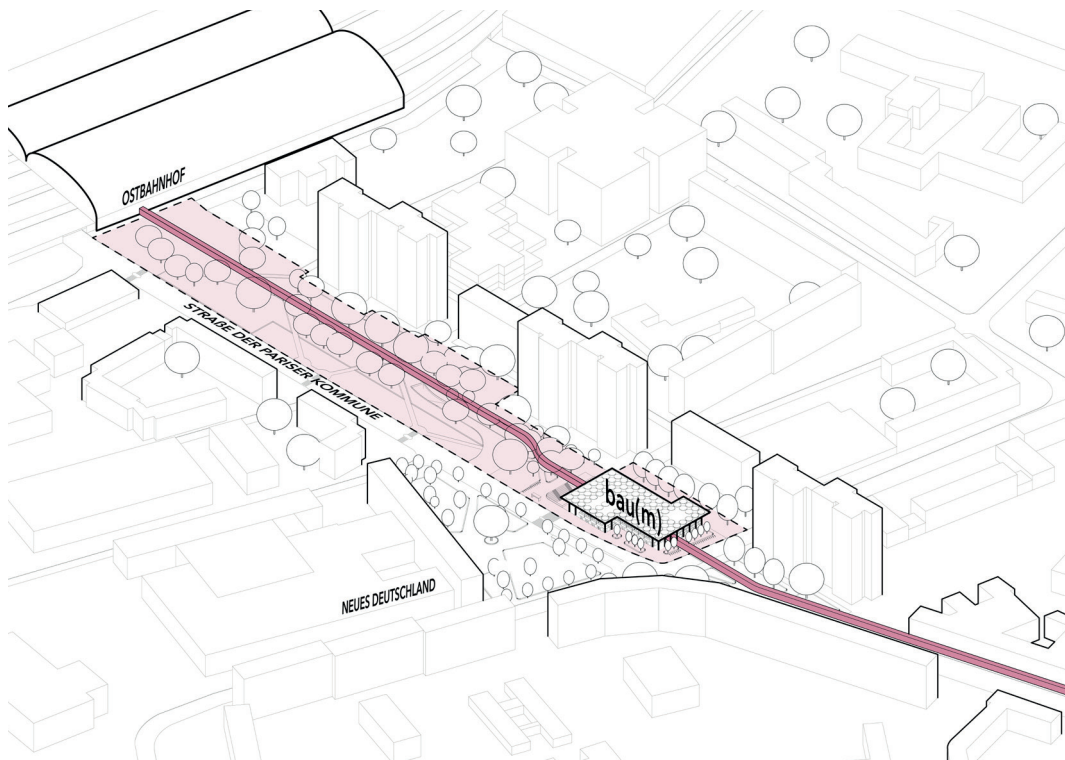


Fig. 4: Urban pedestrian route continuing through building

shop space where pieces of art and smaller pieces of furniture can be made from scrap by social minorities as a way of giving these people a space to get back on track and learn crafts to re-enter society. To create the interaction with people, the workshop is connected to a small shop for people to buy products or hand elements they don't need or want to be repaired. Urban farming land is placed in the park and links to the restaurant in the building to sell food with local products. Then also, the building hosts and place for social support that is linked to a night shelter for homeless people. This way, multiple cycles are at hand to create these interactions.

academic & societal value

Through the design brief, the studio project aims for a Public Condenser using the design topic of 'Multiplicity'. With this aim, the public can be brought together in a space that is sustainable, adaptable and resilient.

For this project, social inclusivity is taken as the approach to condense the public. For it, the German verb 'bau', meaning 'to build', is combined with the noun 'baum', meaning 'tree', into 'bau(m)'. Transcriptionally, the word 'bau' resembles the design concept in threefold. Firstly, it is a building where things can be made, crafted, or build in workshop spaces. Secondly, interactions and connections can be made (built) between people by assembling multiple functions in my building. Thirdly, the use of the building will result in 'building' memories, together, as a community.

As for 'baum', the structural columns are shaped as arches, resembling in some way the shape of a tree. Also, the building is positioned in a park and the main structural material is wood, that comes from trees.

Academically, the project relates in various ways to the topic of multiplicity. By using a grid structure with columns, a predominantly open plan is created, providing great flexibility. In addition, standardised dimensions are used as a way to allow for better adaptability. The element of flexibility and adaptability combined equally makes it an element of sustainability as it allows to be transformed for many times, if needed.

Lastly, as mentioned before, the building tries to bring people, with all their differences and cultural backgrounds together, make them see each other for who they are whilst developing a close community bond. Especially in bigger cities, where there are these many differences between people, a concept like rau(m) could be really useful as a way to promote social inclusion. Therefore, the concept of 'rau(m)' could be a prototype and used in other locations (fig 5).

bau(m) BERLIN
bau(m) MUNICH
bau(m) AMSTERDAM
bau(m) LONDON
bau(m) PARIS
bau(m) MADRID
bau(m) ROME

Fig. 5: bau(m) as a prototype