

# Reflection Paper

Student:

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Studio:

Complex Projects Graduation Studio 2023-2024

Project title:

Hybrid Communicator

## 1. Project description:

In this graduation project of a complex studio, a building typology (parliament) and a building theme (digitalisation) were assigned to me, in which the challenges were to consider how to overlap the typology with the theme in order to invent a new form of building that works differently from traditional ones. With regard to this background, the research question was defined as **how hybrid-communication (digital + physical) can generate a more inclusive discussion environment in district parliament?** Through an architectural and theoretical research phase, the relationships and applications of hybrid communication in the district parliament were set as the following: to use digital communication methods to coordinate and broadcast the traditionally unorganized and hidden mass opinions, and to stimulate and intensify physical communication which are influential for making and changing political decisions. Therefore, the digitalised parliament, entitled as “hybrid communicator”, consists of basic parliamentary programs (parliamentarians’ offices and a plenary hall), and a “people’s voices gallery” with tools facilitating physical and digital communication. Additionally, data storage halls are introduced within the building, according to the digitalisation group requirement that all building typologies within the group should have a data hall to decentralize digital infrastructure and raise digital awareness.

## 2. Reflections of relationships between research, research methods and design:

Firstly, the research framework, including extensive research of program, site and client, was oriented according to the intersection of assigned themes and the proposed research question. In this project, the research phase includes analysis of parliament in Berlin, with the perspective of digitalisation lens. With this method, the assigned theme actually formed a lens for us to evaluate and identify the insufficiency of the existing architecture, and think of a way of how to improve the design with the theme of digitalisation. For example, in the research session of the program, the researches of existing parliaments have shown that although parliaments are defined as democratic architectures, those in Berlin are rather introverted architectures exclusive to the public, especially the parliaments in district levels. With the digitalisation visions, the people’s voices digital gallery which broadcasts public opinions, can then be introduced as a response to enhance both the publicness and level of democracy of a parliament. This way of assigning the building type with a new theme helps me to explore new possibilities of a building. However, although the assigned theme of digitalisation was proven to be highly relevant to a parliament design according to the research, an exploration of themes, which might have the potential to be better than digitalisation, is also a task that I would like to achieve further.

Secondly, the research framework of complex studio is highly related to its theme of complexity, which guides us to implement extensive researches in diverse aspects, and to coordinate the researched products as the design brief which shapes the design. For example, the program research identified the existing conditions and spatial requirements of district parliament, digital galleries, discussion facilities and data centers; the site research identified the different aspects (history, urban, architecture, social, culture, etc) of the chosen site Fennpfuhlpark; while the client research identified future ambitions of clients and needs of users. Complex research resulted in complex design conditions, including both opportunities and constraints, and this constructed the challenges of how to coordinate all the information gathered, and to orientate the design strategies to seize most of the opportunities under the constraints. To me, this quite structured research and design approach is more of an extensive, rather than an intensive approach. Compared to an intensive approach, which spends most of the time concentrating on a few specific directions to create highly specific, or even extreme design; the value of this extensive approach is to create a more balanced design which can respond to extensive conditions, while to inject new ideas (e.g. the gallery) with a more adaptable and realistic thinking. Both approaches have their own strength, but how to enable more room for in-depth research and design specificity within an extensive design framework is something that could be further explored.

Thirdly, this studio focuses on designing with constraints, in which several design requirements are defined according to the individual and group research. For example, the site plot and building program bar are defined as individual requirements, while to install a data storage hall within the all building designs within the digitalisation group is a group requirement. In the design process, I realized that overlapping several requirements from diverse perspectives construct both opportunities and burdens. For examples, when I tried to link introduce the data hall within the parliament according to the group strategies, it was an opportunities as the data hall can be identified as a democratic symbol of display of public opinions in digital age; while it was an burden as the privacy and presence of data hall limits the possibilities of language and circulation within the public design, which made me reflect on were the group requirements rather benefits or limit the design more. I think this exercise of defining requirements could be regarded as an experiment, which reflects that building design without any requirements could be highly irrelevant to the context; while setting too many requirements could easily limit design possibilities and functions in an unnecessary way. Before defining any requirements, how to appropriately define requirements should be firstly considered.

### **3. Relationships between graduation project topic with societal values**

This project, hybrid communicator, which combines traditional building types with new vision of digitalisation, reminds me to be explorative and keep my design attitude to be up-to-date with the latest innovations of society. The lifestyle of people is changing drastically from the modern era to the current digital era, as from the classical era to modern era. In this way, architects should be responsive to negotiate the architectural design according to the social living mode under the digital era. In this project, the aspects of high accessibility and mobility of digital communication methods, such as social media, are taken into account, in which the people's voices gallery proposed allows the users' opinions to be easily uploaded and broadcasted. The threshold of political engagement of citizens is therefore lowered through digitalisation. However, we should also avoid applying every technology without having understood the context and users' needs. For example, remote meetings, which reduce needs of physical spaces, were firstly considered in this project, while the later research revealed that although usage of remote meetings were on the rise, parliamentarians still prefer to have physical communications.

#### **4. Relationships between graduation project topic with ethical values**

Digitalisation is a controversial topic which raises ethical issues. For instance, while digitalisation strengthens and mobilizes public opinions, it also raises social conflicts. After the study of theories of digital ethics, my position is that the benefits and drawbacks of a tool (architecture) do not depend on the tool itself, but how we use it. In this project, even with the risks of conflicts, the people's voices gallery was firstly proposed to stimulate the discussion environment, then measures such as separated private-public circulation and security check were proposed to reduce conflicts, in which the protections would also depend on the management of the parliament. Ultimately, the development of parliamentary democracy should be more about creating a more inclusive and rational discussion environment, but not to burden discussions by reducing conflicts.