

P4 REFLECTION – A STAGE FOR BERLIN

Student: Thomas Hogervorst

Student number: 4700120

Studio: Complex Projects

Studio topic: Bodies, Buildings, Berlin

Date: 22-05-2023

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to reflect on the graduation process. Various aspects of the graduation process will be discussed and reflected upon. These various aspect include the relation between research and design. The used research methods and approach. The relation between the graduation and studio topic and its position within the architectural field. The wider social, professional, and scientific context in which the project can be placed. And the ethical issues and dilemmas raised by the architectural proposal.

The goal of the studio is to find future development potential in the context of Berlin, guided by nine public building typologies. The graduation topic falls within the opera typology and the performance scene of Berlin. Research conducted into Berlin showed that the city has three opera venues that are heavily subsidized by public funding. The public funding that the three operas receive is, however, not aligned with the societal interest in the art form. The opera is visited by a homogeneous demographic and a general decline in interest is visible over the past decades. Meanwhile, the opera buildings themselves, although receiving a lot of public funding, offer little public interaction besides the performance visit. At the same time, research into the Berlin cultural scene revealed a thriving and strong cultural landscape, but with a lack of rehearsal facilities to support this.

As a consequence, the proposed architectural intervention positions itself as a public performance center where people can come to enjoy diverse performances, get educated in performance, participate in performance, and evolve performance. The design is accessible and inclusive, promoting Berlin opera and performance culture.

Research and Design

The research and design are intertwined throughout the project. In the first phase of the project, extensive research was conducted into the context of the project. The research was carried out with a focus on the operatic and cultural landscape of Berlin and its relation to the global context. The initial context analysis can be assigned to different topics: social, cultural, historical, urban, and topological. The uncovered information about these topics forms the basis of the design brief, which is presented at the end of the first design phase.

The research into opera visitor numbers and demographic in Germany combined with research into the Berlin opera scene have left their mark on the architectural proposal. The research influenced the design to become more public-accessible and multi-functional than the typical opera typology. The design responds to the declining interest of the public, with an open

structure that extends the public realm into the heart of the building. While expanding the public program with the addition of public performance spaces. Both decisions allow the Berlin inhabitant to benefit personally from the public funding the opera receives, and strengthens the future of the Berlin cultural scene.

Thus, by conducting extensive contextual research first, the resulting architectural proposal can structurally guide design decisions throughout the different scales of the project. Therefore, the conducted research forms the base of the design.

Relation between the graduation topic, studio topic, master track, and master program

In the studio, the future development of Berlin is investigated through the lens of big architectural interventions of nine typologies of public importance. The relation between the body and the building is a central theme in the development of these buildings.

In the Berlin opera houses, there is limited interaction between the building and the visitor. The opera prioritizes the performance production above the experience and freedom of the body. The architectural proposal for the performance center integrates a more human-centered approach for the opera, allowing for interaction in the building between that what the body sees and what the body can do. The design gives the visitor agency of their visit by creating multiple ways of interacting with the performance and performance production. Resulting in a design that offers a wide variety of personal experiences.

Giving the visitor more agency inside the opera means that the building design becomes more complex. The complexity increases since the different compartments and flows of the opera have to be solved differently to still ensure a solid performance production. This spatial puzzle of the body clashing with functionality is an important topic for the design of public buildings.

Research method and approach

The research approach was largely structured by the studio. The studio periodically prescribed research topics and results/products as a means of communicating research conclusions similarly. The research was partially conducted as a group and mostly as individuals. The research has structurally been carried out over three domains: the program, the site, and the client, in that order. For each phase, appropriate research methods were chosen to conduct the research in the specific domain. The program domain was mostly studied through literature studies and reference project analyses. The site domain was researched through site mapping and a site visit. And the client domain was researched through literature study. The design brief was the concluding product of the main research themes. Focusing on one aspect of the research had the benefit of gaining as much knowledge as possible on a certain topic. However, often I found myself coming back for specific knowledge. The structural and isolating approach of research meant that an overview of relevance and irrelevance was partially lost. This loss in overview sometimes resulted in gathered knowledge that is not applicable to the design.

Wider social, professional and scientific framework

The architectural intervention proposes a model for cultural institutes which redefines their relation with the public. In which the cultural institute creates spaces that benefit both the

preservation of cultural heritage as well as the social inclusion of all. The benefits of the increased interaction with the building typology can be categorized by the UN sustainable development goals. The UN development goals are shared guidelines for the benefit of peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2022).

The first development goal is development goal 10.2, which aims to empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic or other status (UNDESA, 2022). The architectural proposal addresses the development goal by broadening the scope of the program. The programmatic change enables more people to engage with culture and empowers people to partake in activities that were not easily accessible before. Therefore the building empowers and promotes the social, economic, and political inclusion of all.

The second development goal is Development goal 11, which aims to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. (UNDESA, 2022). The architectural proposal reaches this goal as a consequence of increased societal engagement. More people share a connection with and partake in cultural heritage, which ensures the preservation of the culture for future generations.

Ethical issues and dilemmas

In theory, the architectural proposal forms a performance center for the inclusion of all and the preservation and promotion of performance culture. However, there are some aspects that the architect does not control which can diminish that status.

With three already existing opera houses and countless other performance venues that Berlin possesses, the case for an additional opera performance center is difficult. An additional opera generates more public cost for cultural institutions and requires a large number of resources for the construction, which can be questioned in a time where building materials attribute heavily to carbon emissions. However, the scope of the architectural proposal differs much from the Berlin opera houses which made the option of transforming a current opera near impossible. Therefore, the choice was made to use the architectural proposal as a performance venue for all three opera companies, thus not increasing public funding for an additional opera company. As well as the choice for a flexible structure made out of constructive timber where possible. This design approach increases the future flexibility while reducing the current impact of the resource emission cost. Additionally the architectural proposal benefits Berlin through its catalyst effect on the urban development of Berlin's periphery.

The architectural proposal is situated in a former industrial context which is underdeveloped. The site was partially chosen because of the rich creative and cultural scene, which can stimulate activities in the building. The presence of this scene is due to the cheap rental prices of the area. A successful implementation of the project in its local context might, in time, result in the gentrification of the neighborhood, raising rental prices and eventually pushing the creative and cultural scene away. Some questions that arise from this are the following: When this happens does the building still benefit the Berlin cultural scene? And with less cultural collaboration in the area, will the building still perform a similar role in the Berlin cultural landscape? In a way, the success of the project can lead to its downfall. However, one might argue that by then the facilities of the building and its status have transcended the reach

of the immediate neighborhood and function on a city-wide level, reducing the impact of a lost presence of the creative and cultural scene.

Furthermore, for the inclusion of all in the project, as prescribed by the UN development goal, the economic status of someone should not matter. Therefore an important question that remains for Berlin policymakers is to decide what aspects of the building are free to use, and additionally, if fees are required for rehearsal space rental and courses. The height of the fees that is asked for the public facilities determines the real social inclusion of the Berlin public. And thus the success of the project.

What's next?

The further development of the project will focus on the urban integration of the project on the site. The open design and inclusion of public space in the scope of the architectural proposal require well-designed urban connections. The building has been developed to work as a system until now. The design of the public realm and outdoor green spaces will elevate the design and integrate it in the context.

Sources

United nations department of economic and social affairs. (2022). *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11>

United nations department of economic and social affairs. (2022). *Reduce inequality within and among countries*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10>

United nations department of economic and social affairs. (2022). *The 17 goals*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>