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Bodies & Building Berlin studio

Energy

& LIVE &

**REFLECTION**

Academy of Alternative Music



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## **COMPLEX PROJECTS**

**Bodies & Building Berlin studio**

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## **Introduction**

Berlin, once a bastion of counterculture and artistic freedom, faces pressing challenges threatening its renowned music scene. The process of gentrification is having a detrimental impact on the once-thriving artistic community, with the result that musicians are being forced to the margins as housing becomes unaffordable. Public spaces, once hubs of creativity, are now contested by commercial interests, suffocating the spontaneous music scene. Meanwhile, Berlin's diverse subcultures, the lifeblood of its creative spirit, struggle for survival due to inadequate support from traditional music education systems.

Amidst these challenges comes this project: an academy for alternative music. Such an institution provides not only educational resources but also affordable housing, countering the negative effects of gentrification and providing a stable foundation for a collaborative community. Breaking free from the constraints of conventional music schools, the academy fosters innovation to meet the dynamic demands of the modern music industry and pushes artistic boundaries in a flexible and inclusive environment.

## **What is the relation between your graduation project topic and the master track Architecture?**

The master track Architecture aims to equip students with professional skills to address societal challenges using architectural disciplinary methodologies. This includes confronting urgent issues such as the climate and energy crises. The Complex Projects design studio, located in Berlin this year, offers a unique opportunity to explore the intricacies of architecture in the hustle and bustle of a metropolitan city.

My graduation project aligns with the program's objectives. It poses a research question of tangible social relevance, while embracing experimentation and imagination in its solution-finding process. Instead of indulging in overly optimistic utopian visions where bread gives way to roses, this project endeavours to ground

the experiment with a feasible financial, structural and construction scheme brick by brick. By creating a research-supported design, it contributes to the overarching aims of the master program while exploring the complexities of architecture in a real-world context.

### **How does the project respond to the research question?**

The project confronts the paradox inherent in the research question: how to design a music academy that institutionalises alternative music culture, which by its very nature resists institutionalisation. To address the challenge, the project should refrain from imposing governance or restrictions on musicians, while maintaining a sense of order to prevent social instability. It should avoid any preconceived spatial quality, while meeting the necessity of providing conducive spaces for music production.

The design brief and proposal tackle these challenges by avoiding differentiation between music genres and educational stages, allowing for maximum freedom and autonomy in the curriculum. Meanwhile, the essential aspect being carefully designed is the spatial sequence of users' life routines. By focusing on the common denominator of different musicians, which is the intertwining of their individual lives with collaborative musical careers, the project fosters a sense of community among different musicians. This is exemplified in the layout of the building, where the relationship between communal and private spaces facilitates collaboration, performance, and personality.

### **How did your research influence your design and how did the design influence your research?**

Research is the foundation of the problem-solving design process. For instance, research into spontaneous performance spaces and musicians' daily routines inspires the fundamental spatial relationships within the design. Additionally, research on Berlin's non-profit housing organisations and Karel Teige's concept of "minimum dwellings" provides valuable references for developing a financially feasible strategy for affordable housing within the project.

Conversely, the design process also influenced research. During the second phase of the project, the formal intuition of architectural design led to the proposal of connecting both sides of the river with two bridges, creating a distinctive frame on the water. My pondering on the feasibility and implications of this proposal widened the scope of the research and encouraged further experimentation. This design prompted my investigations into the evolution of the amphitheatre typology and its intrinsic power structure. Similarly, I also researched inhabited bridges and reflected on the relationships between the city, infrastructure, and individuals. As a result, the frame, consisting of two inhabited bridges, one slender new building and one existing building, creates a new pattern in the urban morphology, replacing the contested urban fabric ruined by the unwanted commercialised building on the riverbank. This new form of an amphitheatre around a water garden, equally accessible to all, represents a claim on the public right to the riverbank. This solution highlights the symbiotic relationship between research and design.

**How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?**

My approach, consistent with the Complex Projects Studio, lies in its design-centred problem-solving logic, where each stage builds upon the questions raised in the previous one. Decisions made throughout the process are intended to embody the essence of the research questions.

At the design brief stage, the emphasis is on exploring and presenting the program, client and site as distinct issues, using various methods such as case studies, comparative analysis and classification. At the design proposal stage, the adoption of a three-by-three massing matrix broadens the design perspective to include considerations beyond mere morphology. In addition, the continued focus on a structure-driven design approach emphasises the importance of structure in defining spatial qualities, in line with the ethos of the modern music culture of structuralism and brutalism.

However, it is challenging to simulate a realistic practical setting in the design studio as expected in the training objective of the Complex Project. As the design brief is

based on hypothetical clients and assignments, it cannot serve as an authoritative guideline or constraint for the design proposal. Consequently, it is difficult to assess whether the designers are overstepping the boundaries of the design brief when they modify or criticise the conditions set forth in the brief. This can lead to repetitive work and a sense of constant self-doubt in the design process.

**How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?**

The project explores an innovative architectural strategy to counter the effects of gentrification. In line with the core theme of the Complex Project, it emphasises that the essence of architectural design lies in rationalising complex elements of the social and physical milieu. Navigating Berlin's complex history and diverse stakeholders, the project has sharpened its design aspirations and challenges to identify the most straightforward approach to avoiding the negative aspects of urban development.

A key focus of the project is cultural sustainability within the realm of contemporary alternative culture. Given the distinctive development trajectory of Berlin's creative industries, alternative culture is a catalyst and facilitator for the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. However, managing alternative culture is more challenging than managing conventional mainstream culture. It is hoped that this project will shed light on how to preserve and harness the potential of alternative cultural forces for a more balanced and sustainable urban future, but demonstrating its real impact is beyond the capacity of this design studio.

**How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?**

The value of the project's results offers transferable insights applicable to a broader range of urban settings. The phenomenon of cultural homogenisation and gentrification is observed in rapidly urbanising areas worldwide, making the project's intervention relevant not only in European contexts. This project proposes a possible strategy to reclaim public space and cultural identity without demolishing properties

caused by capital expansion.

Moreover, the project explores transferable building technologies aligned with carbon-neutral objectives and energy efficiency issues. The two timber bridges, with their structural elements developed into usable interior space, set a precedent for low-carbon infrastructure and its potential habitability.

Furthermore, the proposed "energy strategy card" toolbox and the vision of a self-sufficient Berlin offer considerable insight into guiding the architecture industry in the context of the global energy crisis. The individual project and the group research are mutually reinforcing. The group's vision of transforming a public building into a geothermal power plant contributes to the innovative energy schemes applied in the project, while the project tests and exemplifies the group's research.



Complex Projects