

Reflection

In the master's program of Architecture, the first year seemed to act as an extension of the bachelor's. The year was divided into two big semester subjects and two short electives. For all subjects there was the freedom to choose what aligned with your interests.

The first chosen studio was the MSc1 studio of Architectural Engineering. The theme of this studio was focused on finding a way to slow down or solve the problem of the Urban Heat Island Effect (UHIE). The relationship between this studio and the current Graduation Studio of Public Building has not been very strong throughout the design process. At Architectural Engineering the design was more focussed on technical elements, which only became a part of the Graduation Studio in the later stages. Moreover, these technical elements were focused on combatting the UHIE, whilst in the current studio that problem played hardly any part.

The relationship between the MSc2 studio of High-Rise Culture, a multidisciplinary studio from the chairs of Public Building, Dwelling and Form Studies, and the current studio of Public Building however is way stronger. The themes of the MSc2 studio were more in line with the current studio as it explored how dwellings could be combined with public space and a (semi-)public program. Where it

differs between the two is the scale of the project and the depth of the research into social thresholds. The MSc2 studio was combining three high-rise towers of housing with a public plinth, whilst the current studio only focusses on the public part of the program with only a fraction of the floor area. This resulted into the Graduation Studio diving deeper into the subject of public program, thresholds, construction, detailing and social interactions than the MSc2 studio was doing.

The Graduation Studio started in the first quarter of the year with some general research about the location. This was followed by an excursion to Berlin, where research on location was done through photography and interviews. After the excursion further research and positioning was done which eventually led to a P1 presentation with conclusions in the form of definitions, maps, location comparisons, program, sections, and a general concept.

What set this quarter apart from other studios was the parallel course of Theory & Delineation. Through a series of lectures and design exercises this course explored different design techniques and tools to help filter information, position yourself and/or create a design concept. The techniques used were a collage and montage, diagrams, psychogeography,

assemblage and digital modelling. At the end of the five exercises of Theory & Delineation you now had a step by step visual research by design process of your design concept. This course investigates the deeper relationships between elements and made you think in different ways about a problem statement and eventual design concept.

The second quarter of the year started again with research of the design location, a further analysis of the program and a search for references. It quickly went deeper through a final design exercise from Theory & Delineation, the Re-mix. This final exercise opened the door to more realistic design research by making you think about programmatic relationships, spatial relationships, sequences, hierarchies, scales, and routing. These elements would be tested through the use of a site plan, floorplans, and sections and were complemented by elevations, axonometric drawings, and relational schemes in P2 to represent a schematic design.

After the presentation there was a moment where the mentors could give feedback. The core of the feedback was two-sided. On the one hand was the structure of presenting quite clear and was the design concept a logical one that would fit the location well. On the other hand were a few aspects that had to

be changed. The routing of the building did not fit the concept and the façade design was lacking the intermediate level. Furthermore, the distinction between the private and public spaces was not big enough.

The third quarter then became the period to embrace the research by design strategy. By testing the design with both sketches and a virtual model these comments were used as guidelines to improve the building. This research method led to creating wide ranging options, where one or multiple of those options were further looked upon through variations. This approach differed from the usual strategy of picking one option and try to improve upon that. Which often leads to getting stuck or making a design that doesn't really work in the end. This method was new for me and helped me broaden my horizon. This made the design process more enjoyable as well.

At the end of the third quarter was another presentation that functioned as a testing point to see how things were standing. Following the comments from that presentation the feedback of the P2 presentation was mainly resolved as the routing was more in line with the concept and the distinction between zones was slightly improved. On the other hand were a few aspects of the design too literal. Taking these comments into account the

fourth quarter began where the research by design strategy continued.

Throughout the whole year the back-and-forth sessions between student and mentor resulted in answered questions, new references and feedback that could open your eyes into something you weren't aware of. In the end with the design exercises of Theory and Delineation, a series of lectures and the writing of a design manifesto I was nudged into making important decisions and creating a working concept.

By using the research by design method I opened myself up to a new way of design approach. Instead of sticking to my first design and trying to improve upon that, this new method gave me the opportunity to widen my scope. It taught me instead of clamping down on something to not be afraid of starting over. This was for example visible in the way the volume of the building was constructed. The shape of my building has changed several times, even in the later stages of the design process.

The strategy provided more freedom to elaborate the design of the different aspects of the new building. Furthermore this design process taught me to not be afraid to ask for an outside perspective. By regularly talking with experts in the field of architecture and technical building design I was constantly

receiving feedback. And due to the fact that I sometimes get distracted into making something work physically or on a floorplan, I forget to stop, to think if that element would work in combination with the rest of the building. For example the routing of the first design was carefully positioned and resulted in a stairway that took you from the ground floor all the way to the top floor with a continuous stairway. Yet it did not fit my concept. This realization moment came only after the tutors commented on it.

So, by using more of the research by design strategy and asking for more feedback from outsiders I'm sure my coming projects will develop a lot smoother.

Society is getting more inclusive by the day. Both in terms of race as well as gender, sexuality, religion and so on. This trend of inclusion should find physical correspondence in the design of public spaces that are more accessible to a wider audience with different lifestyles and cultures. The studio of Public Building offered a platform to dive deeper into this subject and to create a prototype to facilitate this important trend. By designing a public condenser people will be brought together that may normally not have crossed paths with each other. These public buildings are important to the neighborhood and even the whole

city as they can become the heart of communities. A safe space where people of all ages can go to and meet each other, learn from each other, and play with each other. A building that will regenerate its neighborhood and the social life of its inhabitants. Without such buildings these interactions between citizens would be greatly inhibited.

The building uses a form of Commons as a way of creating a building that is more inclusive for people, moments, and cultures. It will be a way to lower social thresholds and bring the private and the urban closer to each other.

The problem of the scale gap between private space and the urban surroundings is not one specifically bound to Friedrichshain or even Berlin. In almost every big city you can find the same problem. With this graduation project a solution has emerged that can either solve or soften this problem with the use of a public building. In this way the project could be used as either a baseline or a reference to projects in other cities dealing with the same problem.

The project uses different strategies that can be directly used on other projects. Firstly, the approach to creating the building volume. This strategy focuses on creating a volume that would both fit within its context as well as influence

its surroundings. The resulting volume would be an in-between volume that makes the urban surroundings more readable to passers-by and lower the impact of the building on the ground floor. Secondly, the strategy to divide program based on identity and openness. This way a gradient of program can be implemented within the building in a simple way. Thirdly the strategy to use a homecoming scenario to divide the building into different zones based on a gradient. Fourthly, the strategy of reusing whole building parts as way to make a statement. This is both sustainable as well as it can help fit aspects within their context. And finally, the strategy of implementing missing elements in the area. This will attract people of a wide variety by not only focussing on one specific group of users, increasing opportunities for social encounters. This in combination with spaces with a flexible program will result in a building that can change functions over time to adjust to the changing need of its users.