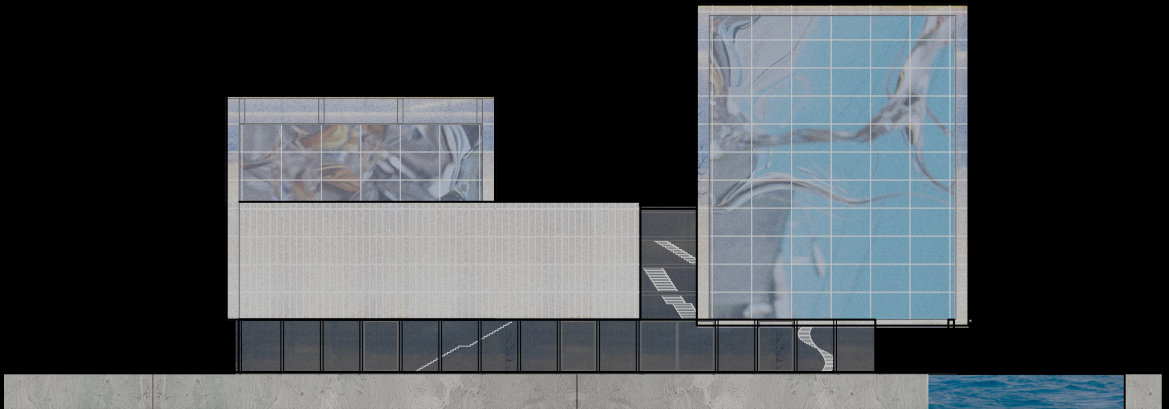# NATIONAL LIBRARY OF GERMANY

Collection and curation of knowledge in an age of digitalisation

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Reflection paper

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How can the national library best accommodate the collection and curation of knowledge to encourage learning in an age of digitalisation?

During the graduation studio Complex Projects the role of the national library in Germany was put under investigation. The national library functions as a central place where all published work of the nation is collected. The institute is responsible for collection of the nation's cultural heritage and makes it possible for the public to access this information for research purposes and to expand one's knowledge. As the book is no longer the primary source of acquiring knowledge, and information is quickly accessed through online media, the question occurs regarding the need for a physical library when information can be accessed from anywhere. The functioning of the national library as it used to be, is no longer sufficient and should reflect the needs of the current society.

How does the library position themselves to stay relevant for information that can be curated for it to be easily accessible. The use of the building will need to be revised to continue serving its users and engage a new generation and audience. Currently the collection is stored in multiple cities in Germany, which defeats the goal of the national library to centralise the collection. As the collection continued to grow it resulted in buildings with multiple extensions and not optimal storage conditions. The design of the national library emphasises the representation of all media such as books as well as online publications, providing a welcoming space for the public, organising events and encouraging learning.
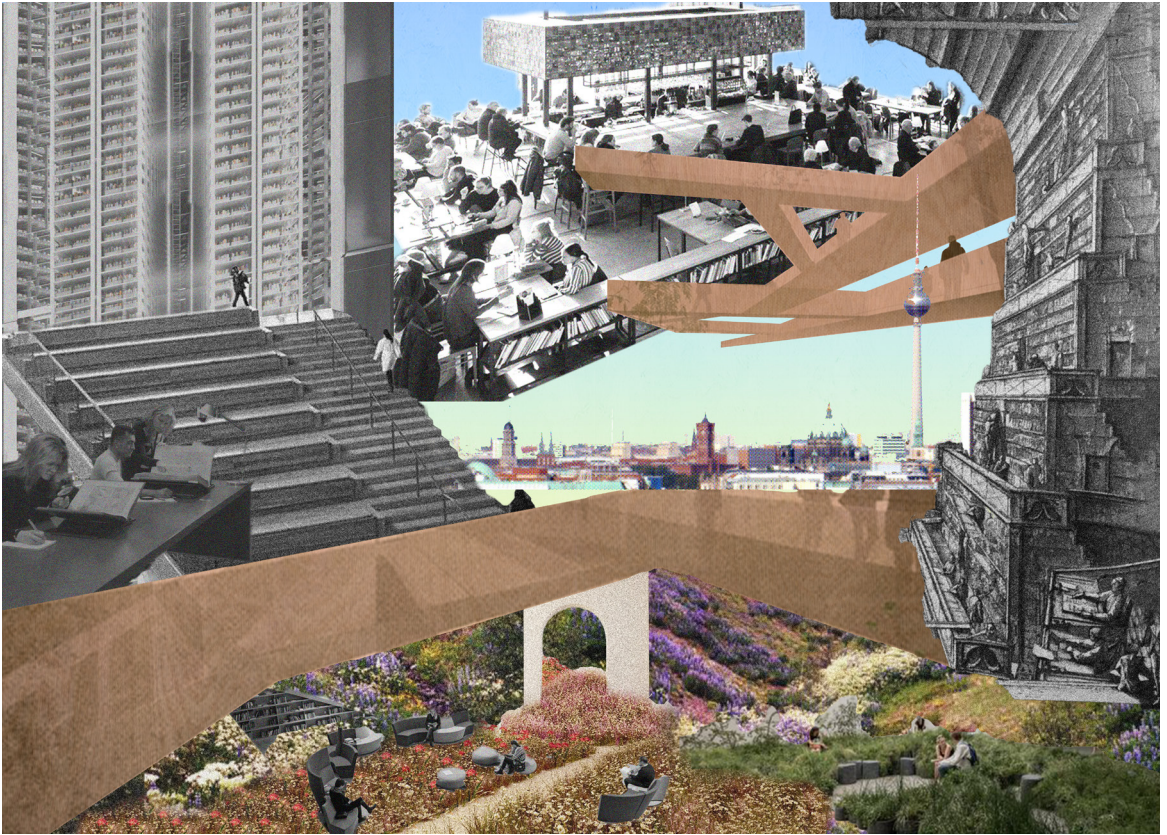
1. the relationship between research and design

The design of the project is connected to the research conducted, taking into account the location, culture, and social framework. The research conducted with the emphasis on a data-based design had a significant impact on the final output. As the research progressed, it provided valuable insights on various factors at different scales, from the individual project to the broader urban context of Berlin.

Furthermore, the group topic and urban vision had an added influence in shaping the design, to make sure that the project aligned with and contributed to the overall urban developments of the group theme: future, set the goal for the building to be an urban catalyst.

A key aspect of the research involved understanding the current trends and needs of the national library and the relevance specific to Berlin. To provide crucial insights into the evolution of this building typology. For instance, the research shed light on the concept of the library as the "living room of the city". This understanding influenced the design and orientation of the building on the site.

Moreover, the research dives into the ways in which information is accessed and shared, which greatly influenced the design recommendations. The focus of the design revolved around social interaction and providing a neutral platform for individuals to broaden their horizons. The research findings on information access and social interaction guided the design process to create spaces that facilitate knowledge sharing, collaborative work, and exploration. At the same time, research was conducted to understand optimal ways of storing and retrieving the book collection and how to make this an innovative element of the design.

The design and recommendations also influenced the research process itself. The design considerations and choices prompted further investigation and analysis in specific areas, deepening the understanding of the subject matter. The design concepts highlighted the significance of social interaction, user needs, and the library's integration within the urban fabric. The design process brought attention to critical research areas, shaping the direction of further exploration.

2. The relationship between your graduation topic and studio topic

The central theme of the Complex Projects studio is the topic of the body and the built environment in Berlin. The objective is to delve into how the body interacts with and is influenced by the surrounding spaces and areas. Through seminars, these objectives are refined, exploring the reciprocal influence between the body and its environment. These seminars provide a deeper understanding of the contextual factors that shape a building and how these experiences are translated into architectural elements.

To grasp the broader context of Berlin and its global significance, each project is linked to a group theme, in this case, the future. An urban vision is created to which the project should relate to. The urban vision focuses on how the project can add to the city's development and act as an urban catalyst for the neighbourhood. The location of the project should help densify the city and relate to the existing municipal development plans of the city.

The graduation topic serves as an extension of the studio topic. The design aims to invite the city into the library and enable knowledge acquisition through various media. And to get an understanding of how the national library can best accommodate the collection and curation of knowledge to encourage learning in an age of digitalisation. This research question revolves around the complexity of the primary objectives of a library: on one hand, creating an optimal environment for preserving a nation's collection for future generations, and on the other hand, providing access to this collection and creating an

environment to facilitate this. It involves finding a balance between the needs of both the individuals using the library and the valuable objects housed within it. The project focuses on addressing the future needs of both the users and the building. Additionally, it considers potential scenarios and current trends in library architecture to anticipate the needs and requirements for future use.

3. Relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific relevance

Digitalisation is a trend that has influenced the way information is shared and exchanged. The role and tasks of libraries is very much influenced by this. A change is already visible in public libraries, integrating different ways of (remote) working forms and housing additional (public) programs. It is of greater relevance to understanding how architecture can accommodate one's learning experience, regardless of the type of knowledge or skill. Providing a proper space to accommodate this learning as well as being able to adapt the building when different media will be used in the near-future is essential for long-term durability.

The physical stack will continue to grow, albeit slow, in the next few years and at the same time should be able to adapt to the possibility of changing to a digital database or other forms. For this reason the building's structure is created to be able to house more books than the current collection size and to have the possibility of expansion. Embracing innovation and technology, such as the inclusion of automated stacks in the library enhances storage capacity and improves accessibility. By efficiently utilising space for book storage, more r oom can be allocated for other programs. Striking a balance between optimal storage space and flexible building usage ensures the creation of a resilient structure.

4. Research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio

The graduation studio follows a dictated methodology and approach, which is reinforced through the schedule and regular presentation moments. Additionally, at the beginning of the studio, a template is provided, setting a certain level of quality and expectation. While this method creates a clear structure and facilitates project comparison, it could feel limiting to add personal creativity and leave little room for individual touches due to the need to conform to the template's style.

However, the methodology the studio uses is clear and beneficial for project improvement. The initial design brief is developed through benchmarking and literature research, with a focus on the project's context. By comparing similar building types, common strengths and weaknesses are identified, and informing the overall program and organisational aspects of the graduation project. Conclusions are presented through simplified diagrams and schemes, for comparisons created a strong starting point for the start of design and set clear boundaries for the project.

The design brief created a clear distinction between the goals and needs of the client, program and site, as well as, the constraints for each of these. It was pleasant to have as a starting point. For the initial concept design, the preferred method was through the use of physical models, which for me, did not help jump-start the progress of the design. Eventually through sketching and digital modeling, volume studies were conducted. In order to make a decision, to value the design options and find a balance between the different needs, it was always helpful to look back on the initial design brief and the set ambitions to make a deliberate choice.

5. Ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered during graduation

During the graduation one of the dilemmas encountered, was finding the balance between public programs and the library's core function, which is the preservation of the collection. A large part of the building consists of stacks with very specific climate conditions and in well-enclosed spaces. It raised the question on how to create a sense of presence of the collection, even though the traditional representation of books is not very visibly apparent in the building. And the meaning of public accessibility and openness. It became evident that access to the stacks could only work effectively when intentional openness was considered

The studio provides a structured framework to focus on. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the process was not always linear, as there were definitely ups and downs along the way. The key takeaway from these experiences is not to be discouraged by setbacks but rather to persevere through these dips and try to continue producing even when it creates less-than-desired results.
As the design was heavily research-based, it often created a certain level of detachment from ethical issues and emotion, as design decisions were driven by pragmatic considerations. While it is important to avoid making choices based on personal preferences, I do think it is important to not to disregard emotional input entirely when considering the user experience of the space.

The method of the studio is quite focussed on presentations and developing a clear narrative with numerous opportunities for feedback. Although sometimes it felt as if it was too much and took much time and energy to prepare,I believe it was a valuable approach to staying on track and allowed me to stay informed about my colleagues' projects and learn from them as well.