

FREE

BERLIN!

Enable urban space for creativity, inspired by free space in Berlin

A Master Thesis by Hannah Larqvist
Architecture and Urban Design, Chalmers University of Technology 2015



CHALMERS

This is a master thesis completed within the Master Programme
Architecture and Urban Design, Department of Architecture, Chalmers
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ABSTRACT

Specific historical factors of war, division and reunification left large areas of Berlin in decay. The numerous vacant buildings and free spaces have attracted a special clientele of creative people and non-conformists by offering opportunities to alternative lifestyles. The subsequent bottom-up initiatives, including e.g. cultural and urban DIY projects, have shaped Berlin's identity as the creative capital of Europe. However, current global urbanization processes generates an increasing need for housing and services in central areas, which substantially diminish the previous spatial opportunities for creative activities and citizen's possibilities to physically affect the urban environment.

The overall purpose of this master thesis is therefore to investigate free space as a phenomenon, in order to identify qualities and characteristics which could be applied in architectural and urban design. The ambition is that the use or implementation of these

qualities and characteristics within this field, to a certain extent could contribute to preserving Berlin's existing culture of urban interaction and participation. By researching the specific context of Berlin and including a relevant case study, important factors of city spaces for creativity inspired by free space, are defined.

Furthermore, these factors are used in a framework for analysis and as a starting point for the redesign and improvement of an existing proposal for a case of urban renewal, in the former Easter borough of Friedrichshain. Actors initial ideas of achieving qualitative densification through a mixed development including cultural, commercial and public use with community focus are strengthened by creating a more accessible space of general character. The new improved proposal is thus a demonstration of how public space could function as a canvas for creative activities and allow future changes being made through collaborative design.

Keywords:

Berlin, public space, user influence, collaborative design, temporary use



Görlitzer Bahnhof on the 1st of May



Me at former airport Tempelhof, playing pitch-and-putt at a course created out of recycled material by 18 different artists

BERLIN & I

It all started in June 2010 and it was far from love at first sight. At the time I had only just recently finished my first year of architecture studies at Chalmers University and the term urban had yet to be introduced in my vocabulary. On an arranged study trip for around five days we were meant to experience the architectural treasures of Berlin (which for some reason ended up in an over-representation of colorful housing projects signed by Bruno Taut). Staying at Generator Hostel and being driven around by bus did not really sell me the city, but cheap food and drinks made it likable enough. Today

I'm a master thesis student with a developed fascination for cities as a phenomenon. Allowing myself to speculate I would say that Berlin is Germany's blessing and curse. It is the family's unruly but lovable old teenager, generating a constant ambivalence. There is a brutal honesty permeating the atmosphere; the architecture of new office buildings do not try to hide their money-making purposes and scrounging punks let you know in capital letters what the coins you spare them will go to - beer and drugs. It is a creative haven that I have come to care a lot about. The result of this "love story" is in your hand.



THANK YOU!

First I want to thank Rebecca Lilliecrona, because without you I probably would have ended up doing something completely different somewhere not even half as fun. Same goes for Tobias Henke, who both introduced me to her and Berlin. Thank you to my friends, family and especially the fantastic reference group of Lina, Esmeralda, Sofia, Anna and Klara - amazing support. I say *danke schön* to Hajo Toppius from Stadtraumnutzung, Johannes Husten from

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/Hannah Larqvist

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1. INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

Global urbanization (United Nations 2014) is putting increasing pressure on cities to provide housing and services in central areas, to what the solution is often spelled out as densification. However, more people in one place does not necessarily improve the quality of urban life as long as the human dimension is neglected (Gehl 2010). Public space is an essential feature when creating livable cities. This is where urban dwellers meet and interact. Also, it is what makes the city a social option to more individually oriented rural life (Westin 2010).

The dissertation *Planned, All Too Planned* (Westin 2010) questions why many of the new public spaces which are actually created tend to remain empty. It is a critique towards planners and architects of modern time and their supposed fixation with the visual and orderly, while what traditionally characterizes urban environments is actually the unorganized and eldritch. This in turn, raises the question of how we as professionals within architectural and urban design, are able to create spaces which leave some things to the imagination of its users - the citizens.

The impact of citizen-initiated projects on the development of cultural industries and urban life is exemplified in Berlin (Bishop, Williams 2012). This movement of so called *Urban Pioneers* (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung 2007) exists due to certain unique preconditions, which were mainly created by the Second World War and the following division and reunification of the city (Oswalt, Overmeyer & Misseltwitz 2014). Leaving the city in decay, those major historical events also generated two very important assets: low costs of living and in between spaces (ibid.), also called *freiräume* or free space in English (Berliner Liegenschaften; Berlin Freiräume). These resources formed a catalyst for innovative urban projects, which have shaped the Berlin's identity as the creative capital of Europe.



Sign at the RAW cultural area in Friedrichshain - A bottom-up initiative providing a variety of temporary activities and events.

BLU'S MURALS

In December 2014 the conscious destruction of what might have been Berlin's most famous piece of street art by Italian artist Blu in Kreuzberg, commenced (Street Art Berlin 2015). During one night the murals from 2008 were completely covered with black paint. The "blackwashing", which stirred up feelings among people walking by, was an action taken by the artists themselves.

In The Guardian, co-creator of the murals explains why. During the murals' seven years of existence, they became a materialization of the former mayor's quote "Berlin is poor but sexy" (Henke 2014). The message of history and current development, with Eastside/Westside gang signs and a businessman chained by his gold watches, combined with the characteristic surroundings, unintentionally created a visual representation of Berlin as a promise land of possibilities with available space and creativity. When they started to appear on street art tours, postcards etc, the city did not hesitate to seize the opportunity to use this message of resistance for marketing campaigns.

Cuvrybrache, the site adjacent to the murals, is a block-sized plot of undeveloped land. This last free space by the river Spree has been referred to as a "playground for adults" and "sanctuary" with "socio-cultural value and potential" (Childress 2014). Recently the *brache* (German word for uncultivated area) have functioned as a homeless encampment and micro-community for people who have been forced to leave their apartments due to Kreuzberg's increasing rents. After a fire in September 2014 the area was cleared and the private property owner will move forward with construction plans.

The destruction of the murals should therefore be regarded as a protest towards Berlin's current development, where spatial potential for creative activities is vanishing at a steady pace and is replaced with luxury apartments (Henke 2014). It is meant as a reminder of the importance of free and affordable space for the inhabitants.



The murals in 2013

SITE INTRODUCTION

Meanwhile, in the former East German district Friedrichshain, one of Berlin's main alternative venues since the opening nine years ago (Möller 2014) are taking part in an attempt to deal with the issues of decreasing space for creativity. Antje Øklesund is a club which allows members to experiment with art, culture and music without commercial intentions. They are calling themselves an "Audiovisual Laboratory" (Stadtraumnutzung 2015a). Located in the backyard of a previous industrial plot is a one storey, partly decrepit brick building housing all the action. Behind the venue stands the association Stadtraumnutzung, a group of artists from various fields which organizes cultural activities in city spaces.

In 2012 the plot of was bought by the real estate concern CG Gruppe in order to use it for a new housing development (Möller 2014). Antje Øklesund, together with the other small-scale actors on site were close to facing the same destiny as many other similar activities, which have been dependent on the "in-between" spaces still existing in Berlin. This time however, there was an unexpected turn of events. The district authorities recognized a

value in keeping the current actors on site and they invited representatives from both sides to work on a common solution (ibid.).

The result of this participatory process is a proposed mixed-used development, combining rental apartments with cultural and commercial activities (Stadtraumnutzung 2015b). These will be coordinated by the interest organization IG Rigaer Straße 71-73, which currently consists of Stadtraumnutzung and BUF e.V (vocational education for adults), but will eventually also include other actors. In the existing design proposal all public functions will be gathered around a small courtyard. The aim of this space is to be used, developed and changed by the in-house activities together with residents and the neighborhood.

After analyzing the current plans it becomes clear that the proposed design limits the possibilities for creative activities in the public courtyard. Question is then how adjustments inspired by free spaces (Berliner Liegenschaften; Berlin Freiräume) could improve and strengthen the development.



Antje Øklesund & Rigaer Straße 71-73

AIM & SCOPE

Through blackwashing Blu's murals, the artists addressed the issue of a severe decline of previously free spaces generated by war and economic restructuring with potential for creative activities, in central Berlin. The overall purpose of this master thesis is therefore to investigate free space as a phenomenon, in order to identify qualities and characteristics which could be applied in architectural and urban design. By researching the specific context of Berlin and including a relevant case study, important factors of city spaces for creativity inspired by free space, are defined.

The result of this process will then be used to redesign and improve on a case of urban renewal, in the former Eastern borough of Friedrichshain. Here, these factors are used as a framework for suggesting alterations and illustrating an alternative to the existing design proposal for the site at Rigaer Straße 71-73. The main aim or ambition is to demonstrate and discuss how this approach, to a certain extent, could contribute to preserving Berlin's existing culture of urban interaction and collaborative design, by providing public space functioning as a canvas for creativity.

What separates this thesis from a regular project of urban design is the idea of how we as architects can enable urban life to thrive by providing qualitative urban space, but at the same time equip it with an openness and possibilities for the users to be able to actively influence their surroundings through interactive or collaborative design. The users being anyone interested in being a part of this kind of processes at the given site.

The conclusions reached by evaluating and redesigning the already existing proposal will hopefully contribute to the general discourse surrounding public spaces and what additional values they could provide within urban development.

District Mitte in the 90s. Photo of a photo from Klaus Baedicke's exhibition at Neurotitan Gallery, spring 2015.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The two main parts of the work forms the answers to two different questions:

- *How can the characteristics and qualities of free space be defined as a means to inform new urban development in Berlin?*
- *Can these characteristics and qualities be used to improve a proposal for urban renewal in Berlin?*

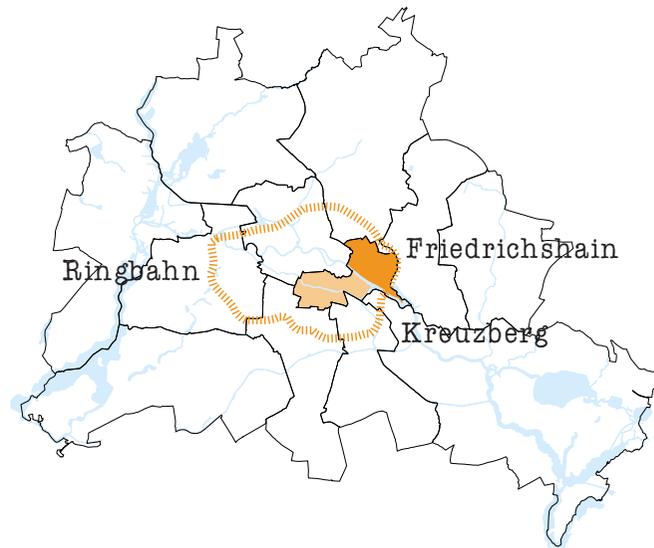


DELIMITATIONS

Within the urban fabric, housing and public space are closely interconnected ingredients, which to my opinion must be well-balanced in order for cities to be livable. My ambition for this thesis have been to focus on the latter, with emphasis on space which are thoroughly or partly publicly accessible and not entirely for commercial interests as for example shopping malls.

What is referred to as Berlin in this thesis is geographically defined as inside "the ring". Berlins Ringbahn is an elevated train track development from 1877, frequented by commuter trains (S-bahn). It frames the inner city, even though some areas which are now regarded as dense and central, appear more crossed than surrounded by it today. This spatial limitations is made due to the fact that the issues presented in the research mainly exists within the S-bahn circle. Further it was important to narrow down the actual analysis to one district, as they are run by different political parties and have sovereignty in some matters.

Both the chosen site and the case study are situated in the borough Friedrichshain which is part of the joint district Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg since 2001. These areas have in turn inter-communal differences and therefore this master thesis will zoom in on Friedrichshain only. Additionally, the time frame for the research go no further back than after the dismantling of the Berlin Wall



METHODS

To answer the first research question and to get an overall understanding of the context, a number of methods have been used. Literature studies, interviews, observations and more informal conversations on site are combined with a description and analysis of a case study (Holzmarkt p. 29). The result is a number of factors forming a framework for implementing characteristics influenced by free space in new developments. This framework then functions as point of departure for creating design strategies in the second part of the thesis.

Question number two is answered by using design as a toolset. Ideas of improvement are generated through an analysis of the existing proposal based on previous research, the created framework and strategies. Finally an alternative design is presented.

BERLIN GLOSSARY

gentrification

Gentrification is an expression almost impossible to miss when reading about or visiting Berlin. According to sociologist Catharina Thörn the phenomenon is often described as something inevitable or a natural process, which makes the city safer and more enjoyable with e.g. a better offering of shops etc (Thörn 2012).

The expression originates from the 1960s and sociologist Ruth Glass studies of a district in London and its transformation from being a working class area into becoming a neighborhood for the middle class (Thörn 2012).

Gentrification always implicates displacement, e.g. through refurbishment of an area with subsequent increases in rent, which forces the original inhabitants to move (Thörn 2012). What is discussed by researchers today is the fact that gentrification seems to have become a global strategy, used consciously by politicians to upgrade parts of the city and make them more attractive (ibid.).



activism

Berlin have a long history of activism and counter-culture, which in practice means that residents do not always oblige when certain political or municipal decisions that are made affects their living environment (Childress 2014; Hallemar, Forsell 2014). This can be observed on almost any weekend, whether it is a demonstration against industrial farming or a campaign against parts of the Berlin Wall being removed to build expensive apartments and it means that the city does not always get its own way (Childress 2014).

selfmade

The Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment in Berlin published the book *Selfmade City* in 2013 to highlight the city's self-made tradition (see following page), by showing examples of new citizen-organized housing projects and their qualities (Ring, Eidner 2013).

Campaign against development plans at the former airport Tempelhof ▽





wagenburg

These alternative settlements consist of vans, construction and recreational vehicles.

squat / house project

Illegally occupied house / Legitimized squat or a legally mediated building, often with an attempt at a kind of communal living (Dowling 2009). Usually the residents have made them into something more than just a place to live by establishing different cultural and community functions. Many are today at risk of eviction, but some are now owner-occupied.

“If you don’t let us dream, we won’t let you sleep” Banner outside former squat, now house project KØPI ▶

temporary use

Temporary use have become a somewhat magical term. It is associated with possibilities for common people with creative minds, as well as urban planners, politicians and property owners (Junge-Reyer 2007). Today's reality might not be tomorrow's - meaning the world today is constantly changing and that change in itself has become a permanent condition of human life (Bishop, Williams 2012).



With those preconditions, temporary activities could be expected to flourish also in the future, as a tool for planning and development, test-beds for businesses or simply as an established strategy within the dynamic field of culture and entertainment (ibid.). In Berlin war and economic restructuring, such as deindustrialization, have left a lot of vacant spaces where those temporary activities can thrive.

Temporary furniture store at RAW cultural area in Friedrichshain ▼



READING INSTRUCTIONS

CHAPTER 1: "Introduction"

Contains background information regarding the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: "Free Berlin"

Explains important aspects of Berlin's post-wall urban development and current situation.

CHAPTER 3: "Free space"

This chapter includes a case study, which aims to deal with current issues of urban development and create space for creativity, influenced by free space. Key factors of this "formalization" is summarized in a framework, which will function as point of departure for redesigning the site on Rigaer Straße.

CHAPTER 4: "Site & Redesign"

This chapter gradually zooms in on the site. It explains the urban context, continues with a description of the site today and introduces the already existing design proposal. Further, this proposal is analyzed based on the framework from previous chapter and ideas of redesign are proposed. Finally those are implemented and an alternative design presented.

CHAPTER 5: "Conclusions & Reflections"

Concludes, evaluates and reflects upon the process and outcome of the thesis by reconnecting to the initially formulated aim and questions.

Berlin in November 2014 ▶
Photo: Anna Ekströmer



2. FREE BERLIN



1990s BABYLON

The division and reunification of Berlin is probably the most formative event taken place in a city during modern time. Today, more than 25 years later the aftermath is still noticeable (Pearson 2014). The border is not there anymore, but still apparent in mentality, attitude, opinions and prejudices. As for physical traces, the concrete barrier separating ideologies has sure left its mark also on the urban environment.

However, the reunification of the halves and end of GDR meant the direct application of Western norms on the former socialist system (Bernt, Grell & Holm 2013). This approach combined with the public's perception of typical GDR architecture as an "anesthetic irritant" and structural symbol of the hated GDR (ibid.), was perhaps not the best point of departure for preserving its physical remains. The most obvious example might be the debated destruction of Palast der Republik which was built in the 1970s to house the GDR parliament and various cultural venues (Franco 2009). A pricy and symbolic reconstruction of the Prussian Palace have made the site into an ideological and historic battleground.

Today proven unrealistic expectations were raised by a hype around "new" Berlin as the emerging city with extensive possibilities for population growth, establishment of new international corporations and overall opportunities for investment and economic development (Bernt, Grell & Holm 2013). Vast urban redevelopment projects such as the one on Potsdamer Platz are physical evidence of this "gold rush mentality", which was driven by both local politicians and international investors.

The construction boom was brief. Due to overestimations of population growth and invested money, only a small number of the optimistic master plans were actually realized (Oswalt, Overmeyer, Misseltwitz 2014). Among them are the extensive and criticized skyscraper project at Alexanderplatz, in the heart of former East Berlin (Kil 1995). The fact that planning and reality not always match was becoming obvious in the new capital.



Palast der Republik 1977
Photo: Wikipedia [2015-04-21]



Potsdamer Platz

“NEW” BERLIN

“The best time in life is when the old powers have disappeared and the new ones have yet to arrive...”

In documentary *Mittendrin*

It must have been exhilarating to be young in the end of 1989 and living in East Berlin. Many invisible walls fell along with the physical barrier (Feffer 2013). The non-conformists who had been hidden out of sight, e.g. punk rockers and transvestites, could now feel at ease in the liberated public sphere. Many East Germans had already left GDR and when the boarder opened more followed. Perhaps it was out of fear for the wall to reappear. Young people who stayed were facing endless possibilities in terms of available space and East Berlin soon became squatter's paradise.

In contrast to the West, where squatting already existed as a phenomenon, this was completely new in East Berlin, as was everything that happened from 1989 until 1991/1992; new structures, new laws, new governments, a new party system (Feffer 2013). This might be why it was initially accepted. Also, the structures were not as

fixed as in the western part of the city where every building had its owner. In the East the majority had been managed by the state and therefore now stood without ownership. Since so many flats were empty, both the residential companies and the district administration said that anyone who wanted to live there should be allowed to. Therefore houses were also legally mediated by real estate companies and became so called house projects (Mittendrin 2013).

“Absolute freedom! And also chaos. Everybody felt very free, free to express themselves. There was no fear, no concept that everything has to be in a system and that you need to ask before starting something, you just did it. And that's why a lot of people did a lot of things, very fast, everywhere” Nina Tode, sculptor, in *Berlinized*

Documentaries *Mittendrin* and *Berlinized* both portraits the cultural boom in former Eastern district Mitte during the 90s. The now trendy and commercialized central area

was then empty and run down. There were no streetlights or heating in the buildings (Nicolson 2014), but this state of decay also proved as an unique possibility for some people.

This 1990s decade of freedom in Berlin, with indifference to the demands of commercial life, generated a new identity for the city (Nicolson 2014), which still lives on to some extent.



Kunsthaus Tacheles, former squat in Mitte. Building currently empty

CITY ON SALE

The second half of the 1990s could be referred to as a phase of “inbetweenness” (Bernt, Grell & Holm 2013). Instead of experiencing a booming economy, making it possible to catch up with other European metropolises, Berlin suffered from intensive deindustrialization with impoverishment as a direct consequence.

A decline in federal subsidies for the former “showcase of the West” led to continuing budget-cuts of public support for social and welfare projects, e.g. renewal programs (Bernt, Grell & Holm 2013). Also, original owners of property in former East Berlin were reinstated. The change of ownership structures cleared the course for increasing real estate speculation within the housing sector inside the S-Bahn ring. This provided Berlin with a first taste of the problematic following gentrification processes (ibid.).

Already at the beginning of the new millennium, Berlin entered into a major financial crisis (Bernt, Grell & Holm 2013). The cost of large-scale construction projects during the 90s in combination with an

extensive and costly banking scandal made the individual debt burden of Berliners escalate up to around three times national average. Shortly after a new government were installed, aiming to make Berlin a “social city” as well as fight graft and corruption. The methods of privatization, reduced budgets for welfare and the public sector were explained by some as essential for saving the city, while others might call it “neoliberal austerity measures at the expense of the local population” (ibid.)



“Berlin is poor but sexy”
Former Mayor Klaus Wowereit in 2004

SAVE BERLIN!

Though being a city in debt, riding on the shoulders of the German nation, Berlin is now experiencing its own kind of boom, which is fueled by an increasing international interest (Nicolson 2014). A question raised in National Geographic last year is whether too great a success will start to erode Berlin's famous freedoms when the infusion of capital is affecting the unique inclusive social fabric of the city. Documentary *Mietrebell* (Rent Rebels) shows the now regularly organized demonstrations occurring as a consequence of rising rents, evictions and use of free spaces for luxury construction projects.

This current development is clearly noticeable also in the cultural sector, since Berlin's image as the creative capital of Europe is predominantly based on cheap labor and low living costs (Bernt, Grell & Holm). Rebecca Lilliecrona¹ fell in love with the city and the freedom it offered. Now she has lived in Berlin for a decade, currently working at house project Haus Schwarzenberg in Mitte, which was founded in 1995. She confirms the difficulties of being able to stay in the inner city as a non-profit cultural organization with

¹ Rebecca Lilliecrona, Neurotitan, 2014-11-07

an alternative touch.

"[...]you always have to fight for your right to stay, because of the rapidly changing city climate. Putting creativity, free spirit and non-profit together is getting harder and harder due to higher rents and less spaces."

One of the main issues according to her, is the fact that while Berlin is rushing to catch up with other metropolises, the city fails to hold on to its unique characteristics.

"A lot of interesting and original places developed in Berlin the last 25 years, most of them are not existing anymore. Instead Berlin is building more and more for tourists; hotels, shopping malls, big arenas, but forgetting what made Berlin so attractive to them in the beginning."

She believes that the main thing making Berlin special is the creative people living there. The local people are also most affected by displacement as a consequence of modernization.

"The gentrification in the city are

making it more and more anonymous and there is less place for the creativity [...]"

To her opinion this development must be taken seriously by the authorities in order for the city to stay attractive. Opportunities for art and culture should be encouraged and sponsored.

"And it has to merge within the city and not only in the suburbs, to keep Berlin vivid and alive."



Haus Schwarzenberg

BERLIN 2030?

The magazine Exberliner have addressed the problematic of Berlin's urban development e.g. through two theme issues. In 2013 an article highlighted the situation at East Side Gallery, where part of the preserved former death strip surrounding the remains of the Berlin Wall, was turned into a construction site for luxury condos (Exberliner 2013). They fear for what will happen if the city's large debt keeps running the agenda, while Berlin is expecting an 7 per cent increase in population until 2030 and is now starting to experience a housing shortage.

However, the city of Berlin appear to have realized the need for a more strategic approach and is currently working on something called *the Urban Development Concept Berlin 2030*, which will serve as a framework for city-wide development policies (Senate Department for Urban Development 2015a). It is based on a SWOT-analysis of Berlin including all thinkable fields such as economy, housing, cultural diversity, cityscape and open spaces etc. The latter being especially relevant for this master thesis, since the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg

where the site of Antje Øklesund is located, has the lowest amount of public spaces in Berlin (Ostmann, Seller 2014). This issue is addressed as following:

"[...] demands on open areas are rising: The quest for nature or peace and quiet, athletic training, outdoor socializing, as well as new and temporary land use, are all competing for space. Berlin will need to further address these varied requirements for open space as well as the problem of structurally preserving and caring for its vast array of open-area facilities with limited financial resources." Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment 2015b

Some conclusions of the SWOT-analysis seem to provide a basis for solving issues surrounding the development and maintenance of public spaces, despite limited financial means. The fact that Berlin has a high level of voluntary involvement is mentioned as a strength (Senate Department for Urban Development 2015c) and the presence of post-industrial open areas is brought up as an opportunity. (Senate

Department for Urban Development 2015d) Also, possibilities to develop the participation of civil society in order to better attend to their needs is emphasized. Have Berlin finally recognized the important part its inhabitants have actually played in the city's development and what an asset engaged citizens can actually be?



SUMMARY: FREE BERLIN

In the report *Tillåtande Oaser* (Permitting Oasis) a diversity of actors and expressions are mentioned as one of the most important factors of an interesting and successful city (ADA 2014). Areas finding themselves on the borderline between subculture and the established are often the ones which fuels development.

As I see it, this means that the characterizing alternative culture in Berlin should be able to continue to take place in the future, also in the central parts, in order for the city to maintain its creative status. Free space have traditionally been a very permitting environment of left-over or not yet developed land where temporary activities are welcome, or at least accepted, based on their activating influence on plots otherwise just functioning as voids.

While the city develop, these small-scale activities are forced to make room for more capital-intensive developments and it becomes gradually harder to find space where this subculture does not interfere or create conflict. Either the urban development must

be anticipatory and strategically leave areas undeveloped for this purpose, or it must find a way to integrate spatial potential for creative activities as a feature of the urban fabric. The solution is probably a combination of both.

Being based on grass root initiatives such activities cannot be created through top-bottom processes, but the city authorities could and should act as facilitators to form the right preconditions for them to thrive. In the current climate the latter seems of utter relevance. However, it is still a question of being able to let go of control to some extent and put trust in the small-scale actors.

The case study in following chapter is an example of exactly this type of case, where the district authorities of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg after a public referendum decided to allow one of those bottom-up initiatives to take charge and develop a new quarter by the river Spree. It aims to keep the riverbank open for all and is an attempt to formalize alternative culture.



Spree

3. FORMALIZING FREE SPACE

CASE STUDY: HOLZMARKT

“The Holzmarkt is the complete anti-approach to urban space development. It doubts everything, and questions every standard” Johannes Husten

This case study displays a completely new type of urban planning in Berlin, where maximum profit is considered irrelevant¹ and free space is implemented as a natural feature. A group of people with their roots in the city's subculture are transforming their experiences, ideas and ideals into an alternative to conventional planning. This statement could be regarded as a direct counter reaction to Berlin's current development.

BACKGROUND

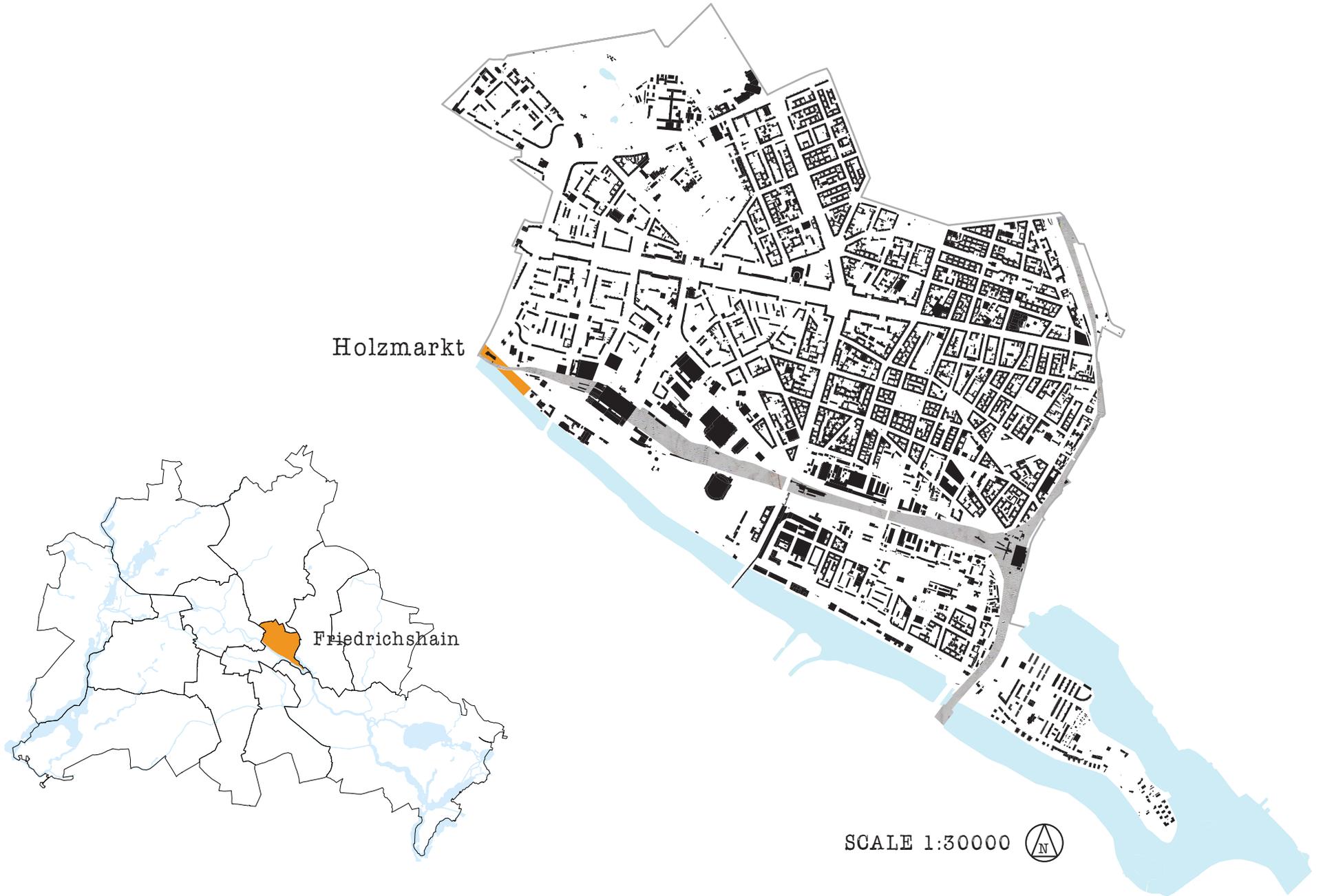
The Holzmarkt is situated on Spree's northern river bank in the borough of Friedrichshain. It used to be a harbor area as well as location for railway and industrial facilities (Dohnke 2013). During the Cold War it marked the border between East and West. After the fall of the wall, many industrial facilities fell into

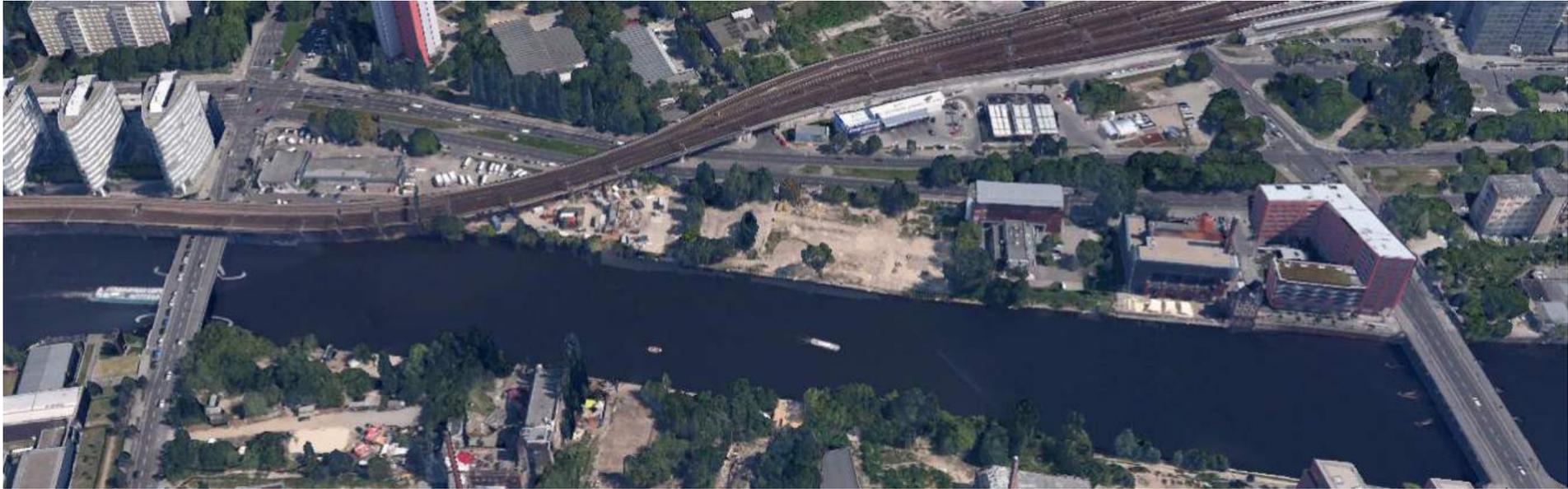
disuse and in the mid 1990s the city started to make plans to transform these derelict stretches of land into offices, hotels, luxury apartments, a large arena and other event locations, all under the name Mediaspree (ibid.). Universal Music and MTV moved in, the O² arena was raised. All in bright contrast to the near-by alternative venues and squats, which became threatened by eviction and rising rents (Borden 2011).

Opposing citizens started to organize themselves in activist groups, e.g. under the name *Mediaspree Versenken!* (Sink Mediaspree!) and their slogan was “*Spreeufer für Alle!*” (The banks of the Spree for everyone!). Finally their work paid off in the form of a public referendum where 87 % voted against the city's planned development, which now only is partly realized (Borden 2011).



¹ Interview with Johannes Husten 2015-02-18





The site

THE SITE

Framed by busy Holzmarktstraße and crossed by the S-bahn tracks is a strip of land currently enclosed by a wooden plank. This is not a site naturally "passed by", but before 2010 it was definitely the place to be, since the internationally famous Bar 25 was located here (Holzmarkt 2013). After the public referendum this section of the riverbank was "saved". A group of people behind the former club founded a cooperative called the Holzmarkt. They were able to convince a

Swiss pension fund to buy the land which is now leased back to the cooperative and it is theirs to develop and manage.

APPROACH

Further, the site has been divided into four separate leaseholds (Holzmarkt 2013). This method is used to dissociate the economic risks, but also to make sure that one major investor which might be needed to realize one part, will not be able to influence the whole area¹. Since the organization and content vary

within those leaseholds, I have in this analysis chosen to concentrate on one in particular - The Holzmarkt Village

THEIR VISION

The overall aim in this part of the area is to create an open space for creativity, living and working, which will be publicly accessible 24 hours a day (Holzmarkt 2013). It will feature low density and permeability as the rest of the development and it will also be subjected to constant change.

¹ Interview with Johannes Husten 2015-02-18

IN THE VILLAGE

This part of the area is according to the founders "understood as a springboard to act independently and achieve common success" (Holzmarkt 2013). It will become a mixed use development where tenants are able to live work and enjoy life, all in the same place. Next to space for production and creative businesses, a large part of daily demands is covered within the village by retailers, restaurants and bars. The units are rented out by the Holzmarkt cooperative, which takes on a responsibility to ensure a certain level of diversity among the different

actors (Holzmarkt 2013). There will be spatial limits to promote this user variety. Based on the cooperative's experiences with temporary uses, a structural framework will be created to promote and stimulate change, e.g. through temporary leases. The approach aims to permit constant renewals and in the long run means that young people, artists and entrepreneurs have a realistic chance to establish themselves here due to attractive rental terms. This is also reflected within the built structure, which is developed to enable change and therefore ensure the preservation

of creative free space (Holzmarkt 2013). The construction process will occur in phases over a period of around ten years and a final state is not determined. During this time parts of the area will be assembled one at the time while other sections can be activated with the help of temporary uses.

On the following spread I have illustrated the idea of a possible final state with the planned content, which consists both of permanent and temporary or flexible structures.



"Artists, artisans, musicians and hedonists create with and for each other." Holzmarkt 2013

Holzmarkt village. Illustration: Holzmarkt 2013



The marketplace. Illustration: Holzmarkt 2013



The village. Illustration: Holzmarkt 2013

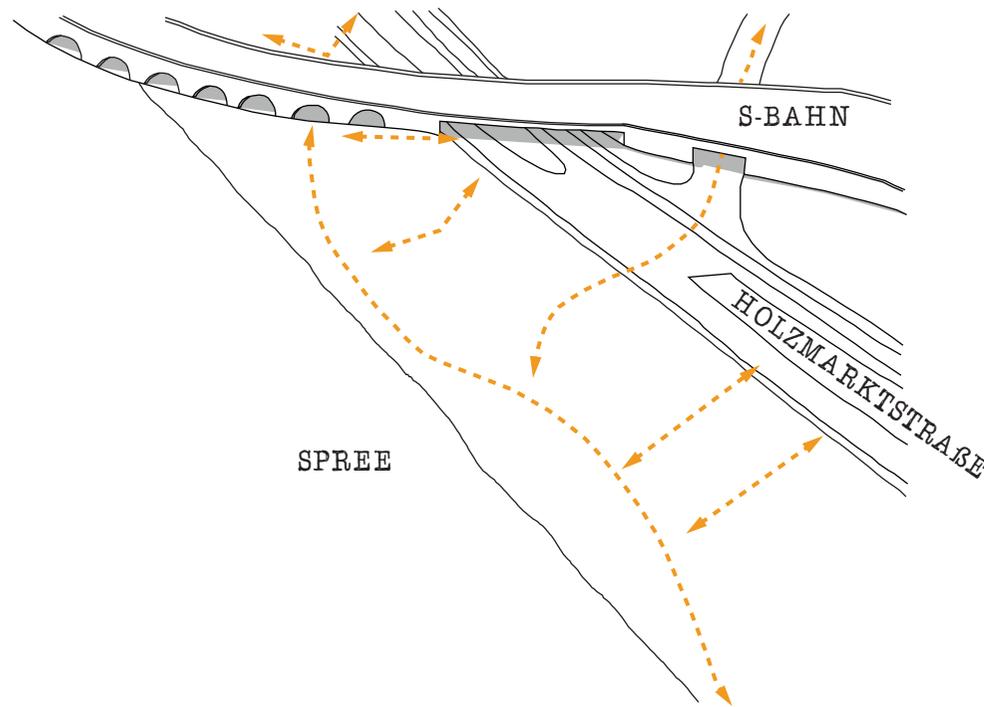


Mörchenpark. Illustration: Holzmarkt 2013



The Club. Illustration: Holzmarkt 2013

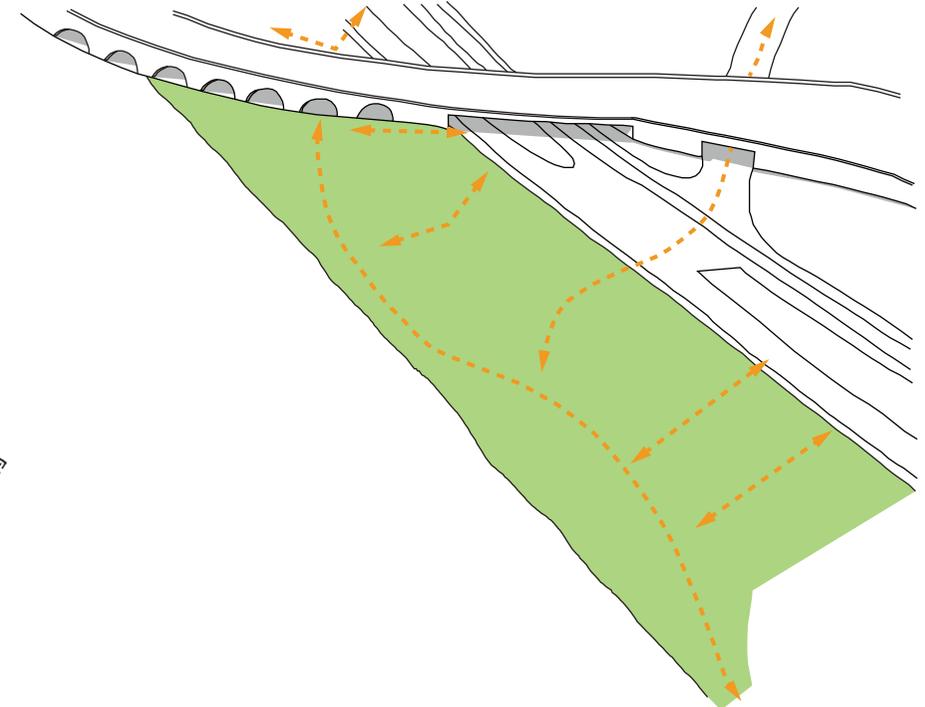
ANALYSIS: Conceptual sketches and texts based on material from the Holzmarkt brochure.



FLOW & VISUAL CONNECTIONS

Five entrance points will lead to and through the village. These so called "Spree windows" realizes the idea of permeability by providing direct sightlines to the river and the opposite riverbank.

A publicly accessible path along the water connects the area with the two adjacent bridges.



PUBLIC SPACE

The *Mörchenpark* is the name of the public space which will cover the entire area as a network of open spaces with various qualities. It will function as a testing ground for participatory design. This is where the citizen-initiated referendum is implemented in the development. Within an organization, also going by the name *Mörchenpark*, interested citizens can gather to "plan for, build and cultivate the riverbank in collaboration with the Holzmarkt cooperative", where they also form a voting member. The aim of this organizational structure is to permanently secure public space on the site.

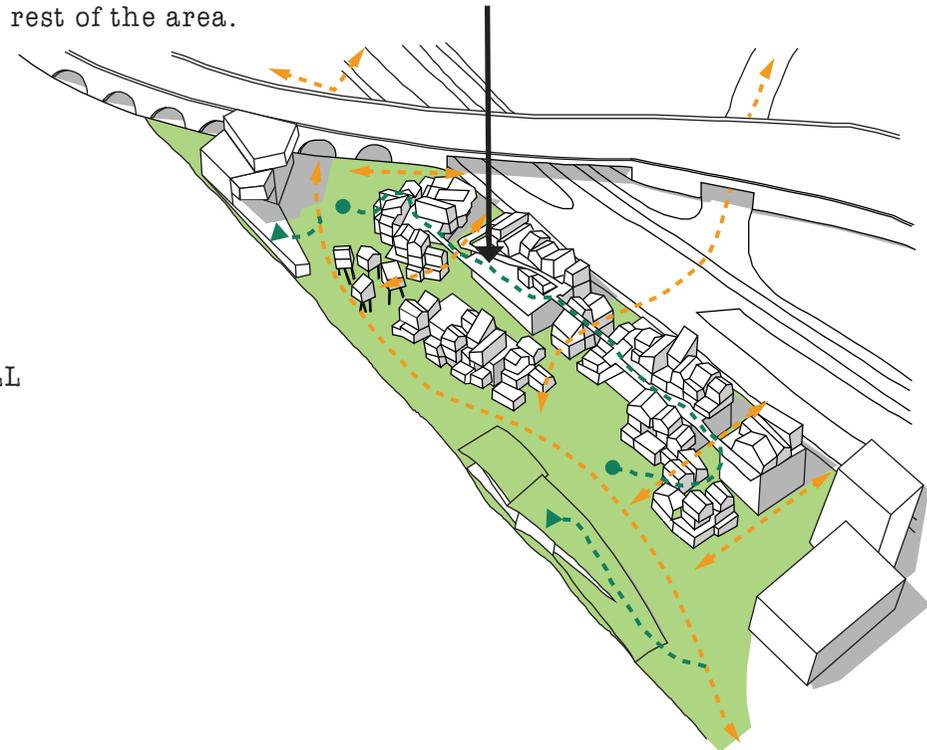


PERMANENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The halls provides the village with a basic street-like structure. They form a concrete foundation for the residential cottages and functions as a noise barrier towards Holzmarktstraße.

These structures offer a variety of uses and adaptable spaces. Workshops, businesses etc can start small and expand over time depending on needs.

“MOUNTAIN PATH”: A publicly accessible system of planks and bridges will connect the huts and halls on roof level with the rest of the area.



DYNAMIC STRUCTURES & SPACE

The huts stand in bright contrast to the halls with their features and dimensions of a smaller scale. Tenants will influence the appearance of this part of the village with different materials and personalized architecture. The temporary and individual character of the huts provides the village with a characteristic form, which is constantly in the process of change e.g. floors could be added, huts could be centralized into groups. They can stand alone as well as be built in connection to the halls.

SUMMARY: HOLZMARKT

Holzmarkt's different and holistic approach have met various, but mainly positive reactions from Berlin's politicians and also gained international attention from people who want to copy the concept. Johannes Husten¹ explains that the ideas and values can be implemented in other projects, but the design and content is very contextual. As I see it, the development tries to recreate the opportunities of free space, but in a more

organized fashion. This is also confirmed by Johannes, who describes Holzmarkt as a result of maturing subculture. The development therefore seems to be an attempt to formalize alternative culture and make it last in a more long-term perspective. Though not being finalized yet, it functions well as a source of inspiration for how to implement the permitting characteristics of free space in a new development.

FORMALIZING FREE SPACE

By learning about the process, organization and content of The Holzmarkt, a number of key factors for allowing space to function as a permanent canvas for temporary uses and expressions can be defined. These are providing preconditions and an "infrastructure" for creative activities in this urban context and could function as a framework for projects with a similar aim, such as the development on Rigaer Straße 71-73

¹ Interview with Johannes Husten 2015-02-18



Holzmarkt village. Illustration: Holzmarkt 2013

FRAMEWORK: “Formalized free space”



top-down enabling

When the site of the Holzmarkt was put up for auction after the public referendum, the district authorities dared to sell it to a cooperative with interesting ideas instead of the highest bidder.

City authorities must dare to let go of control and allow small-scale initiatives to activate and develop urban spaces and areas.



permanent + temporary

The Holzmarkt contains permanent infrastructure of more or less general character as well as dynamic structures for temporary changes. Combined with temporary leases and favorable rental terms the site will be able to constantly evolve.

By allowing the unestablished to exist alongside the established, new ideas can be generated, which will keep the site or area dynamic. Design of general or flexible character is also needed for this idea of changeability.



value for all

Holzmarkt aims to be a space with community focus which provides additional values to the area and city through river bank access, cultural activities, citizen empowerment and collaborative design.

There should be an initial and clear idea for the overall use of the site which provides values for others than the immediate users.



public functions

In the Holzmarkt village, the ground floors provide public functions of various character. The structures are organized to provide sightlines and flows through the development and connect to adjacent walking paths.

A development which puts emphasis on the public sphere by considering flows of people and providing various public functions on ground floor could invite to spontaneous visits, also by unexpected target groups.



internal organization

In the Holzmarkt village, the cooperative are quarter managers which coordinates the activities, but allows citizen-influence through the civic organization Mörchenpark.

There should be main actors who can provide a system or management, which makes sure the additions and adjustments of the site are made in a constructive manner.



spatial qualities

The Holzmarkt development is facing south, being car-free, containing structures of human scale with interesting façade variations, putting emphasis on the natural features of the river bank and providing qualitative open spaces for play and creativity.

For urban life to thrive, people must willingly use and stay in public spaces. These should therefore provide certain spatial qualities, e.g. favorable sun conditions.

REFERENCE SPACES & USES

“Art thematizes spaces, comments on them and changes them. Artists are not only economically dependent on niches in the space of the city; they are also interested in them as subject matter and formal elements for their works”
Claudia Büttner in Urban Catalyst 2014



Section 8 is a container bar in Melbourne CBD

Photo: <http://annevipetersson.blogspot.com.au/2010/03/secrets-door-of-melbourne.html>



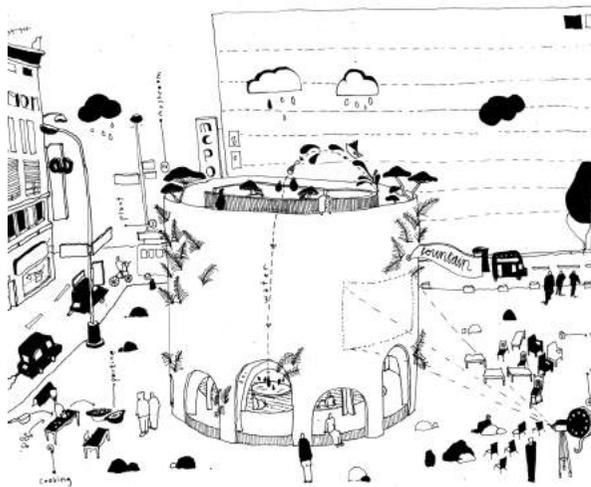
“PLATOON KUNSTHALLE is designed as an experimental space for artists and creatives, and for the members of the PLATOON NETWORK.[...] The venue hosts art projects, workshops and events in the realms of club culture, subcultural networks, global movements and more.”

Platoon Kunsthalle, Berlin

Image source: <http://www.platoon.org/kunsthalle/about>



Street art of various forms and styles can be found everywhere in Berlin. On screens, façades, doorways and on walls, but also in unexpected places. Corners of houses, bridge piers and the roadside become canvases for art that often has a political message. Public art is an inspiring element, which makes the cityscape feel more vivid, colorful and dynamic. It is for everyone to appreciate, enjoy or react on.



◁ **Fountain house** is a public place of interaction and interchange, which celebrates the free access to water in the city. “We tend to take for granted many achievements inherited from previous generations’ common efforts, without giving them a second thought. One of these heritages are public infrastructures”
 raumlaborberlin 2014
 Image source: <http://raumlabor.net/fountain-house/>



The Urban Orchard on Union Street in London was a temporary community garden created together with over a hundred volunteers (Wayward 2010).

Image source: <http://www.wayward.co.uk/work/garden/union-street-urban-orchard>



◁ **Kunsthaus ACUD** is an alternative venue for various forms of art, performances, etc. It has a theater, a gallery, two cinemas, a club and concert space, a large rehearsal room, a bar and numerous studios, which are grouped around a central courtyard (Resident advisor 2015).
 Image source: <http://www.berliner.de/orte/acud-berlin>

3. SITE & REDESIGN

URBAN CONTEXT

The site of Antje Øklesund is located in the borough of Friedrichshain, which forms part of the district Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. It is the most densely populated area in Berlin with 12,400 residents per km² compared to 3,809 per km², which is for whole Berlin (Visit Berlin 2015). Friedrichshain's borders are defined by the large green area Volkspark Friedrichshain in the north and by the Spree river in the south.

“Revolutionary spirit in restored old buildings”

David Borck Real Estate Company mbH

Because of the direct access to inland waterways combined with a well developed railway network, Friedrichshain became the city's centre of industry during the Industrial Revolution (David Borck 2015). In the north and eastern parts, the ambiance of being a working class district and Berlin's social democratic and communist melting pot in the 1920s and 30s (Wigers 2014) still feels present due to the large amount of restored old buildings.



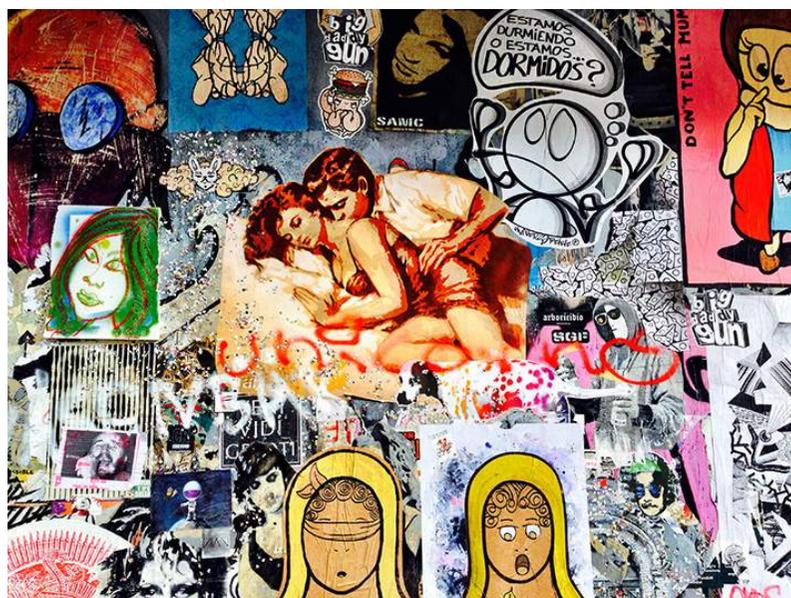
The industries became prime targets during the Second World War and around 50 per cent of Friedrichshain was destroyed (Wigers 2014). Throughout the GDR era additional parts were torn down and rebuilt according to modernistic ideals (Potma 2011), which have resulted in the western part of the borough feeling rather drained of life.

ALTERNATIVE & TRENDY

Today, Friedrichshain is known for its rugged atmosphere, squats and underground club scene (Potma 2011). Still, it appears as a

district of contrasts, not only in terms of the built environment, but also regarding the clientele. It is currently mentioned as one of Berlin's most fashionable areas (berlin-info.de), home to design and media companies, sprinkled with cool bars, clubs and cafés, which attracts their fair share of visitors, looking for a good time. These features and the subsequent tourism, represent an important source of income for the district (Ewert, Evers 2014) This seems like a highly presumable explanation for the district authorities' interest in keeping the actors behind Antje Øklesund et al on site.

The most popular areas in Friedrichshain are to a large extent inhabited by people who moved there during the last ten years and the average age level is around 30 (Wigers 2014). However, you will still regularly encounter more "original" characteristics such as punk rockers, unleashed dogs and squats turned into house projects with colorful façades. The rents in the district are still remaining relatively low. However, the ongoing gentrification processes of Berlin is present also here with significant raises during the last ten years (Wigers 2014).

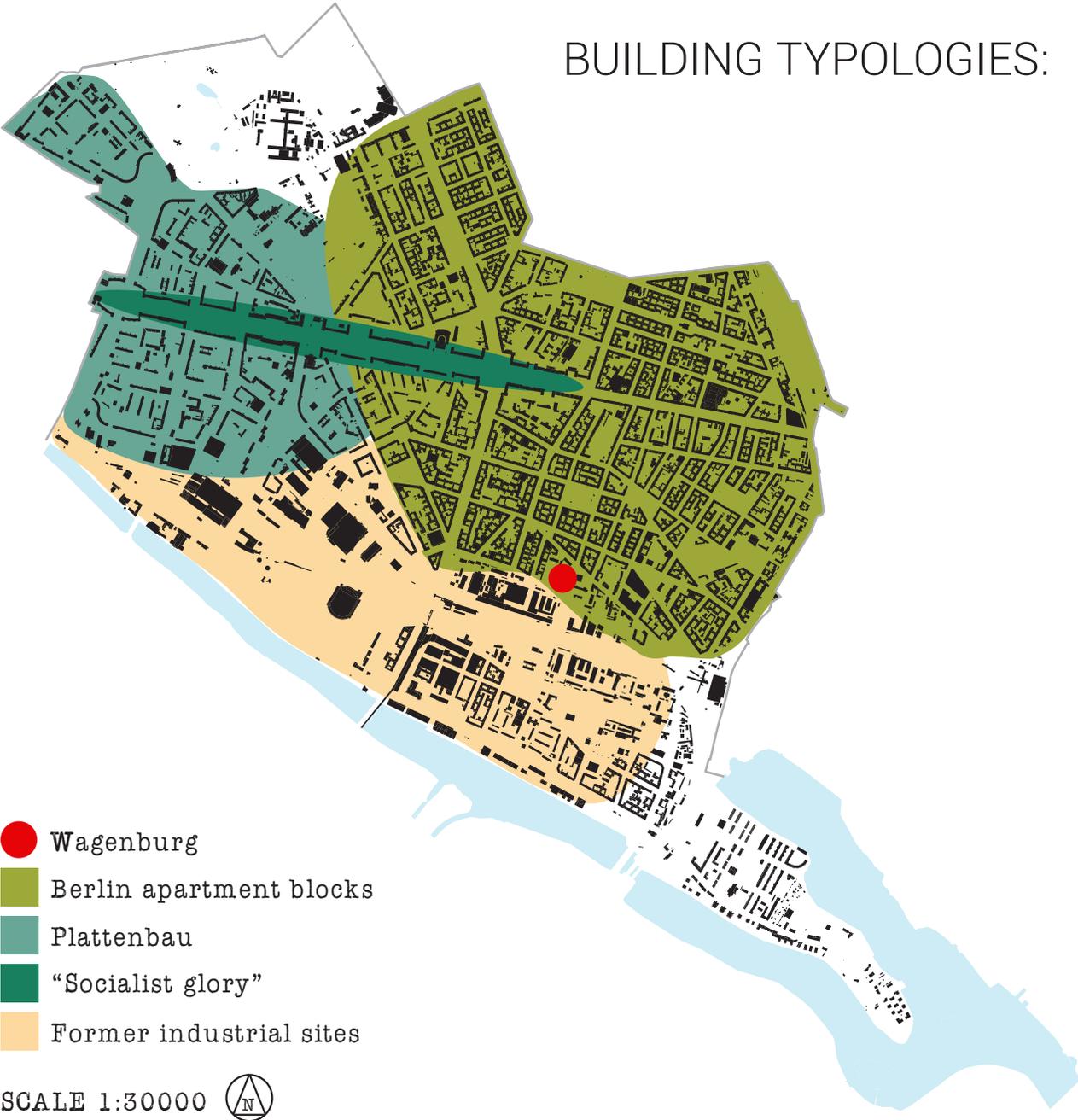


“Friedrichshain is charmingly beautiful where
history has been gentle and unrestrainedly
ugly where evil have been raging freely”

Valle Wigers, 2014



BUILDING TYPOLOGIES:



THE BERLIN APARTMENT BLOCK

This structure, which characterizes the area around Rigaer Straße, originates from the 18th century when the landowners began to develop rear courtyards for residential purposes (Braun 2006). The later construction of apartment blocks followed a similar pattern of erecting a front building with side wings and cross buildings. The result was a mixture of varied social classes in front and rear house, which became typical for the city. Renovated apartments in those buildings remain among the most popular forms of housing in Berlin today (ibid.).



"SOCIALIST GLORY"

Frankfurter Allee is a wide boulevard, which divides Friedrichshain into north and south (Nordkiez and Südkiez). It was built by East German officials and initially named Stalinallee in 1953 (Intelligent Travel 2014). Purpose of the project was to show socialism from its most attractive side (Braun 2006). The architecture originates from Soviet-era Moscow boulevards and the buildings were home to the Communist Party's elite (Intelligent Travel 2014). Here in Friedrichshain is where they hoped to build a model Communist city.



PLATTENBAU

Plattenbau is the name of a building constructed of large, prefabricated concrete slabs (Berlin im Detail 2015). Although this typology is often considered to be typical of East Germany, the method was also used extensively in the West as it was an efficient way to solve the country's housing shortage. Plattenbau apartments were considered highly desirable in East Germany, the main alternative being overcrowded, deteriorating prewar housing, often with wartime damage still visible (ibid.)



FORMER INDUSTRIAL SITES

(see p. 29)



Mediaspree



O² Arena

PUBLIC SPACE TYPOLOGIES:



1. VOLKSPARK FRIEDRICHSHAIN

Opened in 1848 and consisting of 52 hectares, this is the oldest and third largest public park in Berlin (Sullivan 2010). Also, it is the source behind the district's current name (ibid.). Together with sunbathing areas and leisure opportunities it offers an historically rich atmosphere including interesting landmarks. Sport facilities, restaurants and temporary uses such as the Open Air Cinema makes the park into a well-visited spot at most times of the year and day/night.



2. EAST SIDE GALLERY

By River Spree lies the largest open air gallery in the world (East Side Gallery 2015). It exhibits a remaining 1,3 km of the 150 km long Berlin Wall covered with around 106 paintings by artists from all over the world. The land between the gallery and the water was split up and sold by the government, with hopes of upscale development (Exberliner 2013). Friedrichshain's local government bought most of it back for public use, but a few plots are still in private possession...



3. BOXHAGENER PLATZ

This square represents the centre of Friedrichshain and is surrounded by bars, restaurants, cafés and shops. It consists of a children's playground, paddling pool and a small park. Found here is a broad mix of people ranging from families to punk rockers and hipsters. They all gather here on a sunny day to sit or lay down in the grass with a coffee or beer. Saturdays mean food market and Sundays second hand shopping.



4. RAW AREA

This area by the train tracks in southern Friedrichshain is the former location of Reichsbahnausbesserungswerkes (state railway repair workshop, RAW) (Oswalt, Overmeyer & Misselwitz 2013). Parts of the site have been used temporarily by actors within the cultural field since 1998. There are concerts, flea markets and similar events all year. RAW's future however, is now uncertain after the site have been sold to a private investor (ibid.).





RIGAER STRASSE

The site of Antje Øklesund is located on this street in northern Friedrichshain. It is parallel with Frankfurter Allee and a part of the quarter *Samariterviertel*. Between 1993-2008 the area have undergone extensive renovation, but with the goal set to keep its original character (Senate Department for Urban Development 2015e). At first the process resulted in a decline of inhabitants, but in 1999 there was a turnaround and the population have now increased from an initial 6223 in 1993 to 8324 in 2007. This is partly a result

of previously empty apartments being taken in possession after renovation, but also due to infill projects (ibid.). Even though the social compound is said to have been "upgraded", the street still has the highest concentration of house projects in Berlin (Berlin Besetzt 2015). Rebecca Lilliecrona¹, who lives in Friedrichshain, describes it as a unique "micro cosmos" which additionally includes social housing, cultural initiatives and now also luxury apartments.

¹ Rebecca Lilliecrona, *Neurotitan*, 2014-11-07



Laura Shober² is currently living in one of the house projects on Rigaer Straße and she has witnessed the street's development during the last century:

“Ten years ago a cool underground Punk bar/gigroom called ‘Kellerloch’ (Basement hole) was still in the street, before the city locked it with concrete because of it being illegal. The entrance was a hole in the ground, which you had to climb through [...] Also that was the first time I’ve been to the house project I am living in at the moment, where at that time only the top floors of the front house were squatted.

Back then, a brache called Bambyland was a good place to hang out. The house on that land gave home to a few illegal people. Houses on the street weren’t refurbished after master plans of ugliness, there were more squats, nicer people, less tourists, but probably the same great amount of dogs who make

² Interview with Laura Schober, 2015-04-09

the area in my opinion more alive and natural. Also the Punkshop ‘Pukemusic’ has been there for 15 years, the owner committed suicide recently, people think this is a big change for the scene. There is too much to complain about. But I don’t think the street got any better, to be honest, keeping in mind that I am part of the punk scene. I do believe that ‘normal’ people might see an improvement in the street, but forgetting that they now have to pay the double amount for their flat than 20 years ago.”

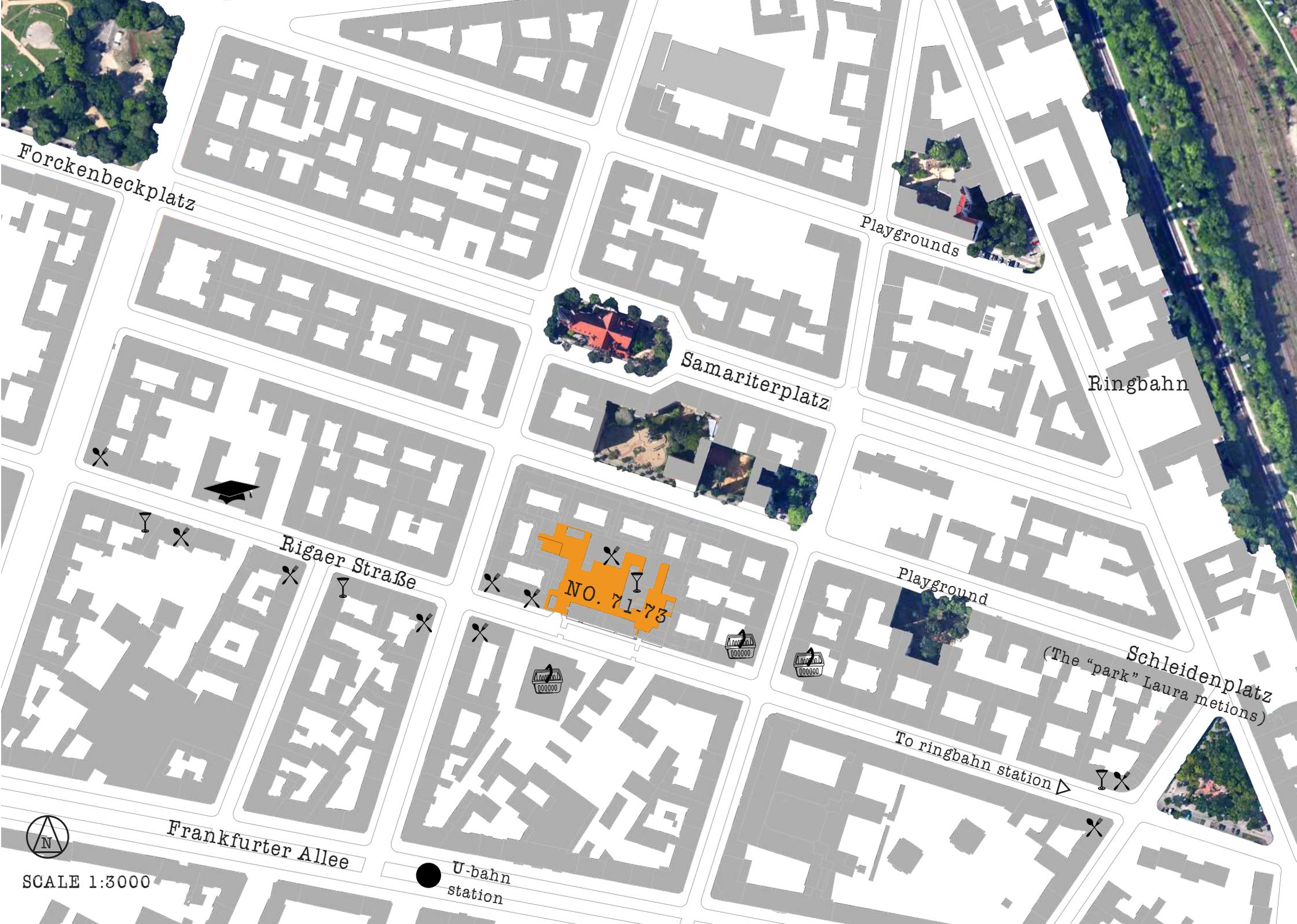
Her opinions on public space in the area, or rather the lack of it:

“There is only one ‘park’ near the Ringbahn, it’s only got four benches, a small playground and not much green. We rather sit on the pavements in front of the house and bars in summer, but mainly go to the bigger parks nearby. The population in Friedrichshain is rising rapidly so I do think more public places will be necessary soon, also because the

brachen are being used to build new houses to please the increasing need of living space [...] Public spaces that are big enough to please everyone’s interests would be important, but development is too interested in creating new living space and not considering that people moving there also want and need green areas and public spaces.”



Old and new buildings on Rigaer Straße



Forckenbeckplatz

Playgrounds

Samariterplatz

Ringbahn

Rigaer Straße

NO. 71-73

Playground

Schleidenplatz
(The "park" Laura mentions)

To ringbahn station

Frankfurter Allee

U-bahn station



SCALE 1:3000

Rigaer Straße has played and appears to still play an important part for Friedrichshain's alternative culture. The former squats contribute to the making the street more alive. For example, Laura¹, mentions *Die lange Nacht der Rigaerstr* (the long night of Rigaer Straße), which is a festival-like event with music and food in the still existing house projects. This year they are also organizing another street party to celebrate their 25th anniversary.

THE LIVING ROOM OF THE CITY

“[...] We rather sit on the pavements in front of the house and bars in summer[...]”

The surroundings mainly offer public spaces in terms of playgrounds (as seen in the map on the right). Rigaer Straße in itself is of the local street character which is quite typical for Berlin, with a limited amount of traffic, generous sidewalks, trees and street side parking which form an important safety distance between traffic and pedestrians. There are lively parts of the street and less interesting parts, generally it seems related

¹ Interview with Laura Schober, 2015-04-09

to the use of the ground floor. Where there are apartments in direct connection to the street, which is the case of nearly all new development on Rigaer Straße, the lack of transparency and activity makes the street feel abandoned. Another reason is the semi-private feel of the sidewalk in front of those façades, which does not invite to staying and therefore does not promote urban life.

As Laura mentions, people like to meet outside the houses, bars, spätkauf's (convenience stores which sell e.g. cold beer) etc, when the weather allows it. This is something I have encountered in most parts



of Berlin, a habit of spontaneously making the street into an extended living room. The retired architect Karl-Ola Warnhammar, who used to work in Berlin for a longer period of time, told me that the insular position of the city during the wall era made people more or less forced into making the most of semi-private courtyards and public spaces. This appears as a culture which survived the dismantling of the wall.

CONCLUSIONS: RIGAER STRASSE

If urban life should be encouraged on Rigaer Straße, the trend of residential use on street level cannot be continued, as it is the publicly accessible functions which attracts people. The alternative culture is still a characteristic which makes this street unique and a resource of social engagement, which could be utilized in new projects. As previously mentioned this is a feature that even the district authorities seem to have started to embrace e.g. through "saving" Antje Øklesund. A new development on Rigaer Straße should therefore include public functions, open up towards the street and make use of these existing cultural resources.

◀ **New building on Rigaer Straße**

NO. 71-73

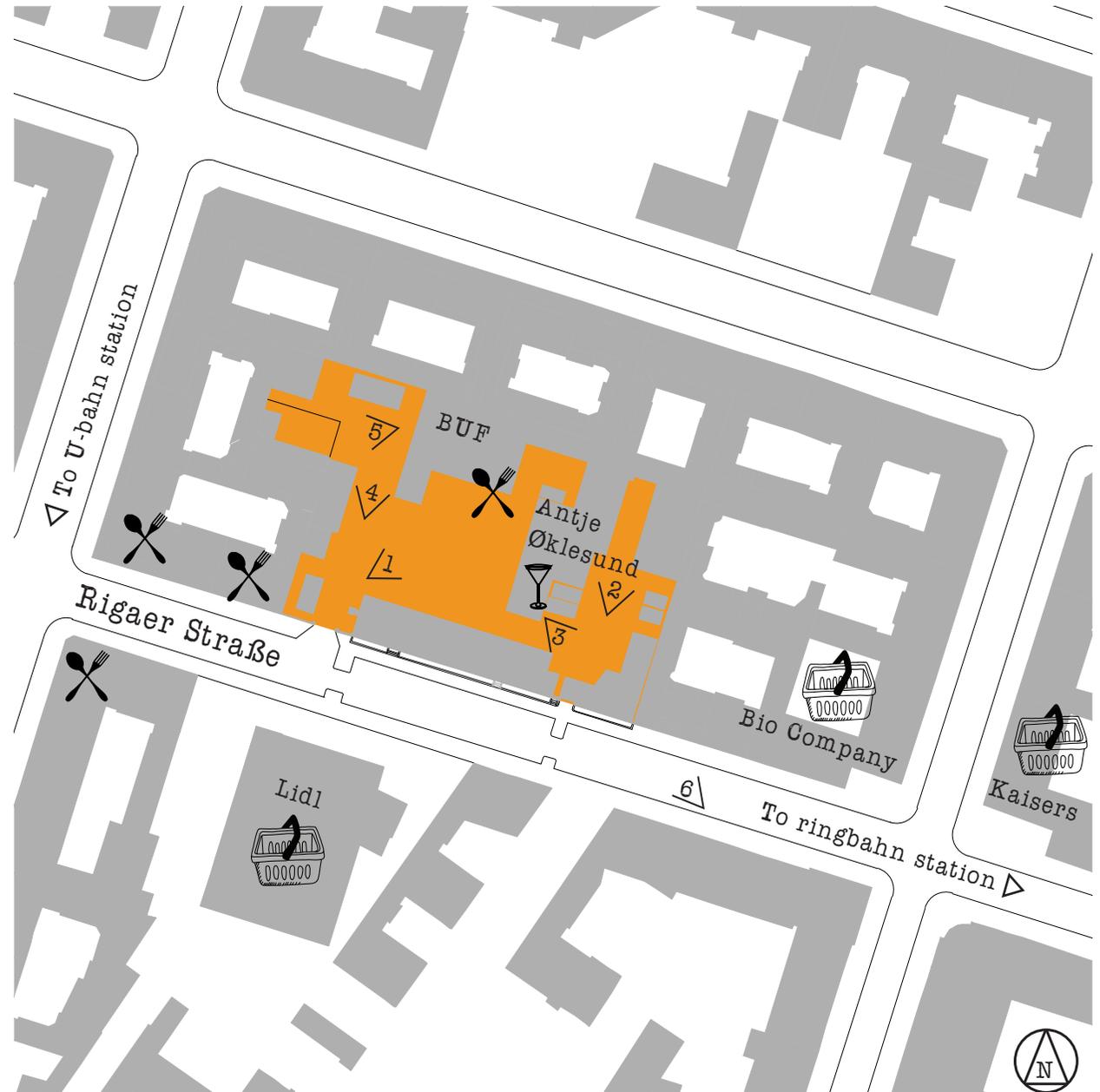
The plot where Antje Øklesund and BUF operate today consists of the remnants from a former furniture factory. Even though the site is publicly accessible it is not a formal public space, but one of those remaining sites in Berlin waiting to be developed. Rebecca Lilliecrona¹ tells me that the front houses have been empty for the last ten years. When she came to Berlin it was possible to move in there and barely pay any rent, but you had to install the electricity yourself...

The insular position with buildings in decay have been quite suitable for a venue like Antje Øklesund. There is barely anyone to disturb and they have been able to alter their premises according to their wishes. The site's historical buildings provides the streetscape on Rigaer Straße with an interesting variation in scale and character, despite the abandoned feel.

In the immediate surroundings are three grocery stores of larger chains and a few restaurants, which means there already is a certain flow of people around the plot. The future of Lidl's location is uncertain since it has been bought by another investor².

¹ Rebecca Lilliecrona, Neurotitan, 2015-11-07

² Hajo, Toppius, Stadtraumnutzung 2015-02-10





△ 1



△ 2



△ 3

▽ 4



▽ 5



▽ 6



THE EXISTING DESIGN PROPOSAL

The result of the participatory process between the investors CG Gruppe, Stadtraumnutzung and BUF is a mixed-use development of the same height as surrounding buildings: ground floor + six levels. Under ground a parking garage is planned, but also a project space for music and performances, which will be more or less equivalent to what Antje Øklesund have today. The aim is for this venue to be able to interact with the café/restaurant on ground floor. The cultural/commercial part of the development

will also house a guest flat e.g. for visiting artists. There will be rentable work space and possibilities for exhibitions. Hajo Toppius¹ tells me that a small foundation might be involved, which is renting rooms in the city and sublet them to artists. BUF is currently the larger actor on the site. They provide vocational education for adults, e.g. cycle repair. Together, Stadtraumnutzung and BUF have started to plan collaborations through different artistic concepts, making use of

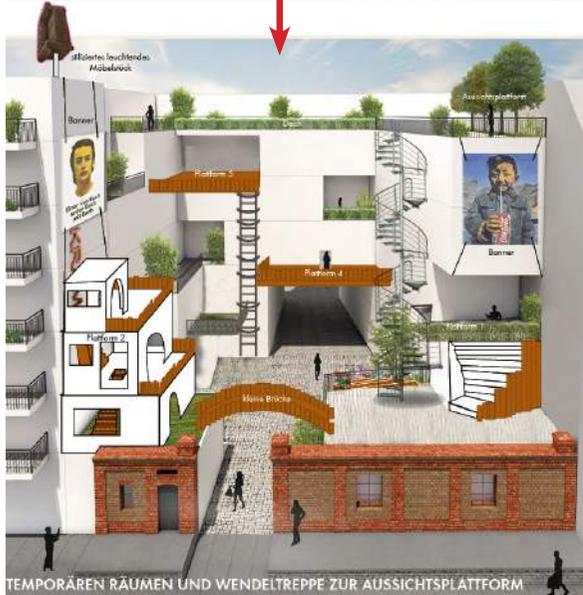
¹ Hajo Toppius, Stadtraumnutzung. 2015-02-10

BUF's students and their skills for installations etc. Planned use for the open courtyard is a variation of projects together with artists, residents and the neighborhood.

Summarized, the actors regard this as an unique opportunity to continue to represent the importance of cultural and social aspects in the city. Their ambition for the public space is to create a playful environment, which provides additional values for the whole community.



Elevation towards Rigaer Straße, cultural and public space in the right end behind the historical wall.
Illustration: Homuth & Partner Architekten



“It was a stereotype process in the beginning; ‘alternative guys meeting investors in suits’. They asked us to tell them what we wanted and needed. Our first suggestion were too extensive, but it ended up quite similar to what we suggested. Then came two years of fighting for the small stuff - for the details. We wanted the yard to be bigger etc. I think that from their point, the invested a lot of time listening to some alternative freaks”

“It will be interesting to see if alternative life is transformable into something more permanent and how it is able to give input to the people who live here and to the surroundings” Hajo Toppius, Stadtraumnutzung

- ◁ Conceptual sketches of how the courtyard space could be utilized with platforms and vertical connections

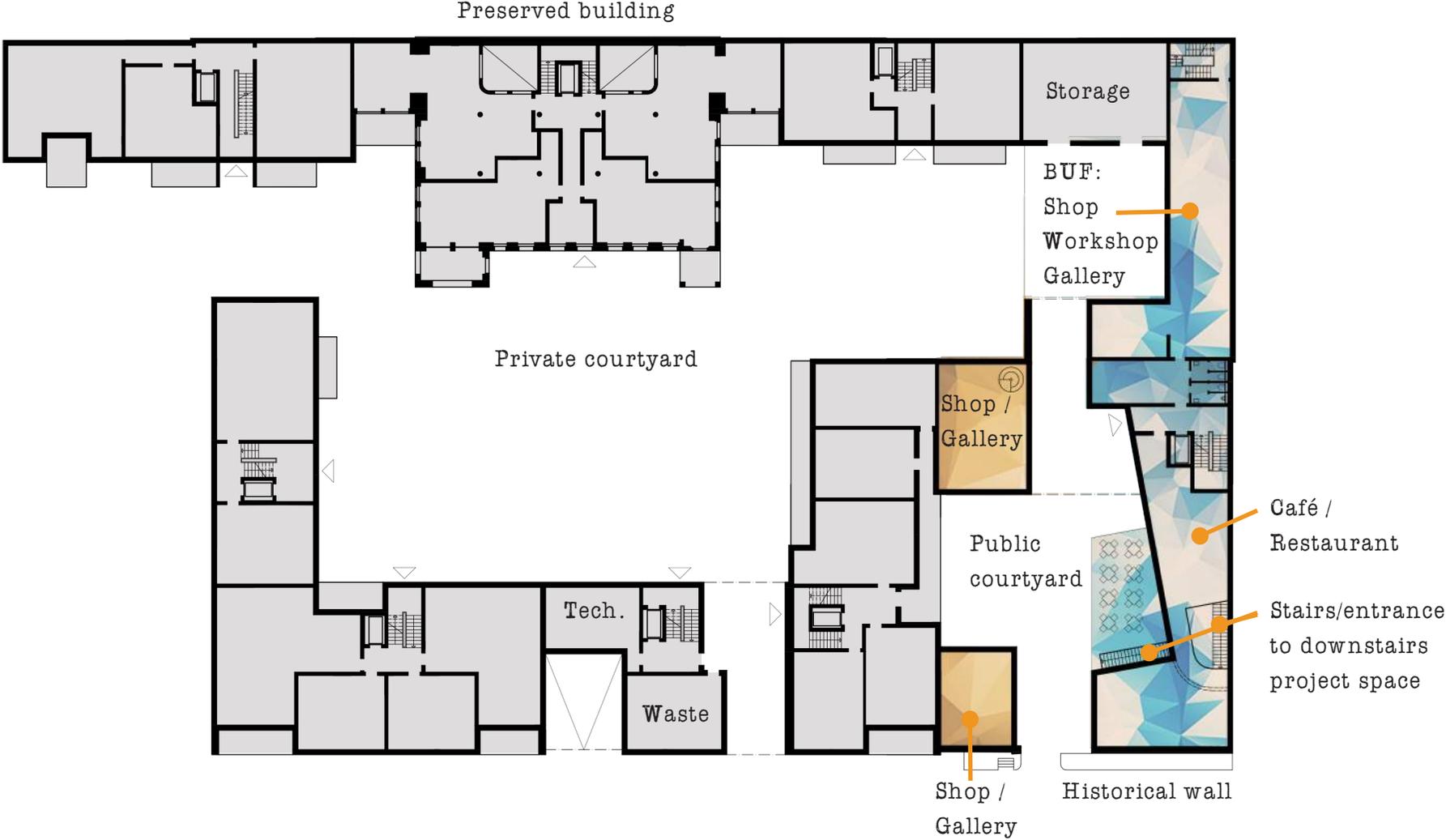
Illustrations: Stadtraumnutzung



Container city.
Illustration: Stadtraumnutzung

The interest organization have been appointed a part of the plot on the south-western end to use temporarily during the construction phase. The image above shows the idea of a container city, which they have developed for this purpose. Here the public will be invited to participate in a variety of different installations and activities, sprung from the collaboration between Stadtraumnutzung and BUF (Stadtraumnutzung 2015c).

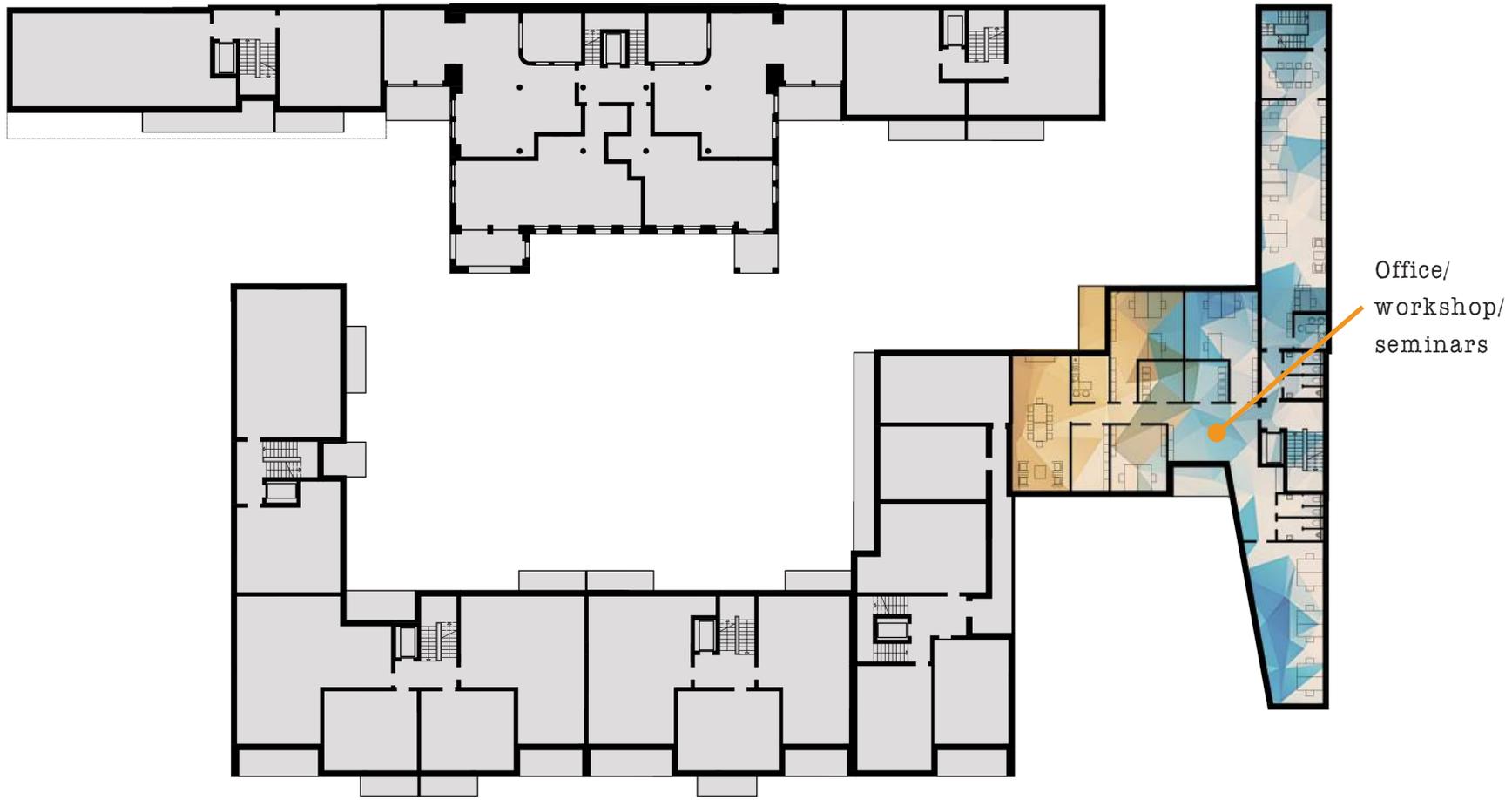
FLOOR PLANS



GROUND FLOOR, SCALE 1:500



Cultural/commercial activities
 Residential use



GENERAL FLOOR PLAN, SCALE 1:500



 Cultural/commercial activities

 Residential use

ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSAL



The public space created at Rigaer Straße 71-73 is a secluded courtyard of around 400 m² behind the existing brick wall in the south-eastern corner of the plot. Directly inside the passage way to the inner private courtyard is a semi-private zone in connection to BUF's premises. This part will close for the public

around 6 pm while the outer yard will be open until 1 am - 2 am. As the quote above by Hajo indicates, satisfied as the actors might be with this possibility overall, the design of the outdoor space still is not optimal, hence the ideas of platforms and bridges to increase the useable space.

“The outdoor area is still a bit too small...a main point have been to have a larger and more open yard”

“[...] interesting to see if alternative life is transformable into this and how it is able to give input to the people who live here and to the surroundings”

Hajo Toppius, Stadtraumnutzung

◁ Light conditions of the site on the 16th of June at 4 PM

Any measures to actively alter the streetscape are not declared, except for the garage driveway. The ground floor facing Rigaer Straße consists of apartments and the waste facilities.



top-down enabling

This example as well as the Holzmarkt show that the district authorities of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, at least to some extent, have realized the existing subculture's importance for the area. Here through an unique and experimental participatory process resulting in a mixed-use development, which provides affordable space for the cultural/commercial activities.



permanent + temporary

This is an infill project in a historic environment, run by an investor, which gives it rather different preconditions compared to the Holzmarkt. The residential and permanent aspect is here of greater importance. However, Stadraumnutzung's experience with events and temporary activities could provide an interesting dimension of dynamics to this development if utilized properly. Still, the current design of the public courtyard is rather introvert, small and inflexible. It is to my opinion a physical evidence of a skewed power balance in the participatory process.



value for all

Through interviews and written material it becomes clear that the interest organization IG Rigaer Straße 71-73 wants to make this development into an asset for the residents and the community as a whole, by providing interesting activities, events and possibilities to partake in interactive design and art projects.



public functions

Instead of opening up towards the main flow of people which occurs on the street, the public courtyard lies secluded behind the preserved historical wall with limited visibility. The wall is an interesting feature in itself but since the rest of the development's ground floor façade towards Rigaer Straße is of residential character, the street is not provided any new life.



internal organization

IG Rigaer Straße 71-73 is founded for the purpose of organizing temporary and permanent collaborations on this site. They could be more or less regarded as equivalent to the Holzmarkt cooperation's function as quarter manager as they will be responsible for the different uses of the indoor cultural/commercial and outdoor public space within this development



spatial qualities

The plot in its current state provides the streetscape with variation in scale and character and the actual hof (backyard) has good sun conditions. In the existing proposal, the design and position of the public courtyard makes it a rather shaded space. Berlin is a fairly northern city where possibilities to be able to enjoy the sunlight presumably could be considered as vital for people to use public spaces.

SUMMARY: ANALYSIS

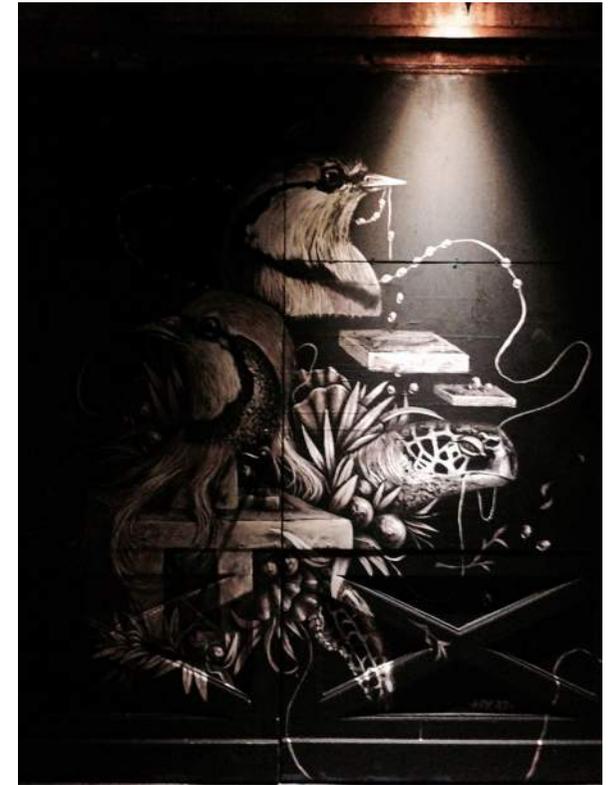
One immediate conclusion of the analysis is the fact that the size and enclosure of the courtyard will limit the flexibility, accessibility and subsequently the variety of uses and level of creative possibilities.

Another important aspect of well-functioning and lively urban spaces in general is people actually spending time there. Here, I experience the building edges as vital, both in terms of having something covering your back to lean on or sit against and regarding the sense of privacy. As mentioned on p. 51, many new infill projects on Rigaer Straße have apartments on ground floor, which makes those sections of the street feel like transfer zones solely. In the existing design proposal for this plot, a part of the historical wall is preserved and fronts the public courtyard. It forms a beautiful brick facade and creates a nice variation of scale in the streetscape, but it also visually separates the courtyard completely from the street which is then not provided with more life.

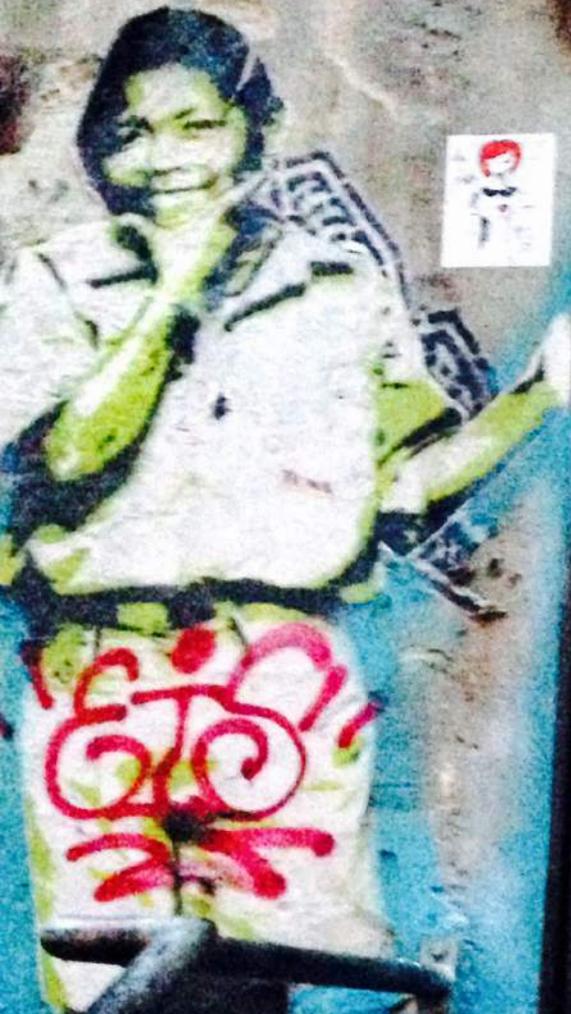
WHAT CAN THE ARCHITECT DO?

As architects we can provide spatial preconditions for certain activities to be able to occur. In this case they are of a creative character, which has the ability and ambition to continuously influence the space. Is it possible to accomplish a "blank canvas" or public space of general character in this specific context and how?

I have on the following spread suggested a number of alterations of the current design proposal in an attempt to strengthen this idea, make use of the existing spatial elements and create a more qualitative public space in general.



Decorated doors in Haus Schwarzenber's courtyard



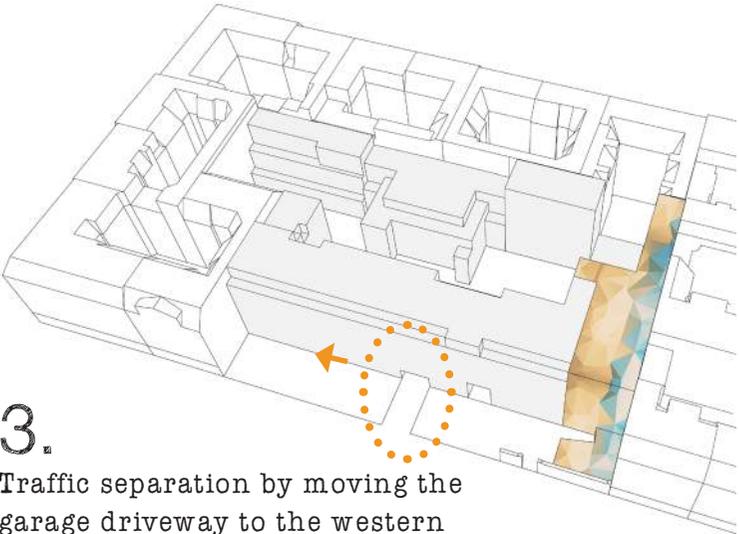
LIKE



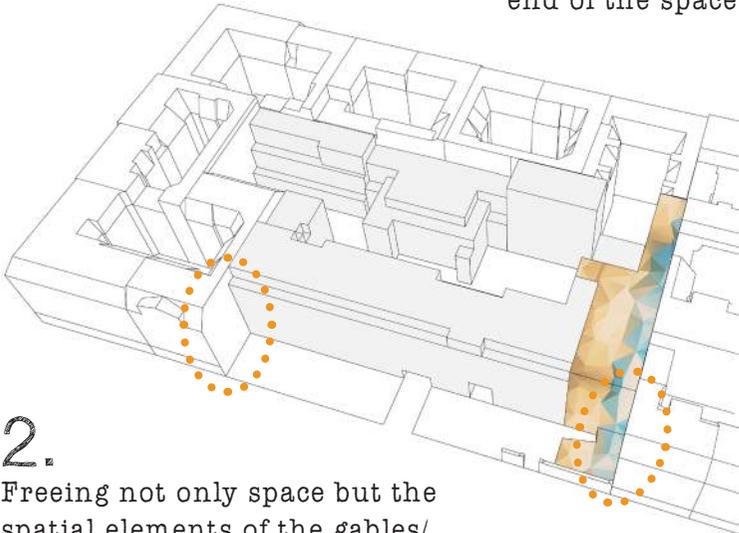
STRATEGIES FOR REDESIGN



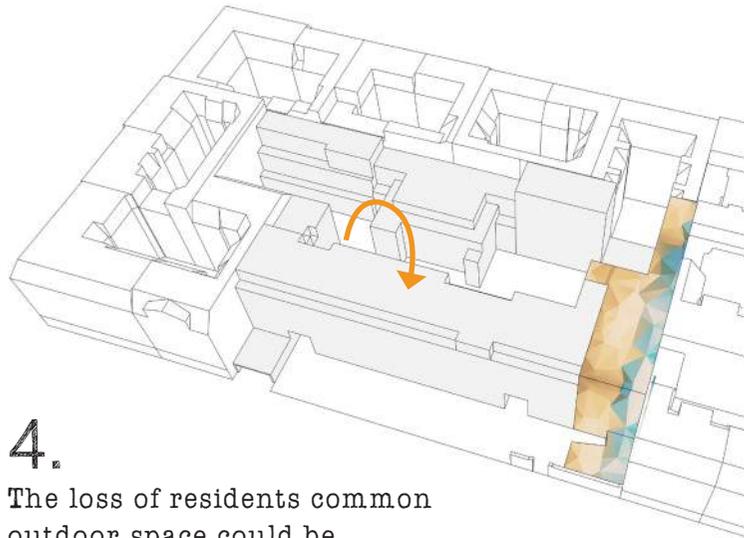
1. “Pushing” the street-facing housing volume further north leaves a larger, more flexible and accessible public space with good sun conditions.



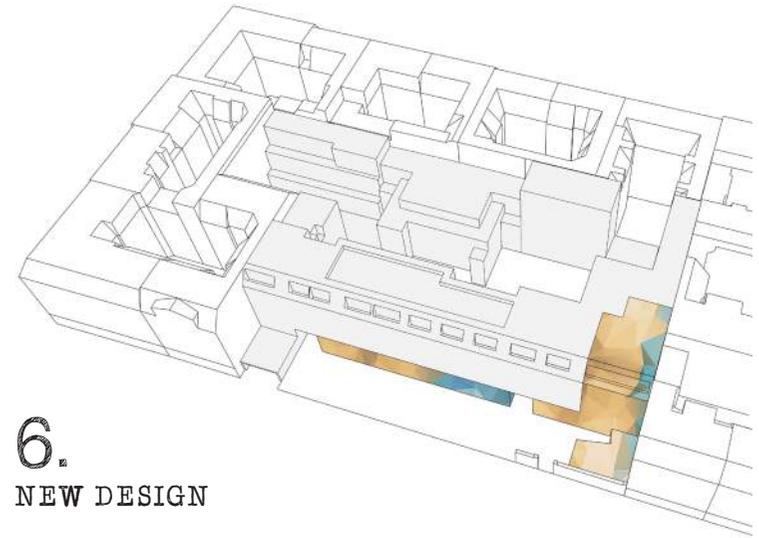
3. Traffic separation by moving the garage driveway to the western end of the space



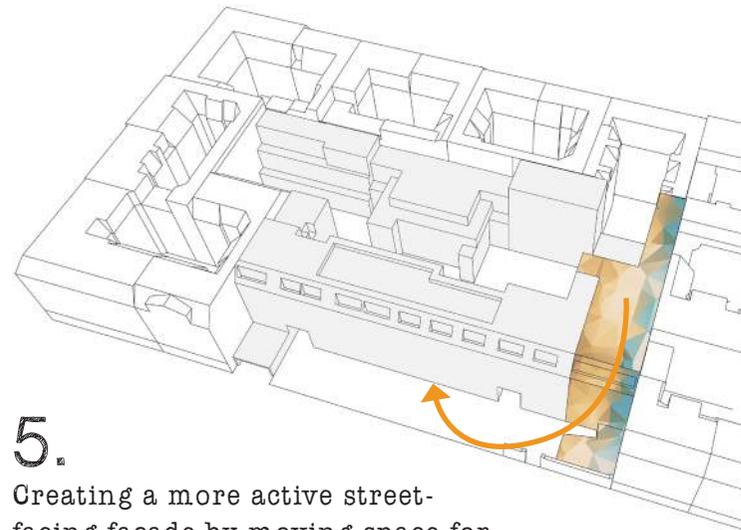
2. Freeing not only space but the spatial elements of the gables/ firewalls of adjacent buildings.



4.
The loss of residents common outdoor space could be compensated with a shared rooftop terrace



6.
NEW DESIGN

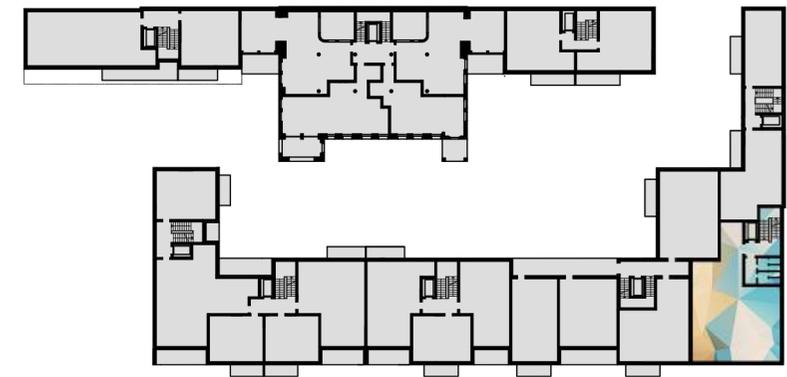
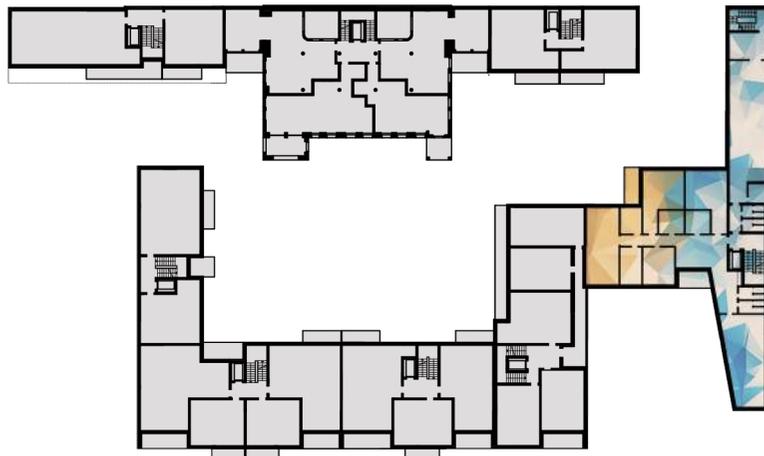


5.
Creating a more active street-facing façade by moving space for cultural/commercial activities to ground floor and level one

CHANGES IN FLOOR PLANS



GROUND FLOOR



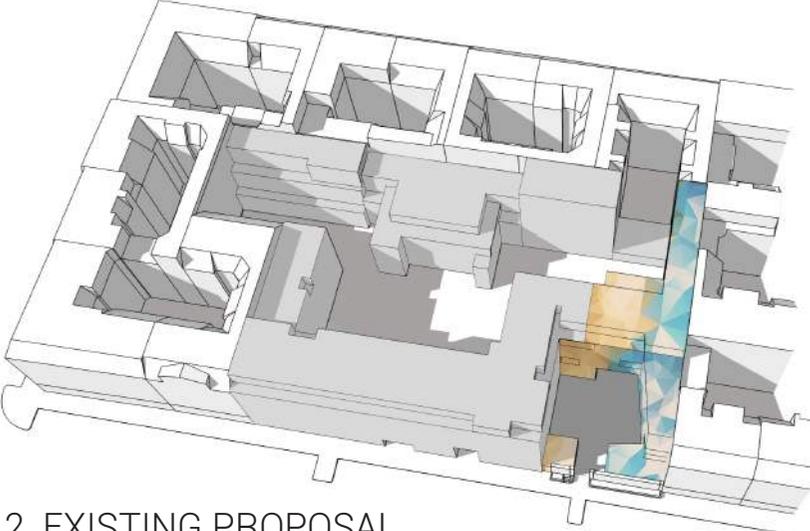
GENERAL FLOOR PLAN

 Cultural/commercial activities  Residential use

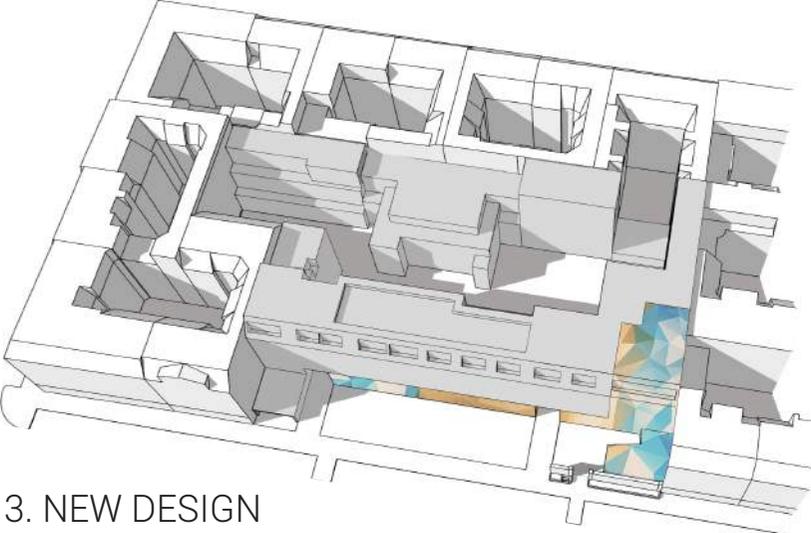
CHANGES IN VOLUMES



1. SITE TODAY



2. EXISTING PROPOSAL



3. NEW DESIGN





BRING ON THE NIGHT

KINO



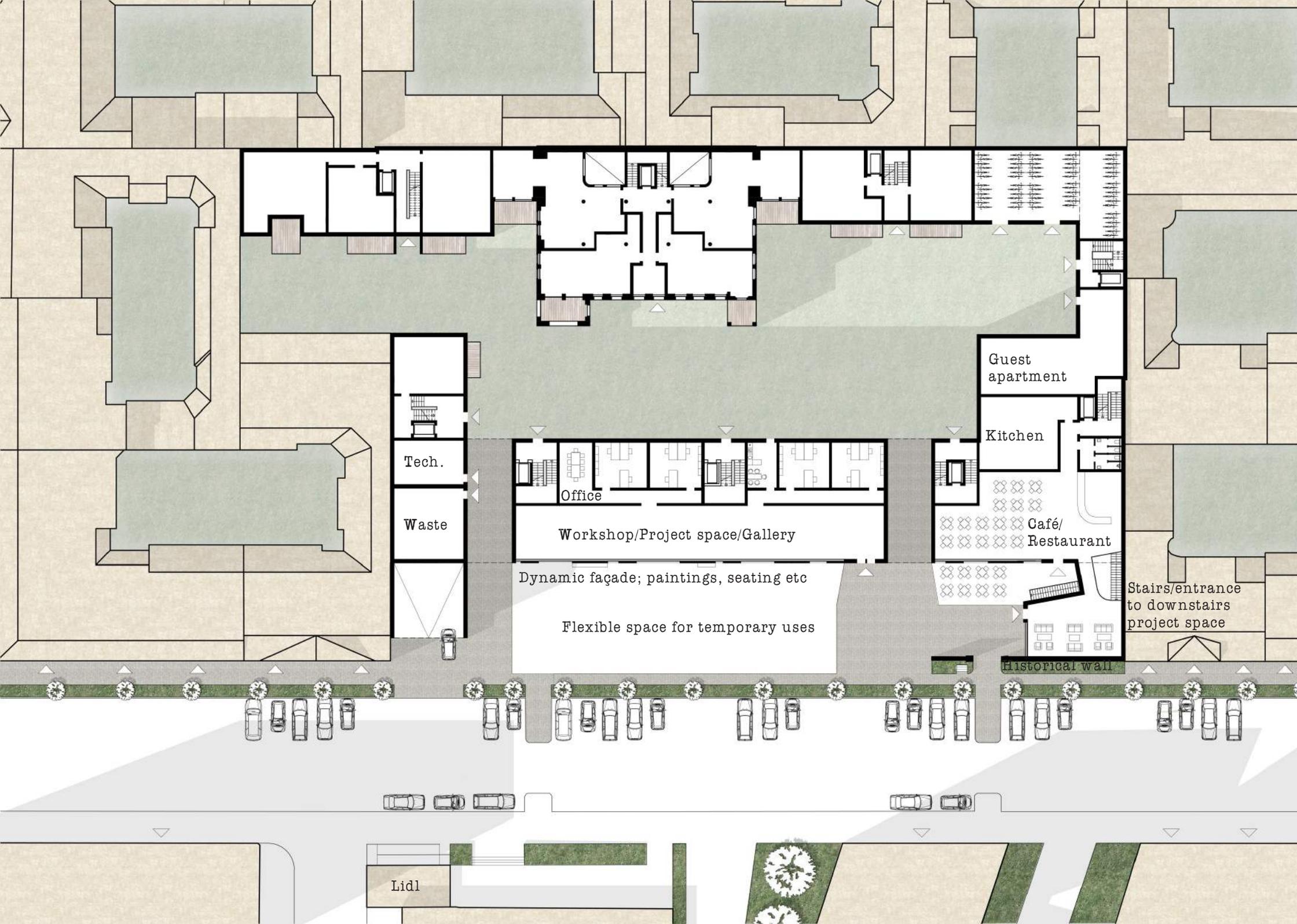
NEW DESIGN

The altered design for Rigaer Straße 71-73 displays the result of prioritizing qualitative space for creativity and social activities. Here, the public space is opened up and turned into an extension of the street facing south for an improved micro-climate, better visual connections and a more natural flow of people.

The existing design proposal is also adjusted to provide a higher level of flexibility for the current and potential actors. An open area of general character is combined with a more secluded section behind the preserved historical wall, in connection to the café/restaurant, for more passive activities. The space for IG Rigaer Straße 71-73 is covering the ground floor and level one. This restructuring is done in order to create more active façades and possibilities for activities to spread from indoors to outdoors and vice versa. Being of various character, they have the possibility to activate this space day and night as well as all year around.

The general character of the space also permits larger temporary structures such as containers and pavilions to house activities which could be citizen-initiated. Inviting the residents in and around the new development to partake is also a way of preventing eventual conflicts.

Along the existing street-side parking a green zone could be added as a developed continuation of the existing planted tree lines on both sides of the plot. The site is only planned to a certain extent since the aim is to provide space which can be changed, adjusted and developed through participatory design. All illustrated uses must therefore be regarded as suggestions.



Guest apartment

Kitchen

Tech.

Office

Waste

Workshop/Project space/Gallery

Café/
Restaurant

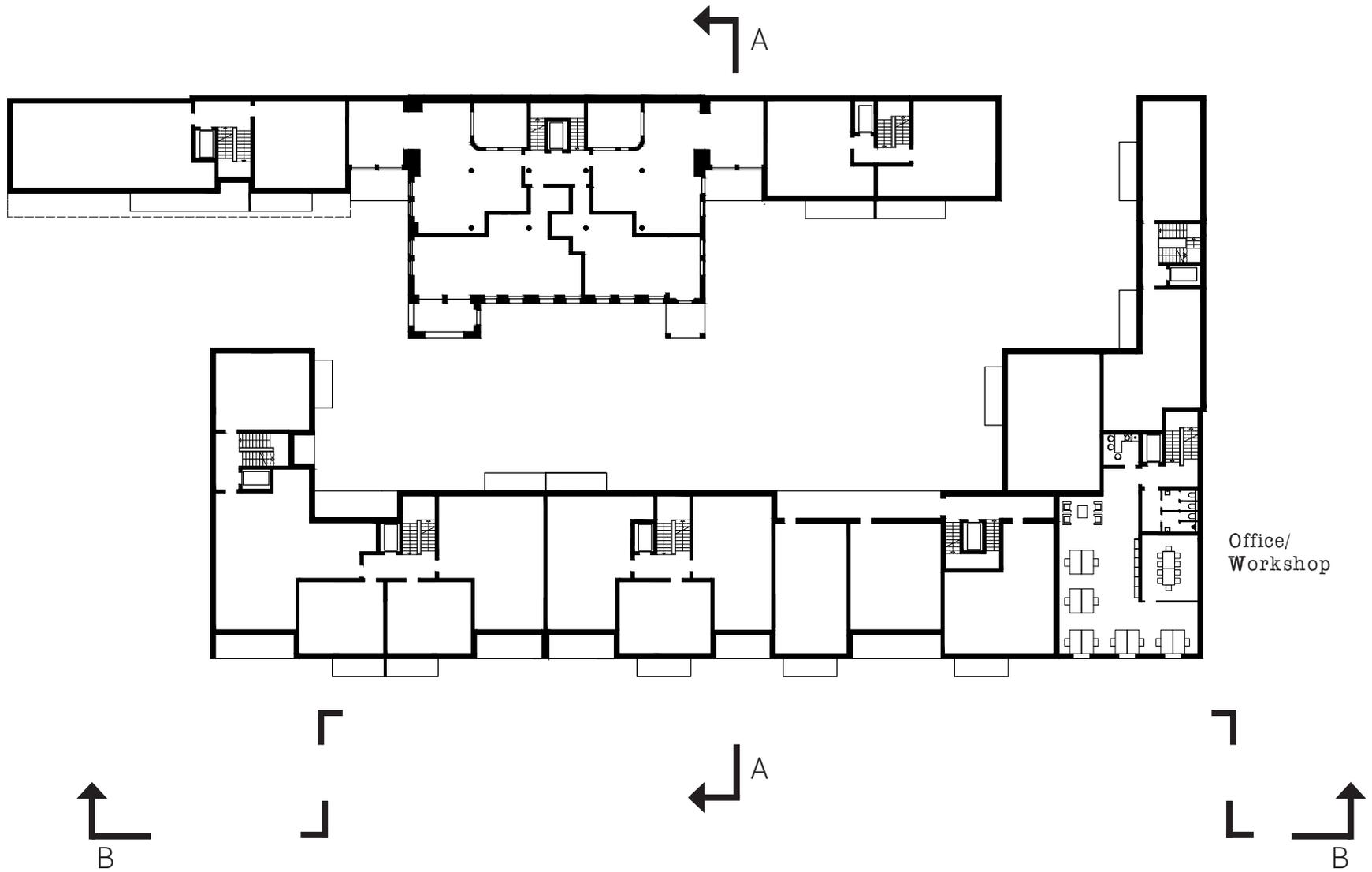
Dynamic façade; paintings, seating etc

Flexible space for temporary uses

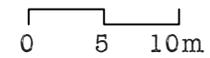
Stairs/entrance
to downstairs
project space

Historical wall

Lidl



GROUND FLOOR & GENERAL FLOOR PLAN, 1:500





As mentioned, the plot were
Lidl lies is said to have been
sold. In the meantime one
cannot help but fantasize
about temporary use of the
extensive roof space, which
could interact with the new
yard...

SECTION A, 1:200

By moving the housing volume inwards, the firewalls remain partly visible and could be utilized for e.g. street art as a spatial element. Typical Berlin...

By placing public functions in the two lowest floors, the border to the private sphere ends up further from the street compared to the surrounding buildings. This could possibly promote use of the yard further, without generating a sense of intrusion. The mixed use could also be a resource for the residents, through providing rentable office space etc.



On ground floor I have illustrated an idea of a dynamic façade with movable boards of e.g. plywood, which can regulate the level of transparency between indoor and outdoor projects space, function as a canvas for art, provide seating etc.



SECTION B, 1:200

The bare firewall on in this end has a public terrace in front and could be used for e.g. projections



6. CONCLUSIONS & REFLECTIONS

"Paris is always Paris and Berlin is never Berlin!" Jack Lang, French former culture minister, about how fast Berlin is changing, 2001

The starting point of this master thesis was an interest for cities as a phenomenon in general and the city of Berlin in particular. An urban organism constantly changing makes possibilities appear endless, at least until you start scratching the surface. The reality of our increasingly global society seems to catch up with Berlin, step by step. Observing, reading and hearing about cherished citizen-initiated projects which are forced to make room for unaffordable residential developments made me reflect upon my soon-to-be professional role and what part I would prefer playing in similar processes.

You have just taken part of my decision, which was to investigate the importance of prioritizing the public sphere and allowing citizen-empowerment of common space in order to preserve Berlin's culture of urban participation, interaction and innovation. Free spaces existing as a "natural" resource of the urban landscape was defined as one of the main factors behind the city's creative atmosphere.

SPACE FOR CREATIVITY

The overall purpose of this master thesis was to investigate free space as a phenomenon, in order to identify qualities and characteristics which could be applied in architectural and urban design. The main aim or ambition was to demonstrate and discuss how this approach, to a certain extent, could contribute to preserving Berlin's existing culture of urban interaction and collaborative design by providing public space functioning as a canvas for creativity.

I would say that I have succeeded in theory, but it is hard to determine how this approach would turn out in practice. What really happens to subculture and creativity when formalized and is this really the ultimate strategy to preserve it? Formalization of alternative culture would probably not preserve it, but create something new based on its ideals, values and expressions. This is still something which I believe Berlin and other cities could profit from within urban development. However, I find it hard to picture artificially reanimated spaces for creativity to be able to replace the existence of more "natural" free spaces. This master thesis is therefore more a demonstration of how to

make the best of situations like the one on Rigaer Straße. Here, a complement to free spaces is created, which implements new values and ideas of citizen-empowerment in urban design.

Regardless of what approach is chosen, meaning if some spaces are just left unexploited for grass root initiatives to develop or if those small-scale actors are involved in participatory planning processes as in the chosen case, a balance between top-down and bottom-up action must be found. How comprehensive the influence from city authorities should be will probably vary in different contexts, but a common aspect is that their role should be as the facilitator. No more, no less.



"Kunst ist Lebensmittel"/"Art is victual"

THE PROPOSAL

I consider that my alterations of the existing design proposal, based on the found characteristics and qualities of free space, truly is an improvement. My redesign is a direct result of putting qualitative public space first, without changing the purpose or structure of the development completely. It is creating new values for residents as well as the neighborhood, but at the same time removing apartment space, presumably leading to a smaller turnout for the investor.

This discussion of maximum profit versus other important values which are harder to define, have already taken place in this case through the participatory planning process. The existing proposal being the final result of this compromise. It is showing the ambition of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg's district authorities to try taking a different route, but the city's economic situation puts the investor in a favorable position. It is therefore not likely that my alternative would become reality. Were I to develop this proposal further, another typology and overall structure for this site would be explored, in order to fully meet the program.

Another aspect is the potential conflicts of a space like this. When I discussed the issue with Rebecca Lilliecrona, she said that the overall aim for central Berlin from political direction is to keep being a melting pot for a mixture of activities and if you prefer a calmer environment you could just pick another street to live on. She has a point. Since Rigaer Straße is somewhat of a main activity street in northern Friedrichshain and this specific plot is on prime location it would seem strange not to make the most of these preconditions as there are still possibilities for more conventional housing developments in other locations.

In this case the main actors will play a key role as managers of this space. They should keep it open and inclusive for anyone who wants to partake e.g. by making sure activities are contributing something to the neighborhood. They must also take care of maintenance and make sure that it is safe.

Summarized I would say that my thesis does not provide any absolute truths, but exemplifies a different approach to architectural and urban design. It also

highlights the values of space for creativity and urban life. If the human and creative dimensions are overlooked, what is then left of the city but a densely populated area to work, eat and sleep? I believe that one way to come to terms with some of the current issues in Berlin is to open up for even more self-initiated projects and embrace the self-made tradition. I believe that if people are enabled and empowered to affect the public sphere, urban life will thrive and cities will become more attractive to live in as well as to visit..



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