



Cities as Assemblages

Proceedings of the XXVI International Seminar
on Urban Form 2019

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edited by
NADIA CHARALAMBOUS
ALESSANDRO CAMIZ
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Table of Contents

p.	9	<i>Preface</i> by Nadia Charalambous
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Theory: the Scope and Limits of Urban Theories

15	<i>A Morphological Study on the Urban Inner Fringes, in Case of Nanjing</i> by Han/ Zhang
27	<i>The Origin, Further Transformations, and Present-Day Importance of Krakow's Fringe Belts Resulting from the Liquidation of the Fortress Krakow</i> by Maciej Mota
35	<i>A Tracking Research on a Special Fixation Line in Shenzhen, China</i> by Zhou Yihui, Xiong Xinkai, Shi Chunhui & Song Feng
47	<i>Reading Cadastral Data: Ownership as Morphological Frame in Taiwan</i> by Chih-Hung Chen & Chia-Che Hsu
59	<i>The Spatial Pattern Characteristics and Type Classification of the Traditional Villages and Towns in Minjiang River Basin, Fujian Province</i> by Binghua Zhang
75	<i>Research on the Evolution and Motivation Mechanism of Urban Form. A Case Study of Tanhualin District in Wuhan</i> by Qing Mei
85	<i>Formal and Cultural Readings of a Vanished Community. Explorations of the Jewish District of Łódź</i> by Ruthie Kaplan & Rachel Kallus
97	<i>Study on the Regeneration of Wen Village in Hangzhou Fuyang Based on Typo-morphology Research</i> by Xia Liu
105	<i>Rethinking the Production of Petřalka: A Phenomenon of State Socialist Urban Assemblage</i> by Azmah Arzmi
117	<i>Layered Morphologies and Topographical Structures in Historic Rurban Landscape Integrating Typo-Morphological, Topographical and Landscape tools with Feng Shui</i> by Laura Anna Pezzetti

- p. 133 *The Geopolitics of Capital Interest and the Development of the European Capital Cities in the Late 19th Century. The Case of Germany, Denmark and Greece in the Context of Long Depression (1873)*
by Anna Efstratiadi & Tom Nielsen
- 147 *Building Typology as a Generator of Urban Form for Urban Design Project*
by Yang Yang & Dr Florian Kossak
- 161 *Typo-Morphology and Urban Landscape Construction. A Case Study of the Ciyun Street Area, Chongqing*
by Xiangbei Li & Xingying Yang

Methods: Combining Conzenian, Typological and Space Syntax Approaches

- 179 *Combining the Historico-Geographical and Configurational Approaches for Landscape Unit Evaluation*
by Li Xiaoxi & Zang Ye
- 191 *Transitional Morphologies. A Joint Research Unit between China and Italy*
by Marco Trisciuoglio & Bao Li
- 203 *Attracting Amida-Diyarbakır: Muratorian, Conzenian Urban Morphology and Space Syntax, a Methodological Comparison*
by Alessandro Camiz
- 219 *The Athens Form: Exploring the Spatial Signatures of Functional and Configurational Typologies of Athens Urban Area*
by Yannis Paraskevopoulos & Yorgos N. Photis

Urban Design: Urban Morphology, Building Typology and Design

- 235 *The Morphological Side of University-City Interaction*
by Haniye Razavivand, Marco Triscivolio & Yuksel Demir
- 243 *Study on the Spatial Form of Suzhou Historic District Based on Urban Morphology and Architectural Typology. Taking Pingjiang Road in Suzhou as an Example*
by Tian Meng
- 249 *Territorial Model for the Management of Riverfront Areas as Public Spaces in Cities with Historical Centers of Monumental Value. The case of Arequipa, Peru*
by Carlos Zeballos-Velarde & Andrea Burbano
- 259 *The Third (Plastic) Way of Transformation. The Typological Process*
by Marta Crognale
- 271 *Urban Design Alternatives in the Compact City. A Focus on Daylight and View*
by Bengt Sundborg, Barbara Szybinska Matusiak & Shabnam Arbab
- 283 *Increasing Cities' Capacity to Manage Noise and Air Quality Using Urban Morphology*
by M. Berghauser Pont, J. Forssén, M. Haeger Eugensson & A. Gustafson

- p. 295 *Inclusion of Soundscape in Parametric Urban Design Model: a Case Study*
by T.M. Leung, I.V. Kukina & A.Y. Lipovka
- 305 *Numerical Simulation of Street Morphology Based on Outdoor Thermal Comfort under Street Canyon. A Case Study of Guangzhou Xiajiu Pedestrian*
by Sibe Liu
- 317 *Urban Morphology and Environmental Performance: Integrating Natural Light Evaluation into the Spacemate Graph*
by Guilherme Kruger Dalcin, Renato Silveira, Jonas Ramos Carrara & Benamy Turkienicz
- 327 *Planned Occupation in the West of Parana: the Consolidation of the Urban Form in New Cities*
by Mariana Pizzo Diniz & Adson Cristiano Bozzi Ramatis Lima
- 339 *Friedrichstadt and the City of Berlin: a Different Scale Analysis*
by Michele Caja, Sotirios Zaroulas
- 347 *Urban Form of Coromandel Region – a Case of Chennai. The Institutional Hindrance of the Commons and Anticommons*
by Xavier Benedict
- 357 *Research on Urban Renewal Strategy from the Perspective of Sharing. Take Village in Campus at Huaqiao University as an Example*
by Lu Tingying & Wang Daren
- 365 *The Role of Urban Living Labs in Urban Form Production*
by Christina Panayi & Nadia Charalambous
- 371 *Participatory Regeneration Practice of Faan Nguk Kei under the Background of Urban-Rural Dual Structure in China*
by Pengyu Zhao
- 379 *Uncovering Hidden Divisions: A Grassroots Method for Urban Visioning*
by Celen Pasalar & George Hallowell
- 391 *The Cultural Capital of Urban Morphology*
by Francesco Mancini & Tanja Glusac
- 403 *Palazzi, Case, Orti, Rue: Combining Different Research Approaches in the Morphological Reading of Ascoli Piceno's Urban Blocks*
by Francesco Di Lorenzo
- 415 *A Quantitative Approach on Morphological Characteristics Study Using the Case of Nanjing*
by Yuxun Song, Lian Tang & Wowo Ding

- p. 433 *Urban Transformations towards an Integrated Intervention Design Framework. The Case of Paris*
by Apostolopoulou I. Katerina
- 447 *The Neighborhood Parks as Generators of Urban Landscape: the Case of Valencia*
by Vicente Colomer Sendra, David Urios Mondéjar, Ana Portalés Mañanós & Juan Colomer Alcácer
- 459 *The Morphological Mosaic: Urban Vitality in Central Areas (Goiânia, Brazil)*
by Juliana de Souza, Silva Arrais & Rômulo José da Costa Ribeiro 461
- 471 *Geo-Morphological Matrixes within the Urban Landscape of Lower Nera Valley in Umbria*
by Marco Falsetti & Fabrizio Toppetti
- 481 *Transform-mut-ation of Tehran. Discontinuity of Urban Form and Problems of Using Urban Morphology in Planning Practice*
by Mazyar Abaee
- 489 *From Practice to Policy: Temporary Uses for a Long-Term City Re-make*
by Ambra Migliorisi
- 497 *The Impact of Political Urban Planning on the Urban Form in Algeria. The Case of the City of Tiaret*
by Asmaa Bekkouche & Tayeb Otmane
- 509 *Planning for Urban Health: Evaluating Urban Planning Strategies to Improve Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes through Cycling. A Latitudinal European Section Analysis*
by Folouli Stefania & Savvides Andreas

Focus: Urban Conflict and Divided Cities

- 523 *Agents in Urban Conflicts and Morphological Process: Exemplified by Guijie Block in Beijing*
by Wang Bo, Shi Chunhui & Song Feng
- 533 *The Lost Centre of Nicosia*
by Constantinos Kypris
- 547 *Use of the Public Space in the Walled City of Nicosia. Urban Mapping Experience*
by Damla Mısırlısoy & Silvia Covarino
- 557 *Urban Form and Social Phenomena in Public Space. Addressing Urban Segregation in the Divided City of Nicosia*
by Rafaela Christodoulou & Nadia Charalambous
- 569 *A Critical Approach to Urban Resilience. The Case of a Refugee Area in Nicosia, Cyprus*
by Eleonore Zippelius
- 579 *Palestine's Spatio-Temporal Fragmentation: Mapping the Narrative Hebron's Division*
by Rana Abughannam & Sara Khasib

Friedrichstadt and the City of Berlin: a Different Scale Analysis

by Michele Caja, Sotirios Zaroulas
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Keywords: Berlin; Urban Block; Townhouse; Typological classification.

Abstract: The study of the city of Berlin along Wilhelmstraße represents an interesting challenge for different reasons: the position of this urban axis in the middle of the baroque city, the interventions on this area during World War II, the large voids created by the massive bombardments at the end of the war, the division of the city in East and West Berlin in 1961, the numerous architectural projects realized during the '80s IBA exhibition.

The present analysis concerns a number of urban blocks in this specific area of the city. The aim was to elaborate a preliminary study, useful to the subsequent construction of their project, which was based on a different scale approach to the buildings and their architectural elements. The result was a series of drawings at different scales that spans from the large scale analysis of the whole urban block to the reduced one of the single building and its parts.

1. Introduction

The first impression one has from the city of Berlin, and probably its great lesson, is its resemblance to a “fair”. It seems that in this metropolis the architects, in the course of time, experimented with a variety of ideas that lead to a large number of building typologies. What distinguished the city of Berlin, generally from other German cities, was the precise aspect of the unity in the multiplicity *Einheit in der Vielfalt* that brought the city into a state of harmony not only during the 18th century but also during the city of the 20s’ and 30s’ of the last century.

The question is, today, if this “architectural zoo”, as Colin Rowe calls this phenomenon (Rowe, 1999), is to be accepted as a unique situation that marks the architecture and the city of Berlin, or if it has lead today the city to a process of loosing its precise characteristics, which distinguished it in the course of time. Berlin, by this point of view, is going to become less recognizable and gradually a city like anyone else.

The present study regards only a part of the city of Berlin and specifically the area along Wilhelmstraße. The selected sector represents an interesting challenge for different reasons: the position of this urban axis in the middle of the baroque city, the so called *Friedrichstadt*, the interventions on this area during World War II, the large voids created by the massive bom-

bardments at the end of the war, the division of the city in East and West Berlin from 1961 to 1989, the numerous architectural projects during the '80s IBA exhibition¹.

The analysis concerns a number of urban blocks and the aim was both gaining a thorough comprehension of the design of the city in this limited area and to elaborate a preliminary study aimed to the project.

This material contributed subsequently to the construction of the project, which was based on a different scale approach to the buildings and their architectural elements. First, the analysis considered the morphological structure of this urban portion of Berlin and what has defined the form of the urban blocks along this important urban axis. Then, the analysis had proceeded with highlighting the relations between the urban block and the different building typologies, and finally was made an attempt to focus – at a smaller scale and by studying the design of the facades of the analysed buildings as well as their architectural elements – on the relations of the building with the street and its construction.

2. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this analysis is based, for many aspects, on other previous studies (Caja, Zaroulas, Biraghi; 2019). However, specific theoretical contributions on the city of Berlin framed the present study. The considerations made here start from the analyses and the work of Aldo Rossi and Giorgio Grassi in the city of Berlin and their clear visions of the various problematics and the lucid suggestions for their solution, through their theoretical elaborations and projects.

Rossi has underlined the importance of the continuity of the constructions along the streets (Rossi, 1964). It is not only a way to work according to the baroque plan of the Friedrichstadt, but above all it represents the possibility to enhance the existent architecture. By this last point of view, constructing along the perimeter of the urban block enables the architect to organize it and to transform radically its aspect; the different remaining buildings inside are not anymore scattered constructions but indeed “typical German” buildings in the green (Rossi, 1981).

Very similar to Rossi's considerations above the importance of the baroque plan are the discussion and the reading Grassi attempts on the city of Berlin. Like every other city, it has its own singularity, its “vocation” that is its natural tendency, which has been developed patiently through a long process in its history (Grassi, 1995). In this perspective, this tendency – that coincides here and in this part of Berlin with the baroque plan of the Friedrichstadt – is being vanished and substituted with something not clear and distant from the real model of the city.

Another important contribution to the reorganization of this part of the city are the ideas of the director of IBA 1987, Josef Paul Kleihues. He agrees with the importance of the baroque plan for this part of the city and urges the necessity to preserve the relationship between its parts, that is, the squares. He suggests to maintain what remains after the demolitions and to improve the existent, e.g. by dividing further the urban blocks into smaller units².

Even if the experience of IBA could be criticised for its lack of a unitary structure, especially

1. The Bauausstellung Berlin (IBA) was an international building exhibition in 1984-87. Its lineage can be traced back to the famous exhibitions organized in Germany during the 20th century (Werkbund 1914, Weissenhof 1927, Interbau 1957). The term “Critical Reconstruction”, coined by Josef Paul Kleihues, determined the character of the projects, which aim was to reorganize the inner city by re-thinking parts and resolving real problems.

2. See the interview carried out by Lore Ditzen with Josef Paul Kleihues in the magazine «Architectural Review», n. 1051, September 1984, p. 42-45.



Figure 1. General plan with the area of the analysis (highlighted in grey).

at the level of the street construction, Alan Colquhoun draws special attention to its positive aspects. In detail, he underlines the fact that the *revisionist model* of IBA appears as the *tolerant* proposal for the actual *confused and congested* city and as able to *replace the utopias* of the past. “I think we can see in these developments a welcome new concept of the space of the public realm. [...] this new tendency [...] conceives of the city as historically continuous – capable of being read as a palimpsest” (Colquhoun, 1985).

3. Analysis

As far as regards the form of the urban blocks the most evident aspect in this part of the city is their excessive dimension. It is about a situation of super urban blocks, which form is dated back to the baroque plan of the 17th century, along with the interventions before and after the war in the area. This particular condition characterizes the whole of the urban blocks along the axis of Friedrichstraße; there exist both modern blocks with large courtyards and older with a more complex form.

In fact, considering that the baroque plan is still recognizable on the deeply modified grid of the Friedrichstadt, it was made here an attempt to classify the urban blocks into different blocks typologies (imm. 2) according to their internal design and the relations between built

and unbuilt area (with courtyards, with large areas inside, with specific typologies of residential buildings, with isolated buildings, etc).

3.1. *The deep block houses*

Being a young city, Berlin didn't have the occasion to develop this specific building typology, which marked the historical centres, especially during the medieval times. This typology of residential building is distinguished by its sense of economy in the use of the land and by the common aspects it presents in different situations and cities (Grassi, 1980). But it is important to point out that in this part of the city, the intensified use of the plots as a result of the decisions made during the 18th century and the development of the *Mietkaserne* (tenement house) is not connected, as phenomenon, with this kind of building typology. It is the result of subdivisions of the urban blocks of the baroque plan and these houses, in this part of the city, are not related to a commercial or artisan tradition of the street.

In fact, from the analysis emerges that the form of the houses is the result of the transformation of the baroque plots and the parcelization of the land into smaller portions.

3.2. *The houses with closed courtyards*

The use of the closed courtyards in this part of the city represents a diffused building typology. It characterizes solutions adopted both in the historical and in the modern architecture. While in the first case they were used to provide the apartments with the necessary light, more recently they form large courtyards that host green areas and services for the block. It was decided with the analysis to indicate also the entrance of each building so as to understand if it is a direct entrance to the house or if it is a passage that leads to the courtyard and from there it distributes each house, indicating in this way the relationship of it with the street and subsequently with the city and the construction of the facade.

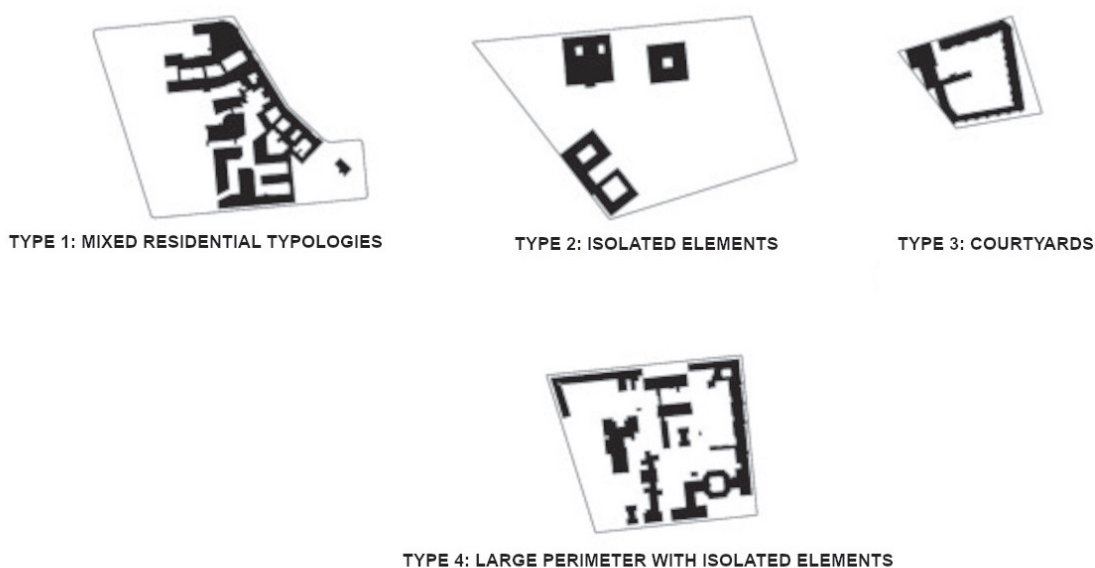


Figure 2. *Topographic classification of the blocks.*

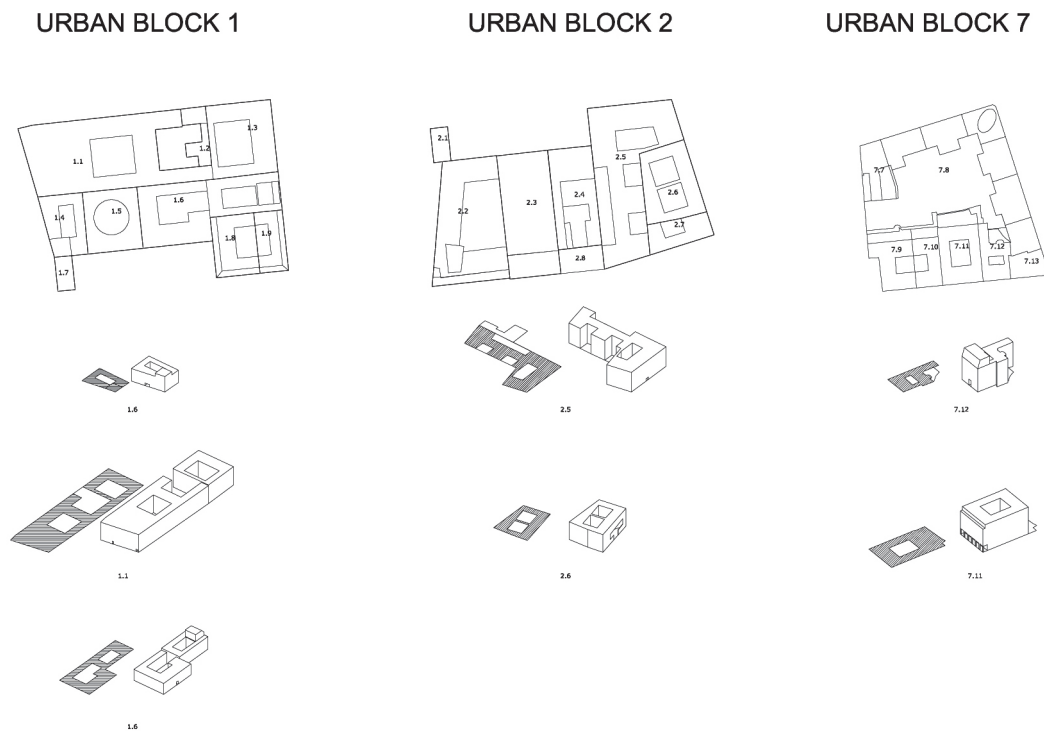


Figure 3. Buildings with closed courtyards in the area of the analysis.

3.3. Houses surrounded by open space

The case of the villa, according to Aldo Rossi, is able to offer a typological model for a city like Berlin (Rossi, 1964). In particular, the work of Schinkel had created the bases and contributed to the diffusion of this building typology, as well as to the elaboration and the definition of its elements. Moreover, the ideas of Schinkel and specifically his attempt to consider the villa as the synthesis of the palazzo, transform the concept of a city and its parts built with villas, from mere built volumes scattered into the greenery to urban houses in a clear relationship with the streets and their architecture.

3.4. The architectural elements

The seventeenth century urban plan and the formation of the Friedrichstadt was accompanied by the creation of a specific typology of residential buildings. It was common for the blocks in this part of the city to be composed with baroque buildings, based on the character of their façades aligned along the street, on which sometimes a honour courtyard was opened, instead of deep-block houses with their mixed use of commercial and residential spaces.

The question of the decoration of the historical architecture was directed towards a construction of some common aspects that make this particular street recognizable and able to be part of a specific city. For example, the creation and the emphasis of the height of the socle of the buildings decided during the baroque plan. By this point of view the façades of the contemporary buildings, produced during the IBA experience, are almost incomprehensible, unable to express common and recognised aspects of the architecture of the city and for these reason

destined to transform the character of the street into a pluralist expression, without real relation to the historical façades.

However, from the analysis of the architecture of the façades and their elements emerged that this idea of the non-unitary street produced an alternative urban design to the city of the '20s, where the urban blocks contained a variety of functions, such as housing, commerce, public services, etc, where the element that unifies the different elevations is not anymore the street but the perimeter of the urban block.

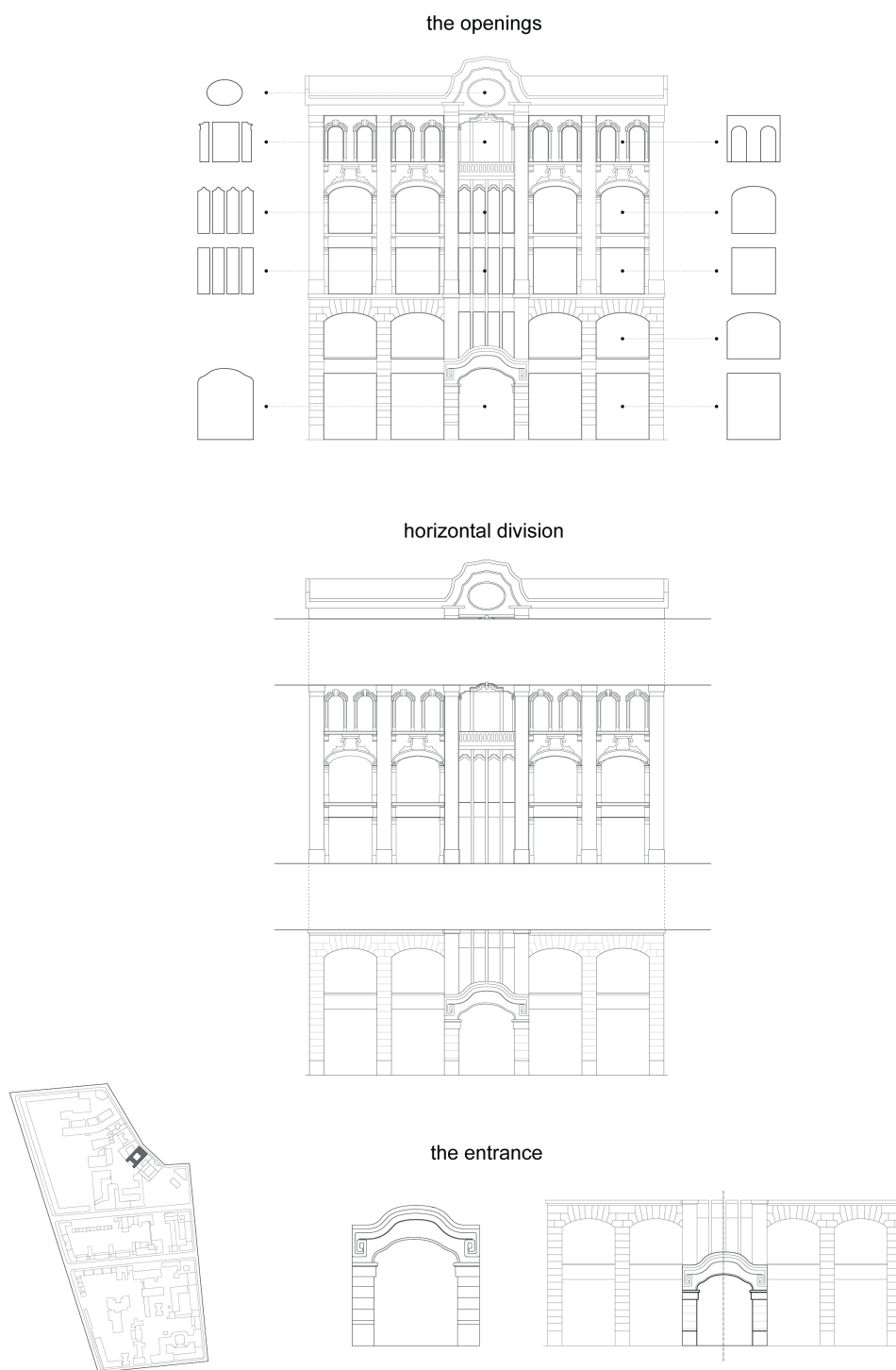


Figure 4. *The analysis of the architectural of a typical mixed-uses Townhouse of the '20s.*

4. Conclusion

The analysis is concentrated on the area of the Friedrichstadt and allowed mainly a better knowledge of the city at different scales by highlighting the different problems and suggesting possible ways for their solution.

The specific streets of Berlin and particularly Wilhelmstraße and Friedrichstraße, inside the Friedrichstadt, are predominantly distinguished by the presence of super urban blocks.

Through the study of each block, it was identified the relationship between built and not-built areas. Another fundamental aspect that emerged was the identification of the singular characteristics of the urban blocks and the consideration of the building typologies analysed, as a result of the singular position of the building and his relationship with the specific part of the city. What emerges from this analysis, as a possible programmatic guide-line for the project, and specifically regarding the form of the urban blocks, are the geometrical squares which became, during the reconstruction, a tool to guide the process of urban reorganization and rebuilding, at least in this part, and a kind of trademark for the city of Berlin.

Considering the ideas defined by Kleihues for the various possibilities of action, so as to imagine a better organised city, a probable suggestion for the project could be the idea of reducing and dividing in this way the blocks into smaller unities. This part has also a recognisable grid, which defines an orthogonal order of the Friedrichstraße, which is something that almost is going to be lost in the actual city, along with its *natural tendency* the city obtained in the course of time in this part of its design.

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