

The Conflicts of Centrality

The Papierwerd area in the heart of Zurich is under great pressure. Visibility, density and its historic meaning have made the discussion of how to use the scarce space polemic. The task of planning a convention centre at this location contradicts its inherent urbanity. The large program, the 240 days of vacancy every year, and the exclusiveness of a convention centre threaten the liveliness and urban qualities of the inner city.

The Peripheral Counterpart

In stark contrast to the inner city stands the Jelmoli storage building in Otelfingen, Zurich's agglomeration. Only partially used, it lies in the periphery of the city as an enormous reservoir of space. Buildings of this character form groups, which programmatically, architectonically, and volumetrically break ranks with their surroundings, because they factually belong to the city. The Gobusprovisorium and the Jelmoli storage hall are exemplary for an omnipresent mechanism: The inner city outsources undesired, spatially intense functions, such as logistics, production, and storage to the agglomeration. This is the only way it can maintain its density and intensity.

The Crossing-Over

By combining the two diploma topics A and B, both sites can function in symbiosis and can be read as two poles of the same urban system. The congress centre desired in Zurich can be realized by readopting the outsourcing relationship of city and periphery. Thus the lion's share of

its program is realized in Otelfingen, leaving only the representation and address in the inner city.

In *Bigness (or the problem of Large)* Koolhaas explains the involuntary dualism of core and envelope in big buildings;

„(...) the distance between core and envelope increases to the point where the facade can no longer reveal what happens inside. The humanist expectation of „honesty“ is doomed: Interior and exterior architectures become separate projects, one dealing with the instability of programmatic and iconographic needs, the other – agent of disinformation – offering the city the apparent stability of an object. (...)“¹

In the Zurich Congress Centre, this fracture is amplified until the internal and the external are spatially disconnected. Held together only by the train line, they are realized as two projects in two different locations.

Outsourcing the program of the convention centre to the Jelmoli storage hall frees the Papierwerd area to be a multi-layered, dense urban project. It is able to combine the wish for the convention centre with that of an open plaza without erasing the most frequented coop of Switzerland. In this way, both sites can resolve their weaknesses, utilising the strengths of the other.

¹Rem Koolhaas, “Bigness (or the problem of Large)” in S, M, L, XL, Eds. OMA, Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), pp. 500-501.