

The Gift

Stories of Generosity and Violence in Architecture

28 February – 8 September 2024

**Exhibition at the Architekturmuseum der TUM
in the Pinakothek der Moderne**

SKOPJE

KUMASI

ULAANBAATAR

EAST PALO ALTO

The Gift

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Exhibition Design and Research on German Case Studies
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The Gift of Architecture
5

Exhibition Partners
8

Exhibition Concept
9

Research Questions
9

Four Stories
10

Epilogue
18

Publication
20

Education
20

Audience
20

Public Program
20

Imprint
22

Architectural gifts are everywhere: libraries funded by wealthy philanthropists, shelters donated by humanitarian organizations, farms paid for with development grants, mosques financed by Islamic foundations, and stadiums handed over as part of diplomatic charm offensives. Embedded in religious and imperial traditions of gift-giving, architectural gifts shape the urbanization process across the world. Humanitarian, developmentalist, and diplomatic building-gifts have become ubiquitous in rapidly expanding African, Asian, and South American metropolises and their hinterlands. In North American and European cities, philanthrocapitalists invest in cultural, social, and educational facilities passed down by the dwindling welfare state.

This exhibition features gifted buildings—from spectacular to mundane, from extravagant to genuinely useful—that show how the unequal relationship between the giver and the receiver results in both **generosity and violence** exerted by and through architecture. What are the benefits of an architectural gift and how may it cause harm? We document how the giving and

receiving of architecture impacts the **production** of these buildings, including their program, design, and materiality, as well as labor relations on the construction site. We consider the economic gains and political influence of the donors. We explore whether architectural gifts require **reciprocity**, and if so, what constitutes a counter-gift. We wonder if the obligations of the receiver and the giver persist after a building's completion. What is the **afterlife** of a gifted building, and how is it perceived, maintained, and used by local communities?

Working with local researchers and communities, and using storytelling as a method, we present case studies on four continents to explore the generosity and violence of the gift-giving dynamic. These include stories of humanitarian gifts for Skopje, North Macedonia; the gift of land in Kumasi, Ghana; diplomatic gifts for Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; and philanthropic gifts in East Palo Alto, California, USA. At the end of the exhibition, we turn to Germany, showing how philanthropy continues to shape Munich and other German cities today.



The Michigan Urban Farming Initiative, Urban Agricultural Campus in Detroit's North End, USA. (Photograph by Michelle Gerard)



Community Center in Accra, Ghana. Designed by Fry, Drew & Partners, 1953. (Photograph by Iain Jackson, 2012)



Faisal Mosque, Islamabad, Pakistan. Designed by Vedat Dalokay, 1976-86. (Photograph by Burhan Ay, 2017)



Noble Hill School in Cassville, Georgia, USA, 1925. (Courtesy of Noble Hill School, 1925)

This exhibition is based on long-term research projects by curators Łukasz Stanek and Damjan Kokalevski.

Łukasz Stanek is Professor of Architecture at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, USA. His last book, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton University Press, 2020), discussed architectural mobilities between socialist countries and newly independent countries from the 1960s to the 1980s. These mobilities materialized in many Soviet, Chinese, Yugoslavian, Polish, and East German architectural gifts across Africa and Asia. Previously, Stanek has taught at ETH Zurich and the University of Manchester, and held guest professorships at Harvard University and the University of Ghana at Legon. He curated exhibitions and exhibited work at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and the Biennale of Architecture in Venice.

Damjan Kokalevski is an architect and curator at the Chair of History of Architecture and Curatorial Practice at Technical University Munich. Born and raised in Skopje, he was educated and worked in Vienna, Tokyo, and Zurich. He completed his doctoral dissertation entitled “Performing the Archive: Skopje—From the Ruins of the City of the Future” at ETH Zurich in 2018, in which he investigated the role of the United

Nations in the rebuilding of Skopje following the 1963 earthquake. He wrote the book *Skopje Walkie Talkie* in collaboration with Susanne Hefti (Spector Books, 2019).

Further support is provided by **Andjelka Badnjar Gojnić**, architectural historian and lecturer at the Chair of History of Architecture and Curatorial Practice at Technical University Munich. Together with the curators, she will design the exhibition and conduct research on German case studies.

The exhibition will be coproduced with local teams of researchers, activists, and communities in each of the featured cities. In Skopje, **Ana Ivanovska Deskova** is an architectural historian specializing in modern architecture, curator, and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Architecture, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University. In Kumasi, **Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh** is a curator, critic, and lecturer at the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. In Ulaanbaatar, **Uurtsaikh Sangi** and **Temuulen Enkhbat** are researchers at Ger Hub, a nonprofit social innovation firm addressing the most pressing issues in ger districts, informal urban areas in Mongolian cities. In East Palo Alto, **Michael Levin** is a documentarian engaged with the community for over twenty years, and **Leigh House** is a preservationist and Ph.D. researcher at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, USA.

The exhibition tells stories about humanitarian, developmentalist, diplomatic, and philanthropic building-gifts in four cities.

The first story examines Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia, which was rebuilt after a devastating earthquake in 1963. This rebuilding included a range of donations from across Cold War geopolitical divisions, including from African and Asian countries.

The second story centers on Kumasi in the Ashanti region of Ghana, where the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology was founded during the late colonial period. Its land was granted by the Asante king in the name of the neighboring communities, who continue to receive counter-gifts from the University such as housing, social facilities, and infrastructure.

The third story regards housing estates in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia that were donated by the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China during the Cold War. We focus on an apartment received by a Mongolian worker during the socialist period and show how it continues to be appropriated by his children and grandchildren.

The fourth story addresses East Palo Alto, a disinvested community in California, USA that struggles to capitalize on the prosperous opportunities of Silicon Valley. We study how inhabitants and city authorities negotiate the opportunities and risks stemming from architectural gifts offered by powerful neighbors such as Meta (formerly Facebook).

The epilogue of the exhibition turns to Munich and presents philanthropy as an important and controversial force in the shaping of German cities today.

Research Questions

- What are the motivations for the gifting of a building?
- How can communities negotiate the opportunities and risks of such a gift?
- How are gifted buildings designed, programmed, and constructed?
- What are the responsibilities of the donors and the recipients?
- How long do these responsibilities last?
- In particular, is the donor responsible for the gifted building after its completion?
- Does every gift require a counter-gift?
- Can a community refuse a gift?

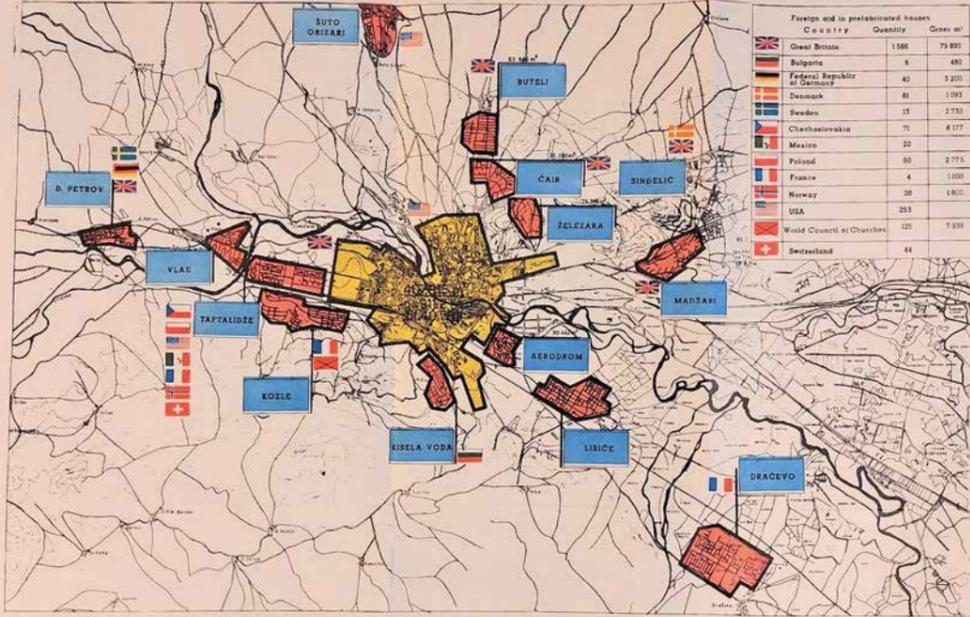
Four Stories

The Humanitarian Gift: Skopje, North Macedonia

When the city of Skopje was hit by a disastrous earthquake on July 26, 1963, what followed was one of the most comprehensive city rebuilding efforts in recent history. The city was then part of Yugoslavia, which was a co-founder of the Non-Aligned movement that gathered countries refusing to take sides in the Cold War confrontation. Aid for Skopje was described as a “noble competition” in the media, and it flowed in from five continents and across geopolitical divides. It ranged from blankets and blood plasma to prefabricated houses, schools, hospitals, museums, bridges, and factories. The United Nations supported and mediated the rebuilding of the city by commissioning numerous planners, architects, and other experts to create the blueprints for the future of Skopje. This small Balkan city suddenly took center stage in media debates, and it became a United Nations showpiece for world solidarity.

In the exhibition we tell the story of humanitarian gifts to Skopje in four parts. First, a large-scale diagram maps the material help and expertise that was donated to the city from over eighty

countries. As an example, we then highlight one prefabricated housing settlement built immediately after the earthquake. Provided by seven countries, these buildings became a highly visible symbol of global cooperation, and we show how they continue even today to be defined by the original gift. Next, we discover the Universal Hall, one of the first public buildings constructed after the earthquake. Funded by over thirty-five mostly African and Asian countries, it demonstrates how architectural gift-giving was not a unidirectional North-South transfer. The design and construction process of this performance hall is exhibited in detail through drawings, photos, and models. The fourth part looks at the maintenance of both examples, and raises questions about who is responsible for maintaining a gifted building after it is completed. Through recent photographs, videos, and interviews we discuss the buildings’ afterlives, with a particular focus on how the obligations of the gifts’ givers and receivers have been voided in the wake of Yugoslavia’s collapse in the 1990s.



Map of prefabricated housing settlements by donor countries, 1964.

SKOPJE



Inauguration ceremony of a housing settlement, 1964.



Housing settlement Taftalidje today. (Photograph by Mila Gavrilovska)



Universal Hall, the first post-Earthquake public building and a symbol of world solidarity, 1964.



Universal Hall undergoing reconstruction, 2023. (Photograph by Mila Gavrilovska)

The Gift of Land: Kumasi, Ghana

The history of Kumasi's Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, formerly the College of Technology, in the Ashanti region in Ghana, goes back to the late colonial period. In 1951 the College was founded by the British colonial government with the support of local elites, notably the Asantehene, the king of the Asante people. After Ghana gained independence in 1957, the College became closely associated with a vision of socialist modernization promoted by President Kwame Nkrumah. This vision was conveyed by the modern architecture of the campus, designed by British, Eastern European, and Ghanaian architects.

Since the beginning of the campus, its spatial development has been shaped by the narrative of gift-giving. The land for the future campus was leased for sixty years by the Asantehene to the colonial government, which passed it on to the College. Although the king leased the land rather than gifting it, College officials referred to the land as a "gift". The same term was used by the inhabitants of the neighboring communities, who claimed that the College had

obligations towards them. The College, and later the University, acknowledged these obligations. It permitted farmers to continue farming on campus land, offered them manual jobs, and occasionally provided the towns with infrastructure such as water, electricity, and roads.

The exhibition shows how these gift-giving dynamics, with their uneven distribution of rights and obligations, have informed and continue to inform the production of space on the campus and in the surrounding towns. The University provides the communities with opportunities for farming, employment, housing, and infrastructure development, but it also exerts pressure on the towns' environmental resources. We also show how the gift of land is the starting point for the inhabitants of the towns to imagine a better future for their communities. These narratives are illustrated by archival material, current photographs, video interviews, and large-scale satellite images depicting a landscape that continues to be shaped by the original gift of land.



Master plan of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana, 1970s.



Interview with Nana Afia Abrefi II, Queen Mother of Bomso II, Kumasi, Ghana, 2022. (Photograph by Lukasz Stanek)



Ejisu school, Kumasi, Ghana, 2023. (Photograph by Lukasz Stanek)

KUMASI



Farms at the campus of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana, 2023. (Photograph by Joe Cann)



General plan of Ulaanbaatar, 1975.

ULAANBAATAR

Four Stories

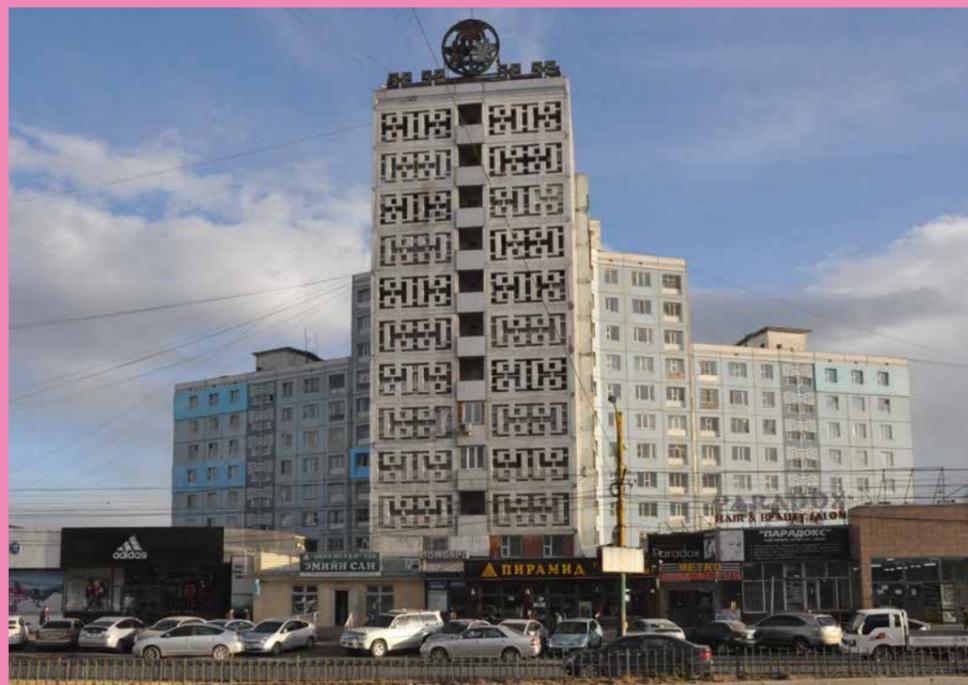
The Diplomatic Gift: Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Since the early 20th century Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, has been fundamentally transformed. While a hundred years ago the city consisted of tent-like dwellings (called gers or yurts) grouped between Buddhist monasteries, today most inhabitants live in multistory concrete homes. This radical change was largely due to socialist development, an effort supported by the Soviet Union starting in the 1920s and joined, after World War II, by other socialist countries. These countries sent construction materials, technology, designs, and labor to Mongolia. Some of these resources were gifted, while others were bartered for Mongolian minerals.

In Ulaanbaatar, these gifts included whole housing neighborhoods, public buildings such as the Palace of Young Engineer's and the Wedding Palace, industrial plants, and a nearby pioneer camp. At times, these gifts expressed competition between countries, notably the rivalry between the Soviet Union and China during the early 1960s. While China designed and built district no. 5, the Soviets donated housing districts nos. 3 and 4. Known as “the blue gift of Brezhnev,”

they were designed by a Soviet-Mongolian team and built out of prefabricated concrete panels from a factory that had also been a Soviet gift.

This exhibition focuses on one apartment in the “blue gift,” which was received by Mr. Chimed Damdinsuren, an Ulaanbaatar factory worker. While some critics compared the Soviet presence in Mongolia to Western European colonialism, Mr. Chimed was grateful for the apartment, which offered amenities previously unavailable to his family when they lived in ger districts. His daughter has childhood memories of a community of neighbors who shared a sense of responsibility for maintaining the district’s public spaces. That responsibility is no longer felt by Mr. Chimed’s granddaughter, who grew up in the wake of socialism and through the ensuing disappearance of social facilities from the district. This story will be presented by means of archival and contemporary photographs of the apartment, interviews with Mr. Chimed’s family members, and photographic documentation of the changing urban landscape of Ulaanbaatar, a landscape punctuated by many socialist-era architectural gifts.



Districts nos. 3 and 4, designed by Soviet and Mongolian architects, 1978–83. (Photograph by Lukasz Stanek)

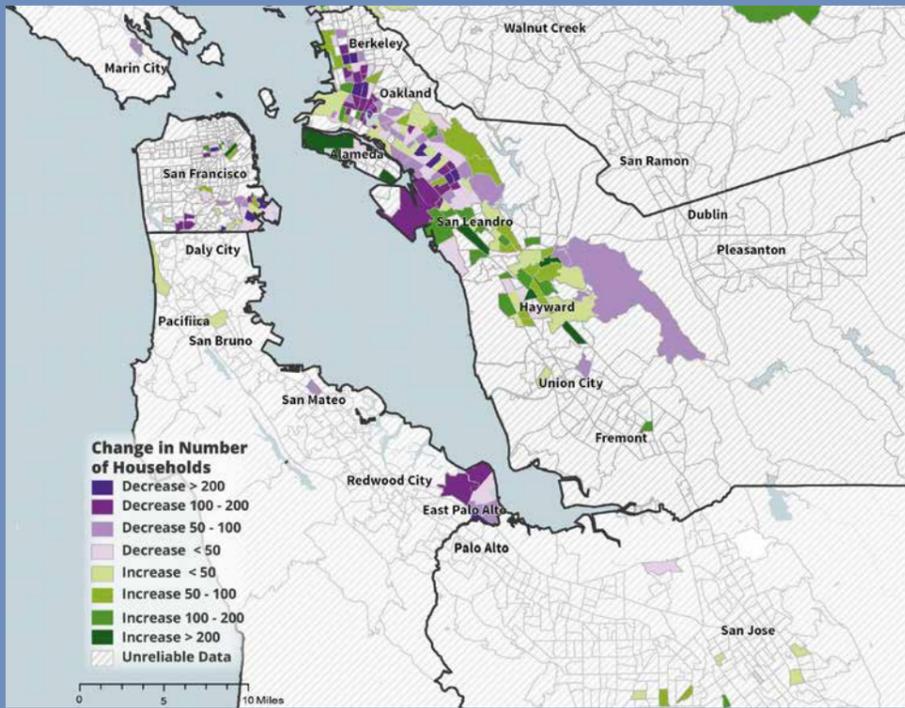


Bayangol Hotel in district no. 5. (Photograph by Lukasz Stanek)



Chimed and Nergui with their children, 1995.

The Philanthropic Gift: East Palo Alto, California, USA



Change in number of households in the Bay Area, California.

EAST PALO ALTO

East Palo Alto (EPA) is a city in California’s Silicon Valley. Located near the Meta (formerly Facebook) campus, the Google campus, and Stanford University, it has been called “an island of affordability in a sea of wealth.” The socioeconomic differences between EPA and its affluent neighbors stem from a long history of redlining in the 1950s (systemic denial of mortgages to ethnic minorities), recession, low tax revenue, and a crack cocaine epidemic in the 1990s. Since then, attempts at redevelopment have increased the tax base and created some jobs, but have also brought about environmental pollution and rising housing prices, leading to a shrinking population.

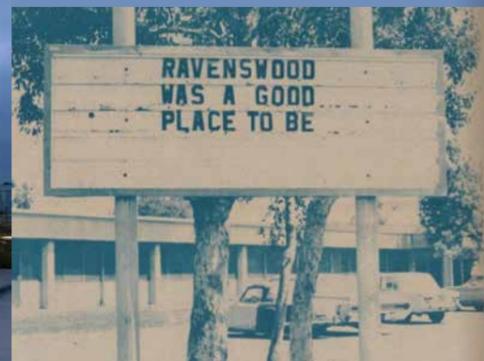
For more than two decades, EPA has been a laboratory for philanthrocapitalism—charitable interventions understood as investments, whose success is measured by social returns. Many of these initiatives respond to urgent needs relating to housing, social services, and environmental management. However, they also demonstrate the risks of philanthrocapitalism. Donors have limited transparency and accountability, but a disproportionate influence on urban policy and development, and tax rebates received by

donors diminish public revenue, reducing government funds available for public services.

In the exhibition, we use film footage, video interviews, and timelines to discuss three philanthropic gifts to EPA and how these gifts were negotiated by community groups, the municipality, and philanthropic organizations. The first gift is the Primary School, a tuition-free private school funded through the corporate philanthropy of Meta’s Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan. While providing high-quality education for some local children, the school received funding from government programs, which reduced state funding for public schools. The second gift is the Creative Youth Development Center, funded through the John and Marcia Goldman Foundation. The third project is an environmentally transformative waterfront redevelopment strategy envisioned by Laurene Powell Jobs. The fifty-two-acre plan is to be implemented through private venture investments and community-led design practices. The decision-making processes on all three projects reveal the democratic deficit typical of philanthropic urbanism, and raises questions among some residents about priorities in non-public control of investment.



Promotional image of the EPA Center.



Historic sign in Ravenswood, East Palo Alto.



The Primary School, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. (Photograph by Leigh House)



Bloomhouse, Emerson Collective, and the EPA Waterfront Development.



Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) During Construction. West Berlin, 1957.

Epilogue

The epilogue of the exhibition brings the topic of architectural gift-giving to Munich and explores architectural gifts within Germany. Selected buildings will be researched as part of the fall 2023 master seminar at the Chair of History of Architecture and Curatorial Practice, with a focus on use, history, and reception of gifted objects by communities. Visitors will be offered a city guide of architectural gifts throughout Munich, inviting the public to visit and explore

them. Furthermore, the outside of the museum will be activated through the use of small furniture pieces, including a Gift Bar for discussing and performing gift-giving rituals with the audience. This space will host numerous small events outside the museum, including performances, book exchanges, open kitchens, and others, to further explore aspects and power dynamics of various gift-giving rituals.



The Fuggerei Housing Complex in Augsburg.



Student demonstration against the American war in Vietnam, 5 Feb 1966, Amerika Haus Berlin. Ullstein Verlag.

Publication

The exhibition will be accompanied by an edited theme issue published by the online journal *e-flux Architecture*. This publication will consist of text, video, and photo essays by the curators, local researchers, and invited contributors. Up to eight entries will expand on the topics and locations discussed in the exhibition, illustrated with original photography and video, and supported by archival material.

Education

As a collaboration between the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, USA and the Technical University Munich (TUM), this project connects the two universities through a series of initiatives. A seminar was held in Ann Arbor and in Munich in May and June of 2023, where students from both universities devised theoretical concepts and curatorial strategies for the exhibition. This included a week-long workshop in Munich, culminating in a public presentation in Pavillon 333. In the fall semester of 2023, students from TUM will work on research for the German case studies, while students from the University of Michigan will study the history of the campus in Ann Arbor. These teaching and research activities will build upon the work of the researchers and communities in the four featured cities, and will be exhibited and discussed in the epilogue.

Audience

The exhibition addresses experts as well as a non-specialist audience, in Munich and abroad. With content spanning four continents, we aim to attract a large international public to the museum. Visiting the museum requires no previous knowledge of the subject, nor any specific educational background. To do justice to such a wide visitor demographic, communication is

configured on several levels and tailored to specific groups—schoolchildren, students, seniors, tourists, families, and specialists in the field.

In designing the exhibition, we have been attentive to our visitors' diverse educational backgrounds, and have considered the likely durations of individual visits. It is vital to develop a design that allows the exhibition to be experienced and seen at various speeds and levels of detail, ranging from a quick stroll for a general overview of the concepts of gift-giving to a more detailed reading of the case studies.

The subdivision into four chapters allows for spatial orientation and a quick overview, even in the course of a brief visit. Each chapter has an easily understandable introductory text that summarizes an essential theme. Visitors are then guided through each case study. Visitor engagement will be deepened by texts, audio and video interviews, films, models, diagrams, and other materials. Some chapters will be bundled into easily understandable interactive stations to facilitate access to the topics.

Public Program

We plan a rich public program over the course of six months. It will feature discussion rounds, guided exhibition tours, workshops, movie screenings, excursions, and a children's program. The program will start with four events that will take place in each of the four exhibited cities while simultaneously taking place in the exhibition space in Munich via a live stream. Further German case studies will be presented weekly and discussed with local audiences. We are also developing a gift-giving game as an educational event that will bring the dynamics of gift-giving closer to the audiences and make them easily understandable. Finally, a series of recorded audio stories will be offered to the visitors as a guide and additional voice to the presented stories. The last room in the exhibition space will be turned into an event space and a room for displaying the local case studies from Munich.



Joint exhibition workshop with students from the University of Michigan and TU Munich, 2023. (Photograph by Lukasz Stanek)



Research in Kumasi, Ghana, by Lukasz Stanek, 2022. (Photograph by Edward Koomson)

Imprint

Brochure for the Exhibition Project
The Gift: Stories of Generosity and Violence in Architecture

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**To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war;
it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality.**