The Living Past of Munich
City as a palimpsest

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The project aims to illustrate the concept of a city as a palimpsest through the web map. This theory draws an analogy between the city's historical layers and the textual layers of a palimpsest (a manuscript that retains traces of its earlier content beneath the surface). We highlight Munich's historical and cultural value by showcasing a variety of its architecture and historical sites on a platform.

Our interactive map displays the patchwork of urban elements from different historical periods coexisting in Munich today, unraveling the city's living past.
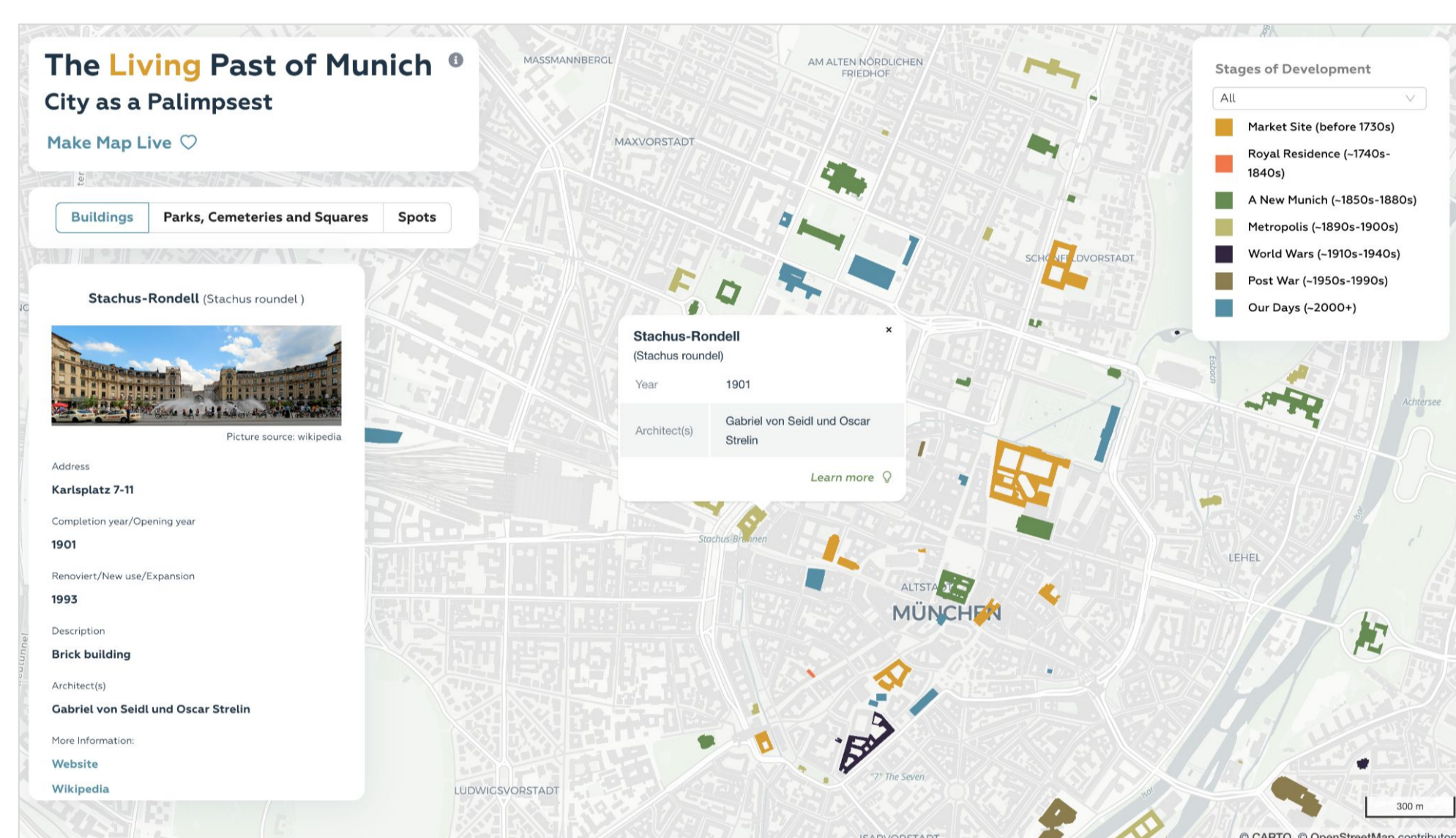

Figure1. The main web app interface for exploring information about different urban elements.

CITY AS A PALIMPSEST

Cities are complex cultural phenomena and can be considered as palimpsest, as urban morphology consists of different layers from different periods that intertwine and coexist together.

Our project is a tool for learning about Munich, understanding how history has shaped its current urban form, and gaining a better grasp of the complexity of the city's landscape.

DATA COLLECTION

The data for more than 250 sites in Munich was manually collected from open resources such as Wikimapia, Atlas Obscura, ArchDaily, and Muenchen.de. As well as by reviewing relevant literature and by visiting the collections of the Munich City Museum.

The resulting dataset encompasses over 10 attributes for each site, including details such as name, year built, type, function, architect, address, links to additional resources, and others.

DATA PROCESSING

To create spatial data from the data table, we geocoded addresses. Further steps were taken in QGIS, including checking the results of geocoding and assigning site characteristics to polygons from OSM. The polygons of the open spaces were manually defined based on reliable sources.

DATA VISUALIZATION

Beyond the interactive map visualization (front-end part) lie thousands of lines of JavaScript code utilizing React.js. The specific web-GIS libraries used are MapLibre and React Map GL. Additionally, we have integrated a back-end component using Node.js, Express, and MongoDB, enabling users to add their own data to our database.

COLORS

Each site is assigned to a stage based on completion year. Colors are inspired by the "Munich 1972" graphic designs.

- 🟧 Market Site (before 1730s)
- 🟥 Royal Residence (~1740s-1840s)
- 🟩 A New Munich (~1850s-1880s)
- 🟨 Metropolis (~1890s-1900s)
- 🟪 World Wars (~1910s-1940s)
- 🟫 Post War (~1950s-1990s)
- 🟦 Our days (~2000+)

The colors are defined to represent the diversity of historical layers that coexist in Munich today. The sequence of time is not relevant to our project, so categorical colors have been chosen.
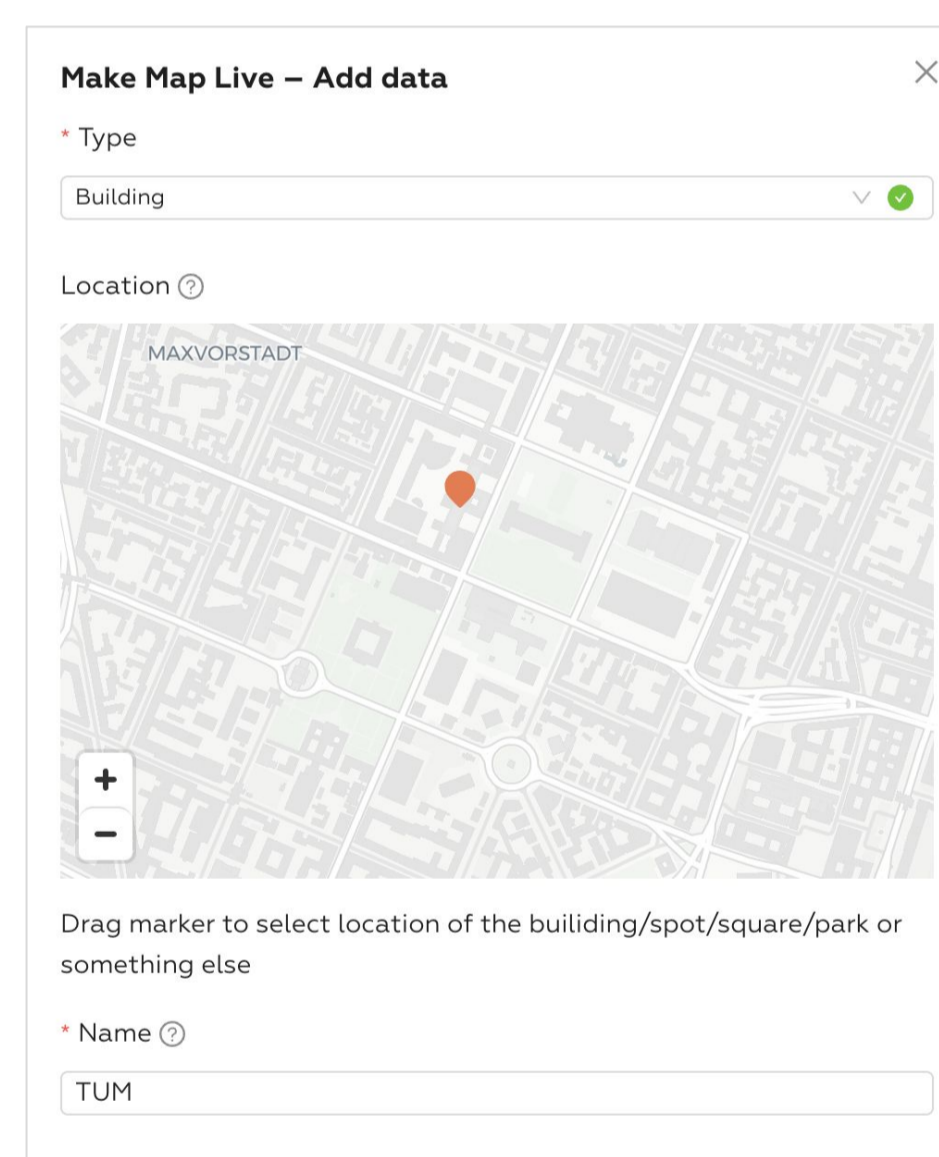

Figure 2: User's form for users to contribute to our project and add data

THE LIVING PAST

The "*Make Map Live <3*" feature of the map allows users to add data to the map. This way, the past lives and Munich´s urban landscape is continuously shown and updated.

CONCLUSION

Munich is a city full of tangible memory. Our interactive map shows various historical urban elements of Munich and reveals the hidden stories of the city.

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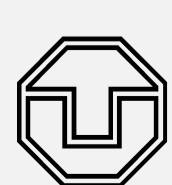
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