Picturesque perfection; a growing population, attractive work opportunities, good education facilities — rurality and urbanity combined, attracting old and young. Situated one hour northeast of Munich, with Munich airport in between, Landshut is well-positioned and boasts good infrastructure. What do you add to a city that already has everything?

Silicon Bavaria; the state in which Landshut is situated has many initiatives that aim to push the digital frontier. The 'Bavarian Cluster Initiative' boosts competitiveness by encouraging clusters of cooperation between companies, the 'Centre of Digitisation' was established to stimulate digitisation of Bavarian businesses and 'Gründerland Bayern' aims to provide young startups in the tech-industry with advice and funding. In Landshut specifically, the University of Applied Sciences educates students in technology and business, and LINK, one of 19 startup hubs in Bavaria, provides a place for them to become entrepreneurs. Everyone is looking towards a digital future, but who keeps track of our analogue past?

Homo digitalis; early 2021 the European Union started funding an initiative to digitise our cultural heritage. Named 4CH, the aim of the initiative is to establish an infrastructure for the preservation and conservation of historical monuments and sites. Buildings (and their cultural content) will be 3D scanned and stored along with the necessary information on how to preserve them from degradation. But what about the preservation of the intangible parts of our culture, like traditions, performances, cuisine & craftsmanship? How do we preserve them from degradation?

Phase 01. This project proposes an archive of (intangible) European culture in Landshut, Germany.

Pinpoint; the geographical centre point of the EU is shifting. With the United Kingdom leaving the European Union in early 2020 and the potential future addition of current candidate countries, the geographical centre of the EU might soon find itself very close to, or even in, Landshut. A central position asks for a central function; Landshut, with its perfect infrastructure and proximity to the digital frontier of Bavaria, is the ideal place to digitally and physically archive our European heritage.

Role reversal; a former prison forms the pinnacle of this proposal: the archive itself. In desperate need of revitalisation, a prison is coincidentally the ideal typology for safekeeping; once built to protect those outside from those contained within, it will now protect what is kept inside from possible threats outside. It might one day even turn out to be the rosetta stone of future generations — a hardware monument in a software world.

Data management; the upper floors of the prison are characterised by a cell structure which needs to be preserved due to the landmark status of the building. No problem — the series of small rooms is perfect for the serialisation of our data: data servers can be compartmentalised according to topic for easy maintenance.

Public vs. private; the building will be divided into two distinct parts. The private upper three floors in which the data servers are stored, and a public ground floor to be used as a forum, functioning as an interface between visitors and our heritage. To give additional space to the public floor and to increase connectivity between the two wings of the building, the inner courtyard will be interiorised by a free-standing canopy reminiscent of a temple, emphasising its importance. A large public staircase connects the inner courtyard with the main entrance of the prison to form a gateway towards the old city centre. This staircase is the only architectural intervention done to the building. The prison will thus be preserved in conjunction with our European heritage.

Phase 02. The archive expands into the nearby park — the digital extends into the analogue.

Wedding crasher; every four years the Landshut Wedding of 1475 is celebrated in and around the city. The people of Landshut re-enact this historic event with exceptional attention to detail, awing spectators young and old. Why not accommodate more European pageants and celebrations?

5 points of culture; the design for the park builds on what is already there. The Turnierplatz will be upgraded with permanent stadium seats to also accommodate other sports festivities, the existing pavilion of the Stadtpark Landshut will be used for small concerts and the Zeughaus will be transformed into a workshop to practice and teach European crafts. South of the park two new programs will be added: a market to practice and taste various European cuisines and a theatre for large performances and concerts.

Order vs. chaos; adhering to the unstructured placement of the existing Zeugheus, the Turnierplatz and the pavilion, the newly added programs will be scattered freely across the park as well— no need to be formal in a democratic union. A beaten path curves mindlessly across the meadows, building relationships between the park and the waterfront.

Formal paradox; the casualness is suddenly countered, a strong axis connects all programs, unifying them into a single (political) gesture. On top of that a large plaza, to be used for big festivities, extends from the former prison all the way to the Isar river. To accommodate this plaza and maintain a pedestrian connection the Wittstraße, which sidelines the park, will be partially placed underground.

Monument; we have never built a monument to honour the European Union. A watchtower across the Isar river finally changes that. Albeit small, thus representing the absence of any political doctrine within the E.U., it allows for a spectacular overview of the park and forms a physical endpoint to the plaza.

United we stand; to make the European Union more cohesive we need to embrace a collective identity. Understanding and celebrating what define(d/s) us is where we start.