

Graduation Reflection

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1. From theory to project

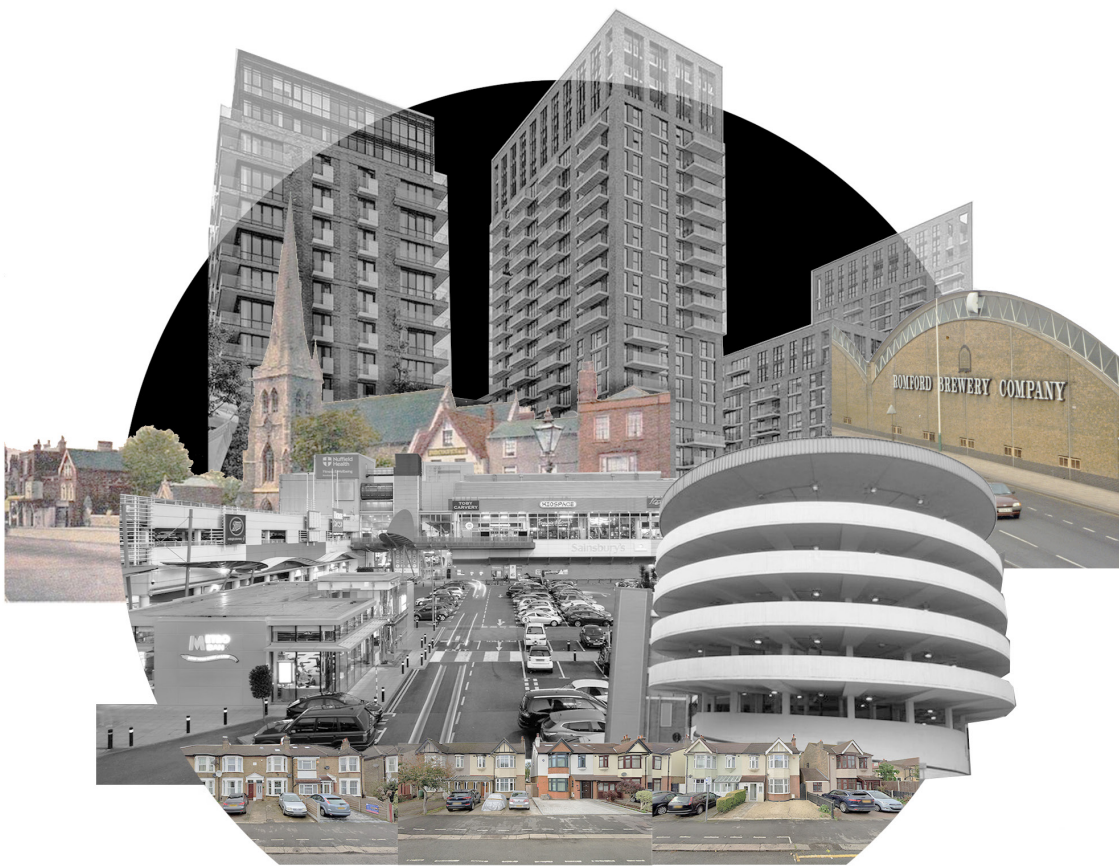
1.1 Methodology

At the start of my graduation, I initially started looking into the 'edge' of London since these rather vague thresholds had always fascinated me. While zooming in and out of these so called edges, I started to notice the deterioration of places and made me adjust my direction. From this point on I started reading theories on fragmented cityscapes. Through reading several works of different authors I became more and more aware of the fact that fragmentation is a peculiar topic and was not so easily dissected. What however was clear to me was that fragmentation caused the loss of legibility and identity of places. During one of our early seminars I stumbled upon Kevin Lynch and his book 'The Image of the City'. It gave me a clear framework on how to analyse cities and their legibility through the users perspective. Next to this, I read a substantial amount of literature on the identity of places. The main author which has supported my research is Edward Relph. With his ideas on identity, I was able to subdivide this topic into three keywords; meanings, human activities and physical setting.

In order to find my site, I decided to narrow down my research to the recently opened Elizabeth Line. The reason for choosing an infrastructural line was fairly simple since it has had an still has a strong influence on the fragmentation of cityscapes up until today. Next to that, housing prices have seen an enormous increase since its announcement which makes it likely that existing towns which already have been victim will continue to lose character and gentrify further while new towns are likely to follow this trend.

1.2 Research Question

All the above mentioned research led to my main research question: *How can architecture contribute to overcome the fragmented urban landscape along the Elizabeth Line in Outer London, countering the loss of legibility by drawing on the revalorisation of its identity?*







1.3 Consumer back to citizen

With the data of the Office for National Statistics I was able to filter through the different station areas along the Elizabeth Line and ended up in Romford which was the perfect place to further conduct my research.

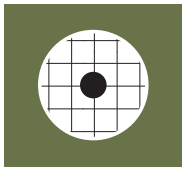
Romford has exponentially grown since the Industrial Revolution and is completely divided into fragments. Large shopping centres, parking garages and kilometres of asphalt rule the metropolitan area. After analysing Romford through the earlier discussed frameworks I came across one shopping centre (the Brewery) which really caught my attention. It is only twenty years old, has an excessive amount of parking lot and is not integrated with the rest of the city centre. I decided to look further into shopping centres and devoted my research paper to it. The research on shopping centres and its conclusions gave my sufficient information and together with a thorough analysis on Romford through the earlier discussed framework I found it essential to create a new masterplan for Romford, focussing on revitalising the Brewery by introducing a pedestrian orientated mixed program within a green spine connecting Romford with the Green Belt again through the river Rom. Since nowadays most of all Romford's users only live or shop here the goal of the masterplan focusses on transforming the consumer back to a citizen again.

1.4 From station to destination

Within my masterplan I decided to focus on the redevelopment of the train station of Romford for the following reasons:

1. The station and her arches will be the new gateway to the new masterplan.
2. The masterplan will create a new square next to the current train tracks.
3. The station is currently lacking, offering almost no amenities.
4. The station already is and will only become more important with the introduction of the Elizabeth Line.

The station area has a true potential to become a catalyst for a city and with my project I would like to demonstrate the true potential of such spaces. The main goal is to create an area where citizens can get together for different activities at different times throughout the day.



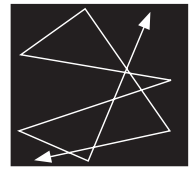
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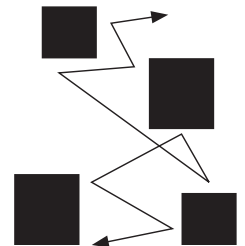
to green
connection



to pedestrian
focused



to mixed
program



to outside
experience

2. Reflecting on my own work

2.1 The approach

Initially I felt lost within all the theories, subjects and the city of London in general. After narrowing down my research through my fascination with fragmented cityscapes, I came to the city of Romford to test my ideas. During P1 I addressed my doubts regarding my approach because then it felt like I was just doing something, but the story made sense. I guess I found it difficult to ground my research within such a free studio.

2.2 How and why

In my eyes my approach worked out like I had hoped to. With the use of my theoretical framework I got a clear understanding of how Romford's identity and legibility had changed over the past ages and why it eventually turned into a metropolitan area. I also encountered a couple of weak spots within the city centre which I try to solve within my new masterplan and project. Within a bigger perspective I feel my research can also be of added value. The problems London is facing regarding fragmentation is not unique but actually happening all across the world. I suggest an alternative approach to fragmentation which counteracts on this phenomenon by countering the loss of legibility by drawing on the revalorisation of its identity. In my opinion we can use different fragments of cities as a base for new synergies which can again characterize spaces.

2.3 Received feedback

After receiving feedback from P2, I realized that I needed to focus on elaborating my masterplan and finding ways to guide people through it while showcasing the integration of different user groups. To address this, I developed a series

of columns along the river Rom that emphasized the new green spine and served as a guiding element to lead people towards the new station area. Additionally, I specified six user groups and proposed routes that my new masterplan would accommodate.

Because of the different scales of my graduation project I still found it difficult to ground my building smoothly within my earlier created masterplan. This issue was a primary concern raised during P3, and I recognized the need to step back and re-establish a strong connection with my masterplan. At the time, I was not satisfied with my project but with guidance from Roberto during tutoring sessions, I made the decision to remove the elevated square in front of the station and prioritize the continuation with the green blue spine. This decision proved to be crucial in the development of my project.

2.4 Learning from my own work

During my graduation year I mostly learnt to tackle a complex, heterogeneous problem and break it down and frame it through research and design. I enjoyed being able to spend a significant amount of time on research but I also experienced that time flies and you eventually need to make decisions. Sometimes I felt stuck within research or design but also found out that by making choices you in time can help yourself progress. After making decisions and moving on you subconsciously test your ideas and can reflect on them in a different way.



3. Thoughts

Numerous cities such as London have been victim of uncontrolled growth which has led to fragmented cityscapes. Modernization and compulsive growth has led to illegible places where the sense of place is being lost. More cities are starting to have similar skylines where generic high-rise buildings are being built next to shopping malls replacing the former landmarks what once made them distinguishable.

This research gives an urban and architectural framework on how to deal with the phenomenon by drawing on the revalorisation of its identity. Places such as Romford have seen an enormous growth turning a rural village into a metropolitan area in less than 100 years. This results in a fragmented urban landscape where small historic fabric collides with large infrastructure orientated typologies tied together forming one city.

This graduation project provides a possible solution to this contemporary challenge: preserve and refurbish by drawing on the identity of a place and only carefully remove if necessary to overall enhance the legibility.

