Reconciling Hinterland

Reflection paper
Floor Hoogenboezem
4084098
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Reflection for the preliminary results of the research and design in the graduation phase

Faculty of Architecture
Delft University of Technology
Studio Heritage & Architecture, Disclosing the Military City

Main tutor: Hielkje Zijlstra
Second tutor: Wido Quist
Third tutor: Marieke Kuipers
Board of Examiners delegate: Jan Jacob Trip

I. Product

The Heritage & Architecture studio, disclosing the military city focussed on a large vacant industrial site, situated in the greater area of Lisbon, but still being part of a very characteristic little village, called Beato. This abandoned industrial site, the Militairy Manutencao Complex, was situated in the heart of this poetic but also very poor village. This extreme contrast between the rich historical presence, the rigid industrial atmosphere and the degredation of public space, really intrigued me. This made the project very complex, but also very interesting and relevant. You could feel that Beato was heavily charged with traces and with past readings. However, in the industrial area, these historical traces were secluded, hidden and taken for granted. I decided that I wanted to investigate in the how this industrial space could be modified to make it become part its own village again, and how it could contribute to revive urban space.

The whole year my research was focussed on the three different topics; a good urban space, history and memories and designing with time-layers. The transformation firstly creates multiple courtyards on the site. They create more contrast in the monotonous wide industrial space, and thus an impact on human emotions. Besides, a new type of educational centre, tries to develop the urban space program wise. Secondly, the transformation is exposing time- and building characteristics, to generate more understanding for it's rich and layered history. Finally, a new layer will help to expose these characteristics, by making a composition of old and new.

With my project I hope to show that there is a way of reviving an abandoned factory village, by making the locals more aware of their cultural and historical wealth and traces. But also to be more sensitive and reconciliated towards the existing communities and their way of using and living in an urban environment.
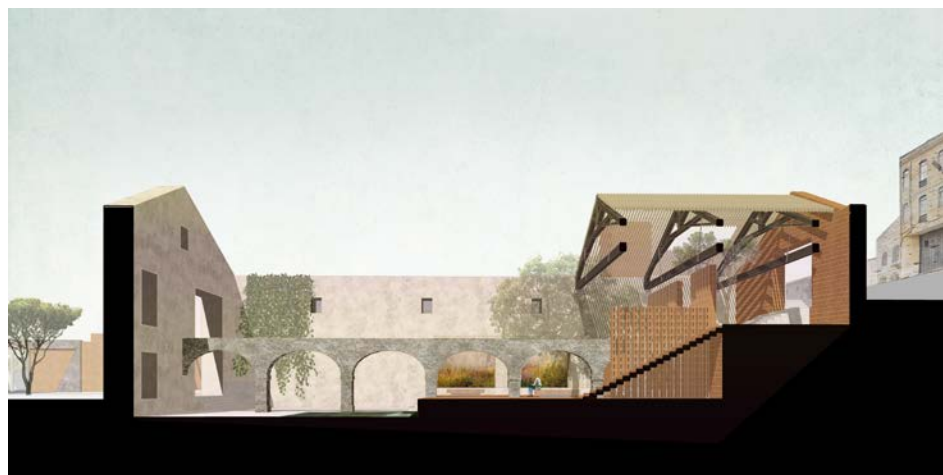
II. Process

The relationship between research and design:

The design is influenced by the results of various studies, a group analysis on technique, architecture, cultural values. In addition to these studies, I did an extensive workshop group research on social economic facts and I did several precedent studies during the design process. The precedent studies were divided in three different parts; public space, designing with time-layers and the Portuguese education. For the Public space research I analysed methods from famous writers about public space, such as Kevin Lynch, Gorden Cullen, Christian Norberg-Schulz and Jan Gehl. For the , designing with time-layers I did small case-studies on buildings from architects who are famous for their architecture and their approach to history. Besides I also made a big model, to do tests and to compare different approaches. For the research on Portuguese education I read several reports from the European Union, about the problems, the development and the improvements on education in Portugal. Besides I also researched how the Finnish education is organized, which became an inspiration for the new organization and program of the site.

In a heritage & architecture studio, students are gathering information and making conclusions by making three different analysis; architecture, technique and cultural value. However, I experienced that these analysis just gave me the basic input for the design project. When dealing with a large vacant industrial site as location, there are many other factors that play an important role, such as the development, public space or sustainability. However, there was not much space/time to do critical research on these topics. So for me the triangle of Heritage & Architecture, gave me the foundation of the project, and my own personal interest and research helped me to make most of my design decisions. But looking to the preliminary results, I do think that my project has reached a balanced interrelation between design, technology and cultural value.
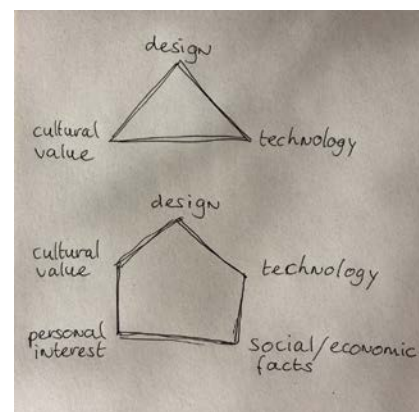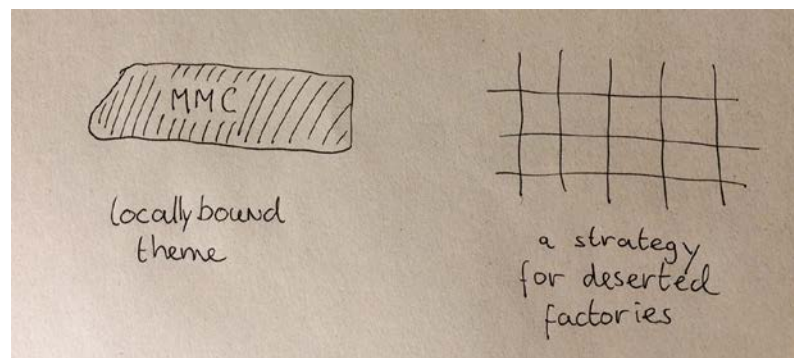

The relationship between the theme of the graduation studio and the chosen subject

The theme of the graduation studio is extremely broad; basically there is only given a disserted industrial site on a specific location, Lisbon in this case. This gave many possible directions, which made the beginning of the studio very complex. I had troubles with finding a strong focus, because for such a project so many factors play

an important role. Doing the architectural, technical and cultural value analysis did not really help me in finding my niche. Finally after a few days spending in the library, I found a topic where I wanted to continue with; the Palimpsest. Although this was not enough for the main focus of the design, it did give me a good start for my personal research, interest and design process.

However the project is localized, it was important for me to come up with a design, which was relevant on a bigger scope. Due to todays speed of technology and globalization, disserted factories within degradationed urban areas are a frequent topic. On the other hand were the local circumstances of the site and the context very specific, and was a more anchored design needed. I tried to develop a strategy for disserted factories in urban areas, that takes into account the specific local characteristics of the place. Although the project was located in a very poor area, the same kind of strategy could be used in more developed areas, because it focuses on people and their relation with public space. In this sense, my research and design becomes more relevant for areas with the same issues.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach and the chosen method

The methodical line of approach of the Heritage & Architecture Chair is the building research in design, technology and cultural value, and their conclusions forming an important tool to make a transformation framework. A personal fascination is arising the first weeks of the project and during the design process, decisions constantly need to be evaluated with the conclusions of the design, technology and cultural value research and the transformation framework.

In my graduation project the methodical line went actually almost precisely as expected. In the group I did an extensive research on the narrative and the history of the site (architecture and technical) They gave basic input for the cultural value research. We concluded that there were three main time-layers, that made the

development of the industrial site so unique (Although I concluded that there were four distinctive time-layers). For me this fact became a leading aspect in my design; designing with time-layers.

I decided I wanted to focus my research on this topic. I used books and references to compare different design techniques with each other. Later, when I was inspired by the second excursion to Lisbon and I started to read more literature about urban spaces and people, I extended my personal focus and improved my design starting points. I used sketches and 3D computer models to test and to make decisions. I rarely used physical models to do research, not surprisingly I was disappointed in the model I made for the P2.

After the P2, I did a intensive evaluation and I again extended my personal focus and design assumptions, this time more on the development of the site and it's relation with the wider social context. At the same time, I was working on an extensive personal cultural value analysis, which was giving me a grounded base for 'designing with time-layers'. I used sketches and a big physical model to test different options, and gave me really quickly insights in what was working well and not.

After the P3, I was again reflecting and evaluating the design to the research conclusions, the design assumptions and the transformation framework. I again extended my personal research with another view on public space and the connection with people. I used mainly sketches to compare and to make decisions on different scales. This gave me new insights and therefor needed to re-evaluate and adapt the design to the improved assumptions.
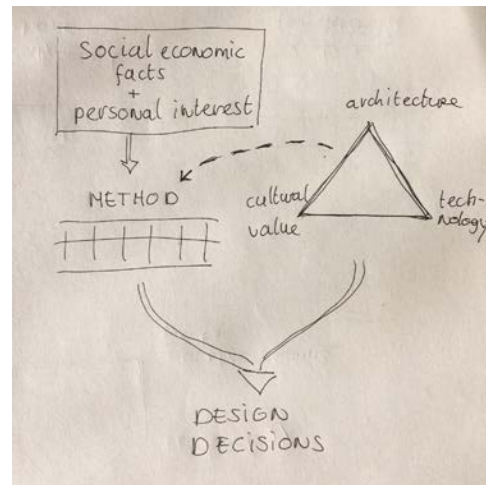
Because it was my first time doing a H&A studio, the first weeks I was a little bit insecure if I could find the right methods to find my own niche, and at the same time following the methodical line of approach from the Heritage & Architecture studio. After making some mistakes, and willing to improve the right methods, I felt more and more comfortable in my design process during the graduation year.

*The relationship between the project and the wider social context*

As I already mentioned before; the social economic facts were an important trigger for my design. When we visited Beato, I got very intrigued by the large contrasts between the wealth of culture & history, the rigid industrial area and the poverty of urban space by which the site was embraced. At the moment, there were two things that Beato really lacks, that is first: a good educational institution and secondly, well developed public spaces that can encompass urban functions like education etc. I discovered that in general Portugal has problems with an extremely high

unemployment and school drop-out rates. I wanted to use the industrial site, which not only tries to improve the local social circumstances, but that it would also contribute to a wider social context; in this case Portugal. I got inspired by the way how the Finnish schools are organized, they could help to improve education and to make it more accessible. Finland has, according to OECD, the best education in the world. Their key is to deny classrooms as much as possible, but in stead to play and to learn in inspiring environments.

My project offers an educational centre, where each building gets a specific new function, that together give opportunities for positioning people in the working based society. So in this sense it tries to involve the surrounded communities in different ways:
- the proposed design tries to improve the current public space, and therefor also tries to improve the social context by offering more social space
- it offers opportunities for people to develop more knowledge, interest & skills. But the program is especially focussed on lower educated, unemployed and children, by creating approachable program.
- It can be seen as an example/test project for a new type of education, where the typical classroom makes place for a more adventurous type of learning. In this sense, the social context goes even further then Portugal and maybe even Europe.

I think that the new educational centre I designed is very much taking into a account the wider social context, both on a local and a global scale. However, the project will cost money and therefor also the educational and cultural program cannot be for free. I tried to keep costs as low as possible by involving the local communities in the building/design process. Most of the transformations are materialized by a very easy, low-tech and cheap material: The Compressed Earth Block (CEB). Although the Portuguese inhabitants have a really strong craft culture in their blood, It would still cost time and money to involve untrained, unschooled people. During the construction process, It will be necessary to consider to what extent the participation of the local population can be achieved. Finally, financing could hopefully be requested from the European Union because it tries to improve the level and the quality of education.
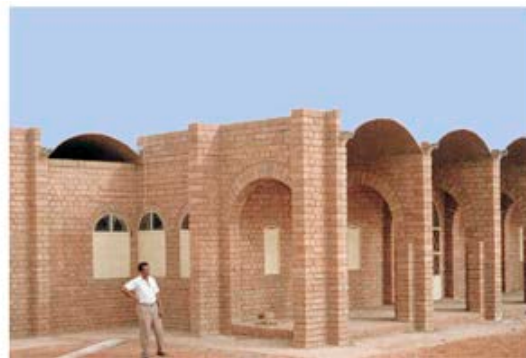
example project made my locals with CEB block, by Hassan Fathy

III. Planning

The above section reflects upon the process of my graduation project up to the point of the Pre-P4. The upcoming period is divided in two parts; the period to P4 and the period to P5.

The period to P4 will probably be one of the most toughest parts of the studio, because there is still design research to make but on the other hand a lot has to be decided. To spend my time as useful as possible, I will first make the outline for the P4/P5 presentation text, because the main story of the project is clear now. From there I will see what drawings and decisions are still need to be made. As my focus is not only on one building, I still have a bit difficulties in finding the right places where my design is explained on it's best. Anyway it's important to re-evaluate the design to the transformation framework, and the conclusions of the architectural analysis. Do the design assumptions need to be improved? Sketching, evaluating and justifying will help me making the right decisions. I also want at least spent a few more hours/days on model studies because they gave me in general very quick answers to my hesitations.

The period to P5 I want to divide in 5 parts;
1. finish the drawings for the presentation (the last changes to be made)
2. make the presentation slides and text
3. make an urban model of the ensemble (1:200)
4. finish the 1:100 model (and make photos)
5. make 1/2 fragments 1:50 (and make photos)