



AR3MET105

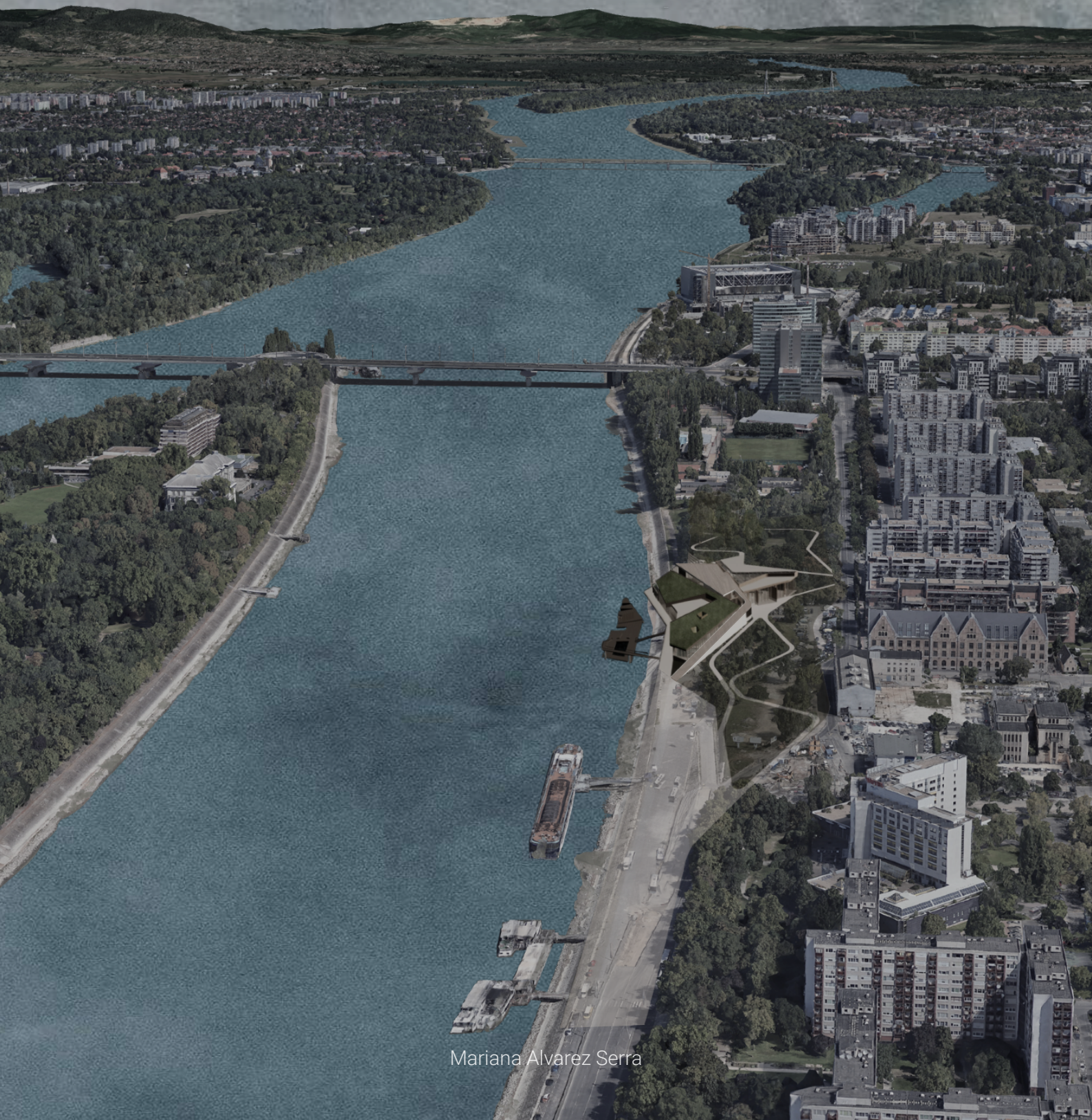
**Methods and Analysis**

Master Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences

**Delft University of Technology**

# TRANSITIONS

Reviving the historical legacy of swimming in the Danube by  
redesigning its margin



Mariana Alvarez Serra

## INTRODUCTION

I have always been fascinated by the potential of architecture to elicit diverse behaviors and emotions in its users through their experience of space. As Andrei Tarkovsky once noted, 'a book read by a thousand different people is a thousand different books.'

This perspective led my theory thesis to be a visual (re)interpretation and defragmentation of the inexecutable cities written and imagined by Italo Calvino. By decoding Calvino's work, I concluded that these cities are 'invisible' because everyone's perception of space is highly subjective, shaped by our unique life experiences and emotions. This ignited my passion to explore how architecture not only affects our emotions but also plays a pivotal role in our mental health and overall well-being.

I have chosen the Methods Studio because it focuses on developing innovative approaches and tools for understanding and shaping the built environment. It challenges traditional views and inspires new ways of thinking, seeking transdisciplinary encounters between architecture and other fields. It aligned perfectly with my interest in exploring architecture through the lenses of theoretical perspectives provided by neuroscience, but also deconstructivist and phenomenological philosophies. Through these transdisciplinary collaborations, diverse perspectives enrich architectural discourse and practice, making both the design process and my personal growth as an architect highly stimulating.

## THE CITY

As I embarked on my journey to explore the profound impact of architecture on human emotions and well-being, I sought opportunities to apply my fascination in a real-world context. Budapest, with its rich history and unique urban challenges, emerged as the perfect laboratory for testing these ideas.

In this context, I realized that the principles I had explored in my theory thesis - the subjective nature of space perception and the profound influence of architecture on emotions - were not just theoretical concepts but had practical implications for improving the lives of the residents in District XIII. I saw an opportunity to redesign this space designing an urban retreat that makes use of public areas as the essential link between various urban elements.

# POSED PROBLEM

## CONNECTION

In particular, I turned my attention to District XIII, where despite a long history with water and vibrant bathing traditions, residents find themselves spatially and emotionally disconnected from the Danube river.

## DISCONNECTION

The non-humanized riverbanks, which are lined heavy traffic and subject to numerous man-made transformations over the years, , such as the construction of roads and parking lots, have weakened physical relationship between the citizens and the river. This situation has resulted in an absence of qualified public spaces, poor accessibility, and a lack of stimulating pedestrian circulation, resulting in its detachment from its restraining mesh.

## RECONNECTION

However, a glimmer of hope emerged. This photo taken on site indicates that people do desire a closer, more tangible connection with the river - in order to bridge this gap between spirit and reality.

### CONNECTION

A SPIRITUAL BOND



HYPOTHESIS

### DISCONNECTION

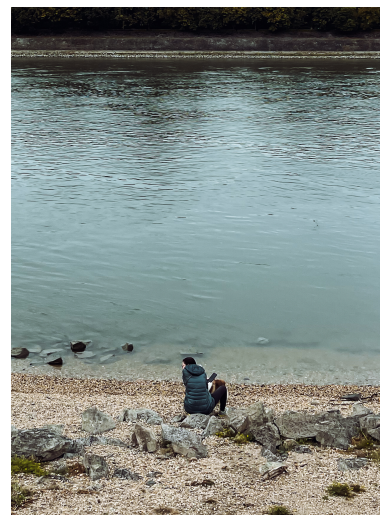
A PHYSICAL BARRIER



POSED PROBLEM

### RECONNECTION

A TANGIBLE DESIRE



OBSERVATION

The woman ant the dog

Therefore my proposal was designed exactly to act like a bridge that brings the people from Budapest to the river with the aim of reinstating that desired physicality.



PONTON POOLS (HISTORICAL LEGACY)

BATHHOUSE CULTURE (TRADITION)

BRIDGING THE PEOPLE OF BUDAPEST TO THE RIVER BY SEWING TWO CULTURES TOGETHER

## THE SITE

The chosen site is Adam park because, besides offering the essential connection to nature to feel like an escape from the city (within the city), it is currently being used as a car park, which is needed, but this purpose is neglecting the full potential of this area which could be something more exciting.

So I started by crafting an architecture that really responded to its surroundings. The building's layout was initiated by respecting the existing trees on site and the shape of the building also evolved from a biophilic perspective that nurtures an unmediated connection with nature. Drawing inspiration from the tenets of phenomenology and a deconstructivist mindset, the design radiates a sense of fluidity and fragmentation. Here, predictability is eschewed in favor of spaces that encourage exploration, akin to the enigmatic charm of Budapest's famous ruin bars.

## PROGRAMME

The project intends to activate a part of the waterfront along the Danube, with architecture acting as a transitional *bridge*, fostering a more symbiotic relationship between the urban community and water. Nestled within a once-concrete expanse in a park, the retreat aims to transform a former car parking lot into a structure that emerges as an oasis of green for the people of Budapest to gather, engage, and revel in a new urban space.

The project comprises two parts.

The first is a private bathhouse facility, sheltered within a public layer holding functions like an atrium bustling with life, a shop for the curious, a panoramic slow food haven aloft a terrace, a walkable roof that acts as new public space, and a ground-level health-conscious café, all overlooking an urban river-facing staircase. The result is a building that outwardly serves the public, while inwardly housing an introvert private bathing facility.

The second is a public floating structure, paying homage to the evocative reminiscences of old pontoon pools. Its purpose is to re-activate the historical legacy of swimming in the river. By tying these two worlds together in one area, while bridging the community physically to the river, the proposal becomes a revitalisation of the waterfront.



The woman and the dog, in context

## REFLECTION ON RESEARCH

In a world that is becoming more virtual by the day, there is a longing for physicality that yearns to be fulfilled. Throughout this academic year, my primary focus has been on crafting an architecture that delivers spaces capable of leaving a lasting impression on the urban fabric they occupy, but more importantly, on the mind and bodies of those who engage and experience them. Architecture is the set for life to happen, and we, as set designers, orchestrate different scenarios and environments for different users to engage with - and the play plays out.

In the preliminary research phase, I approached the project with a transdisciplinary perspective, incorporating diverse points of view and knowledge into architectural discourse and practice.

Methods Studio focuses on developing unique approaches and tools for creating, using, and understanding the built environment. It aims to challenge traditional views of the architect's role and inspire new ways of thinking and practicing architecture. We are asked to challenge ourselves by using creative imagination as a source of innovation, seeking transdisciplinary encounters between architecture and other fields such as literature (poetic and fictional), the visual and plastic, cinema, etc. I was interested in the exploration of architecture through the lenses of theoretical perspectives provided by neuroscience, but also deconstructionist and phenomenological philosophies, and I wanted to research this through creative methods such as the ones referred above.

In retrospect of the research process thus far, there was a series of exploratory methods used including observation and analysis of the riverfront in Vizafogó, interviews with local residents, perceptual maps for site analysis, and a review of literature on the relationship between architecture and wellbeing.



## REFLECTION ON DESIGN

Regarding the design process, I opted for more creative methods such as: sketching atmospheres with tea; unfolding drawings that conveyed an idea of journey, discovery, mystery; writing about the site; creating a narrative with characters to talk about the building; Additionally, I incorporated other drawings, some of which were hybrid in nature, blending various design elements.

To ensure precision and feasibility, I delved into technical details, meticulously tuning the design. Both physical and digital modeling played a pivotal role in bringing the concept to life, allowing for a tangible and virtual exploration of the project. Moreover, I used renders to provide a realistic visual representation of the design, capturing its essence in vivid detail, and after I hand-drew on top of them to infuse a sense of tactile connection. Lastly, sketching the different environments I once imagined helped convey the intended mood, ambiance, and emotional impact of the space, adding a holistic dimension to the design process. In this way, I endeavored to create a comprehensive and innovative design that seamlessly combines artistic creativity with practicality and functionality.

## REFLECTION ON PERSONAL GROWTH

Drawing upon some newly acquired knowledge this year, creating an architectural project involves a continuous exchange between investigating architectural principles, examining the site's conditions and producing a tangible architectural solution. It's a push and pull, a give and take, a fluid back-and-forth between research and creation that constantly evolves. Just like wine, projects require a process of maturation. I have concluded that 1) the design process is marked by a constant flow of unexpected discoveries, and 2) less is more. Having a clear and focused project with well-defined objectives is more effective than a proposal that holds too many loose intentions. Like Jorge would say, "just because you like strawberries it doesn't mean you put them in your soup." Or better, "similar to a slowly cooked meal, projects benefit from a deliberate and gradual preparation."

Perhaps we should approach our projects with a willingness to listen and respond to their needs and potential more. While it's important to have a clear vision, we should also remain open to unexpected insights that emerge during the design process. Every idea, intention, drawing or decision will inevitably have an impact on subsequent steps. Inefficiency is inherent in this art, but in its constant stream of discoveries lies the beauty of creation.

Ultimately, the most successful projects are those grounded in a deep understanding of context and purpose and those which are able to grow and evolve in response to the challenges and opportunities they encounter along the way. We must embrace and trust the process.

## REFLECTION ON SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT

I believe that my project aligns with the focus of the Methods Studio, which aims to challenge traditional views of the architect's role and inspire new ways of thinking and practicing architecture. My project also aligns with the focus of the Built Technology track, which emphasizes the integration of technological innovation and sustainability in the built environment.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can a bathhouse facility respond to the changing needs and aspirations of future generations through innovation, while also honouring and preserving past traditions?
- How can this architecture compensate for the lack of physicality in an increasingly virtual world, through sensory-rich experiences and multi-sensory design approaches?