Javier Sanchez Jimenez-On the rocks: a breakable heaven

P5 REFLECTION

It is my belief that landscape architecture is a very apt term; it is design discipline that studies how to intervene in space, or, some would argue, our perception of it (which is the basis of architecture) through the use of landscape-not necessarily natural- materials, processes and techniques. I hoped to showcase these aspects, which are the very basis of the Landscape Architecture track, in my final project, and it is my belief that I succeeded in it. I chose the topic of tackling the water, energy and urbanization un balance in the Guadarrama mountains because I believed that it was a perfect candidate; it would evidently imply a spatial intervention- and a very noticeable one- so tackling to the core of the masters program; however, these interventions would rarely involve building as we understand it, but working from, on, in and about the landscape elements in the area; so, in this regard, I consider that my project does indeed fill the curriculum.

This project exposed me to a radically different teaching tradition than the one that I am used to; a very telling. Hence, my approach to the project has been witching between these two was of addressing problems- Madrid's more general-to-particular, steppes-design, single-idea-guided, rationalist mantras, and Delfts more open-minded, bottom-to-top, empirical hindsight. This has both worked and absolutely backfired for me, in different fields. On the one hand, is an almost fail-safe method to ensure that something is valid-if it is when seen from both perspectives. On the other, running this constant scan and trying to get the meeting points is terribly stressful, complicated and time consuming. In this case I think that the double reassurance was worth it, but I wouldn't encourage taking this stand in cases when time is the most pressing element in a design process. However, one point both ways have in common is the early research phase, as they both encourage to get as much information as possible; once the information is gathered, I set the goals on which kind of information I needed- I divide it largely in two groups:

1. Quantitative information: this could be defined as somehow cold data. Numbers, stats, physical propierties of elements, cartography, dates where significative events took place. For this, I had a ranking on how reliable the sources were, with European Union and state agencies on the top of the ranking, closely followed by regional administration and universities; the source itself was immediately listed in a word document. If the information was literally crude data, expressed I text or numbers, it was included. If it was graphical, most of the times it was redrawn so to fit the aesthetics of the report/; but as byproduct of this process, I garnered further understanding of the information, so in my opinion this method was highly effective.
2. Qualitative information: in this case we are talking about somehow non exact, more perceptive information, that is useful to understand's a place atmosphere and *genius loci*; in this case, as the question of reliability is irrelevant, I applied my own intuition; this procedure, as much as it can yield significant and fast gains sometimes, is in my opinion very risky as it can also lead to enormous drawbacks and time lost, and actually pointless for mining any significant information. For me, this only worked if it is used for questions that are absolutely concerned with perception or for confirmation of other data, as to evaluate the qualitative values of flows of a quantitative element.

The influence of the research on the design is quite immediate, especially for someone brought up in the Southern European tradition; it is the fuel of the design. However, soon I discovered that the design process was also shaping the research, as it would priorities some research topics over others, cancelling some and adding some-this is also the way my mentor's feedback affected the research topic. It also influenced me by uninventively making me become more receptive to some information than to other. In time, once of the body of work of design grew larger and larger, another phenomenon started happening; I would find myself performing analysis on my own design same as I did with the information collected through research. Again I must say that although this quadruple-check way of working is very time consuming and needs of a special mindset, it sort of depurates many errors same as a continuous polishing would remove a crack in a diamond. However, another undesirable byproduct of this is that often the results of this last analysis are yet again introduced in the project and the layers of complexity tower upon each other; I found myself way too late trapped in this game, with much more information than I could tell and absolutely clueless about how to tell it, producing dozens of documents in an attempt to simplify the precious ones without ever reaching an intelligible level. This is, for me, greatest handicap of my way of working: the products that it yields are very difficult to read. This also hinders its academic and societal value as communication is valid for these fields to profit from any piece of information, and also its transferability.

In case the project was implemented, several concerns would arise, both practical and ethical- and, I would say, the first would lead to the second. It's a huge transformation, something that always implies to have the question of if it was really worth it lingering; in some other area, maybe I would be easily deterred by this argument, but not in this particular zone where large scale interventions are part of the genius loci DNA, with a centuries-long tradition of going as far as possible, and sometimes moving the line of possible in the process. Years of careful design and work should be invested. Auxiliar infrastructure built. Thousands of people would have to leave their homes. Of course, then the circle goes back; the solution to this ethical question is actually rephrasing; it is not any longer if it *is* worthy but *how much* it is worth- boiling it down to money, which is a practical problem. However, this delivers little joy or ethical cleansing for the conscience because a country like Spain, with its dwindling economy being already consistently preyed by a notoriously corrupt administration, would be forced to choose whether to spend its remaining breadcrumbs here or in a probably more pressing matter.

There is also another issue very related with money and ethics that engages the local environment of this project: the fact the area lies between two different regions would force them to co-operate, which has been proved difficult in the past. Even between two reportedly Castilian regions ruled by the same party, the fighting over these mountains has been akin to a quarrel between two brothers- with the youngest one, Madrid, being significantly wealthier and narcissistic to a t- which is another of the reasons why I would deter from this project; in an ideal world, it would foster the collaboration and trust between two regions that never sought to be more than one; but in the world I know, it would be the perfect excuse to argue about who keeps the mothers' house while she is still alive and breathing.