

## P4 REFLECTION

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### INTRODUCTION - EXPLORELAB GRADUATION STUDIO AND MY FASCINATION

ExploreLab enables students to translate their personal fascination into an actual graduation project. When I applied for ExploreLab, I started off by addressing the lack of attention for projects in non-western countries during my bachelor and mentioned that, because of my Moroccan background, I had the opportunity to visit Morocco almost yearly (the North-East part, specifically the city Berkane) where I started to notice the increasing amount of architecture that is detached from its context, especially the large scale projects where copy-past building blocks are becoming a norm and the fast unplanned urbanisation on the outskirts of towns is increasing each year. Not only do they have no relation with their climate and region, but these projects are a threat to the local culture and way of living. On the other hand vernacular architecture is disappearing, replaced for multiple storey blocks with large glass façades. This tension between designing for a specific region and culture and becoming modern has always played a role, not only in the architectural discourse but also in a wider context such as the everyday life.



fig. 1 Phases of research before designing (orange)

## FROM RESEARCH TO DESIGN

The research started with the search for a notion in architecture that embraces local identity and encourages architects to design for a specific context while taking into account that we are living in a modern society. I started with researching the notion of Critical Regionalism by reading books and articles written by experts on this topic (Kenneth Frampton, Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre), in combination with examining reference projects that were designed while using a critical regionalist approach. During this research, I noticed a strong link between critical regionalism and social, political and cultural aspects that determine the position of the architects. therefore I continued by looking at references that show how Western ideals are portrayed in architecture in non-western countries, and mainly how this was supported by the colonial background. Afterwards I tried to translate this framework in the case study of Morocco, firstly by shortly examining the history of external influenced in Moroccan architecture, mainly because of the French occupation, afterwards I examined influential works by Moroccan architects on their search for modernity and tradition today. This gave me the opportunity to conclude with my own perspectives on how to design Moroccan architecture in the 21th century, while using an approach that balances modernity and tradition in the best way possible.

The transition towards the design started by getting to know the context, out of the research I concluded that a lack of understanding local culture resulted in the fact that some present-day projects are not fitting in their context. The typological analysis is not only a way to document different dwelling types in the North-East region of Morocco, but also shows how external aspects, such as colonisation, influenced these types through time. This analysis helped me to understand this process and showed me which aspects of the traditional Moroccan dwelling needed a present-day interpretation, whereas the strong elements of the large scale housing provided a good base in terms of density that is needed. The theoretical part steered me towards my own viewpoint on critical regionalism in a Moroccan context. During the research I saw similarities in the projects that were designed while using a critical regionalist approach, for example the ability of the architect to leave certain aspects of the design open and in that way create a regulated form of incrementality. These aspects have influenced my design, where I continuously searched for a way to find the perfect balance between modernism and architecture. The typological analysis helped in that way to understand what is needed to compete with the existing urbanization projects and in the mean time to re-introduce traditional aspects in architecture that is meant for the society we live in today.

## RESEARCH & DESIGN METHODS

I started my research by doing a literature study to understand the impact of the notion of critical regionalism and the importance of its use to create architecture that is related to a specific region. While reading and writing about this notion I did not only notice the different interpretations that are given to this notion, but I also noticed what the criteria are of projects that are balanced between embracing the region and using universal and modern techniques, in present-day projects and in history. Afterwards this framework is linked to the case study of Morocco, where I examined influential works by Moroccan architects on their search for balance in modernity and tradition. This in combination with the history of modern architecture in Morocco enabled me to understand the social and political factors of Moroccan architecture. Next to this written part of literature study and precedent study, more knowledge about the context was retrieved by making a typological analysis of the different types of housing in Morocco through time, particularly in the North-East region of the country. The theoretical part and the typological analysis eventually helped me to understand tendencies in history and in the road towards modernism, and enabled me to create my own viewpoint on critical regionalism in a Moroccan context. This viewpoint is translated into guidelines for designing housing in urbanizing Moroccan cities and eventually transformed in the creation of a system that balances tradition and modernism and answers the architectural discourses of urbanization.

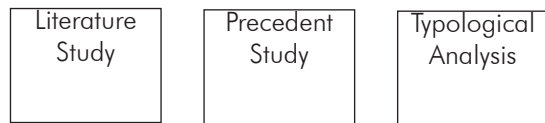


fig. 2 The used research methodologies

## EVALUATION OF USED METHODS

The method of researching was not fixed on the day I started working on the research. While researching the term critical regionalism I noticed that the importance of social, cultural, political and even more aspects of the context were playing a huge role in the way designs were made up. Regarding my background as someone who has experienced cross-cultural influences as being both Dutch and Moroccan, I got interested in the way people from a different background design in contexts that are not their own, therefore I added one chapter to my thesis that examines these differences. The typological analysis was also an aspect that arrived throughout my research, I noticed that a method that was highly used by foreign architects designing in an unknown context, is by doing analysis and surveys under the existing and the vernacular ways that people use architecture to get to know the context. Regarding the fact that the Moroccan context is something I am familiar with, I used this fact to describe how traditional dwellings changed through time considering the strong changes due to being a protectorate of France and present-day universalism.

The same goes for the design, because the design is highly dependable on the made research, my design method came about later in the process. This was based on using guidelines which I retrieved from the written research and the typological analysis. This process of shifting between research and design was longer than I thought, because of the general background of the thesis it was hard to adapt to the context of Berkane, but the typological analysis played a huge role in bridging this gap between research and design. Overall the process was mainly difficult during the shift from research to design, after months of researching a topic it can be difficult to start designing because you want to translate all the researched aspects in your design, it took me a while to reduce this information retrieved during the first period, and translate this into a design.

## THE WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT

In a wider social context my project is firstly dealing with the fact that globalization is taking place, this is causing us to be exposed to different social and cultural aspects of various societies. This has two effects, one that endangers identity by promoting one way of doing as the generic way of doing and the other one is the increasing cross-cultural relations where people exchange instead of inscribe. The fact that we are searching for 'the best of both worlds' in this increasingly multi cultural society demonstrates that it is in fact possible to keep your own identity and culture while encouraging the fact that we are always advancing and developing.

The project itself based on a prototype which is implemented in my projects location, Berkane in the North-East of Morocco. Nevertheless, the project demonstrates a scenario to solve urbanization in small and medium sized cities, while maintaining local culture and still providing housing that corresponds with the current demand. This designed 'stamp' can be implemented in different areas where this phenomenon of urbanization occurs. The basic strategy that I tried to illustrate with this project is that it is indeed possible to find organization and at the same time adapt to a certain context. When this strategy will be implemented in a different context, the idea is that the whole process of doing a typological analysis, site analysis and a larger social, political and cultural research becomes part of the first step towards creating a 'stamp' for a specific location.



fig. 3 The large scale building blocks in North-East Morocco



fig. 4 The private lots in urbanizing areas in North-East Morocco