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AR3AP100 **Public Building** Graduation Studio

1. The relation between the graduation project topic, the master track and the master programme.

The Architecture master track, as described by the faculty, teaches and encourages students to develop creative and innovative building projects, using design as a means to engage with the technical, social, and spatial challenges of the built environment. This approach is concretely translated into specific design assignments and case studies throughout the different studios offered in the master's program.

The MSc1 studio AR1UA010 Urban Architecture (Fit In) focused on designing a library in a problematic neighborhood in Groningen called De Hoogte. The assignment involved reinterpreting architectural principles derived from an iconic reference library, leading to a project that engages with the urban fabric and aims to enhance the neighborhood's profile toward inclusivity and equality. Central to the studio was the process of abstracting and reconstructing the key architectural principles of the reference library—both literally and figuratively—and translating them into a modern, contemporary architectural language that extends beyond the scale of the building itself.

The MSc2 studio AR0167 Architecture & Urban Design tasked students with redesigning a station district in Zoetermeer. The design challenge had a partly futuristic dimension, requiring statements about future social and spatial dynamics while questioning traditional contemporary approaches to architecture and urbanism. Given Zoetermeer's distinct identity as a modern suburban city, the project focused on reinterpreting and transforming the existing modernist, cauliflower-patterned urban fabric into more livable and human-scaled urban environments.
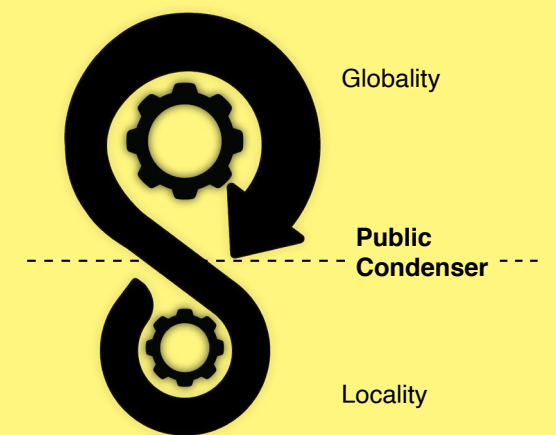
Similarly, the Public Building Graduation Studio (MSc3 and MSc4) embeds multiplicity and a holistic approach at its core. The assignment involves designing a Public

Condenser: a hybrid, multifunctional public space intended to bring different kinds of people together, symbolically defining contemporary architecture and physically bridging societal gaps.

Amid the global rise of right-wing political parties, growing concerns around xenophobia and exclusionary policies have become increasingly prominent. Denmark, for instance, has introduced strict migration measures, including the controversial "ghetto plan," which disproportionately targets non-Western immigrant communities. Such policies exacerbate social divides and fuel discrimination, particularly against visible minorities, thereby complicating meaningful efforts toward social integration.

In this context, architecture holds a critical role in fostering inclusivity and mutual understanding. Public buildings, through their design and programming, can encourage interaction, celebrate cultural diversity, and dismantle prejudices. Food, as a universal medium of exchange and expression, offers a particular opportunity to bridge social divides and cultivate cohesion within shared spaces.
In Bispebjerg, a culturally diverse and marginalized neighborhood in Copenhagen, these challenges converge, making it a significant site for intervention. The graduation project explores how a food-centered Public Condenser can address xenophobia by fostering inclusivity and interaction within a diverse urban setting. The central research question is formulated as follows:

How can food-centered architectural strategies reduce xenophobia in diverse and problematic neighborhoods like Bispebjerg?

Globality

Public Condenser

Locality

An illustration showing how the Public Condenser functions as a social device, operating between the local social scale and the global scale.

2. The influence of the research on the design and visa versa.

The Public Building graduation studio follows a research-by-design approach, making the design process—as often described by academics—both intuitive and iterative. These two dimensions of the design process reciprocally strengthen one another, leading to a project that is well-balanced and carefully situated within its spatial, temporal, and academic context.

The research methodology blends quantitative and qualitative methods to build a well-rounded understanding of the site and its socio-economic profile. On the quantitative side, traditional site analysis focuses on aspects such as infrastructure, greenery, water systems, and the urban morphology and functions of the area, while socio-demographic studies provide statistical insights into the population's age, background, and origin. Complementing this, the qualitative research delves into the site's heritage and social profile through literature reviews and on-site interviews, capturing the lived experiences of its users.

Concrete examples of this dynamic interplay between design and research include the initial thematic focus on inclusivity, which was later re-evaluated and refined to specifically address xenophobia—a shift that was subsequently substantiated through statistical data and surveys. Similarly, an early proposal to design a bazaar-like urban space was reconsidered after qualitative research revealed that the site was already saturated with similar functions. This iterative process ultimately led to a shift in approach toward food-centered spaces and community kitchens, a direction later confirmed as appropriate by spatial data analysis.

3.How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

Julia Morgan once said that architecture is a visual art and that buildings speak for themselves. The challenge embedded in the nature of this field is to seek the visually envisioned and to initiate the design process from there.

The value of the chosen approach and methods becomes clear when considering how they directly influenced the development and refinement of the project. The research-by-design methodology, which, as described earlier, balances intuitive exploration with iterative refinement, allowed the project to remain flexible and responsive to new insights, refining both concepts and principles along the way. Blending qualitative and quantitative research proved to be particularly valuable: while spatial data and demographic studies grounded the project in factual realities, on-site interviews and literature research uncovered social nuances that would have otherwise remained invisible.

The iterative nature of the design process ensured that initial assumptions—such as focusing broadly on inclusivity, proposing a bazaar-like program, or defining the roof design—were critically reassessed and adapted when necessary, leading to a more specific, context-sensitive, and ultimately stronger design proposal.

This approach proved valuable not only because it allowed the project to stay open to unexpected findings, but also because it ensured that the final design was solidly rooted in both social realities and spatial opportunities.
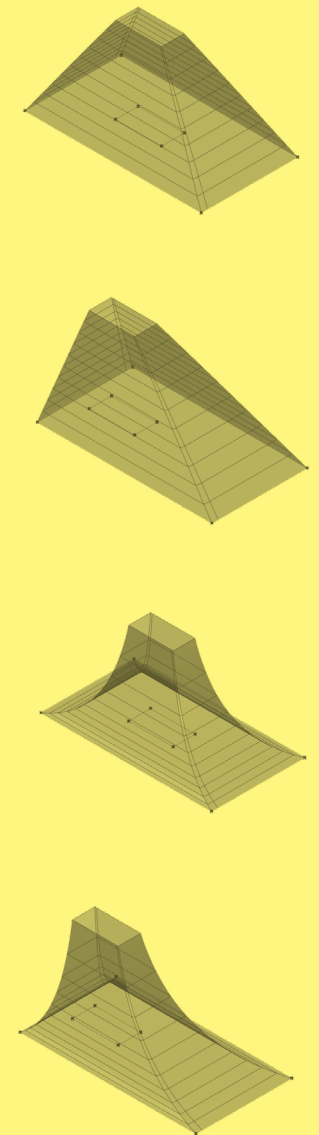
A series of diagrams showing the parametric design process of the roof, illustrating the search for the right architectural language to express the desired concept.

4.How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

My graduation project explores the potential architecture holds for addressing xenophobia in culturally diverse neighborhoods, specifically through food-centered public spaces. The aim is to create a hybrid environment that fosters social interaction, understanding, and inclusion by using food as a universal medium.

In an era where society is more interconnected than ever through migration, globalization, and digital technologies, interactions between different cultural groups have become increasingly complex. However, this growing connectivity has not always translated into greater mutual understanding. Exclusionary and xenophobic thoughts and policies are gaining ground, raising concerns that fear-based perceptions of 'the other' could become normalized.

Addressing xenophobia through architecture presents both a challenge and an opportunity: a chance to initiate tangible, spatially experienced change. Rather than merely reading about or being told to accept difference, architecture can embody and celebrate otherness, offering users direct, everyday encounters with cultural diversity.

From an academic perspective, the project contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of public architecture in responding to societal issues. Societally, it seeks to offer a spatial strategy for enhancing inclusivity at a time when polarization is increasing. Ethically, the project engages with urgent questions about fear, belonging, and the right to public space, aiming to foster environments where diversity is experienced as a natural and enriching part of urban life.

5.How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

A central concept that ties the project's social ambitions to its architectural form is the reinterpretation of the Mjødhall — the medieval Nordic meadhall — as a public device. Historically, the meadhall was more than a dining space; it was a communal hall where stories were shared, alliances forged, and identity performed through collective rituals. Its spatial typology, open-plan layout, and central hearth promoted both visibility and interaction, making it a powerful architectural metaphor for inclusivity. In today's urban condition, such communal spaces have largely disappeared from public life, especially in the exact archetypal form, replaced by privatized or functionally isolated buildings. By reintroducing the meadhall typology as the centerpiece of the Public Condenser, the project proposes a space where shared cooking, eating, and storytelling can occur across cultural boundaries.

Situated in Bispebjerg Nordvest — where public life already thrives around bazaars and restaurants — this reinterpretation offers the potential for a food-centered urban ensemble, with the Mjødhall at its heart. The ensemble is composed of three protagonists under a system of urban roofs: the dining hall (Mjødhall), the market as a well defined expansion of stalls of the bazaar, and the bazaar (Lygten bazaar). Together, they form a layered spatial structure that not only facilitates exchange but also symbolically frames immigrants and newcomers as active contributors to public life, rather than passive subjects of integration policies. This positioning allows individuals to present their cultures, skills, and cuisines — in effect, themselves — to society on equal footing. Furthermore, by supporting micro-economies (immigrant startups) and providing a recognizable civic platform, the project complements the socio-economic vision proposed by ADEPT

for the district and raises the neighborhood's spatial and social capital.

The core ideas behind my graduation project — using food-centered spaces to foster social inclusion and address xenophobia — have clear potential for transferability. Besides the fact that food is a universal medium of communication and hospitality across cultures, public spaces designed around it can encourage casual and meaningful encounters between diverse groups. This approach is by no means original nor exclusive to this design task. In fact, research on similar case studies and approaches was conducted prior to the design process to identify potential angles and solutions.

If we were to consider the social, historical, and spatial attributes of Bispebjerg as puzzle pieces, the originality of the design lies in the rearrangement of these pieces to provide solutions across all these domains. While the specific context of Bispebjerg informed many design decisions, the broader strategy of using everyday, shared activities to promote social cohesion could be adapted to many other urban environments facing similar challenges.

However, successful transfer would always require a sensitive reading of the local context. Cultural differences, urban patterns, and social histories vary greatly, meaning the architectural language, programs, and spatial configurations would need careful adjustment. What works in Copenhagen (Mjødhall) might not work in the same way in, for example, Paris, Rotterdam, or Berlin.

Rather than proposing a fixed solution, the project offers a design approach, a possiable angle and reinterpreted public device— one that seeks to embed inclusivity into everyday urban life through tangible, sensory experiences — that could inspire further adaptations elsewhere.

6.The intangible

In a recent interview, Joris Luyendijk, journalist, writer, and anthropologist, said the following: "The problem is not discrimination itself but rather the possibility of it," meaning that unmasked discrimination, bias, and prejudice are prominent hidden and intangible factors that make the determination of discrimination a difficult task. Approaching xenophobia and the project in this way, the question becomes: ***How much of this intangible aspect of the phenomenon can architecture tackle? And, if tackling it is possible, how can it be addressed?*** Precedents have proven that the tangible dimension of the phenomenon can be countered through architecture and space, but it remains questionable whether eating, sharing, and getting to know each other will help break hidden biases and prejudices outside the dining hall—and perhaps even within it.

From my perspective, I would argue that while this question is certainly legitimate and maybe even eye-opening, the goal should not be to provide a handbook nor a solution to such a vast phenomenon, but rather to initiate a process of engagement with it and to constantly define the constraints. This can only be done by interacting with the phenomenon in all fields and ensuring that the discussion remains ongoing.