MENDING BRESSOUX

REINVIGORATING SCARRED URBAN TISSUE



Graduation plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences

Dave van Leeuwen

STUDIO

The choice of this studio is based on my personal interest of working with existing material and urban structures. Urban architecture works in a site-specific civic context, and mainly redesigns the existing environment. This ties in with my own ideas; I strive to take the history of a place and use it as a basis to write a new chapter. I believe our future environment is shaped by flexibility and re-use. This can be achieved through re-use of materials and buildings, or designing long lasting architecture, with the possibility to change function over time.

I want to create projects based on the needs and desires of people and the context. Within the assignment of Black Hill City, I feel challenged to develop a design that is perfectly attuned to the context and is rich in morphological features adopted by history. For these reasons I believe the course of this chair fit my ideas on architecture perfectly.

Dave van Leeuwen

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Urban Architecture: *Black Hill City*

Paul Vermeulen	Design Mentor
Lex van Deudekom	Building Technology Mentor
Eireen Schreurs	Research Mentor

Location:

Avenue de la Croix Rouge, Bressoux, Liège, Belgium

Image 1, preparation for the exhibition *Wasteland*



“LIÈGE NEEDS A
SLOW WAY TO DEVELOP,
BECAUSE THERE IS NOT
A LOT OF MONEY”

FRANÇOIS SCHREUER (2022)

PROJECT

PROBLEM STATEMENT

François Schreurer (2022), political spokesperson on collective action and public life for Liège, argues that the city of Liège does not have much money for development. The city of Liège came up with big projects to improve the city, such as a metro line, a modernist planning area, a big new central station, a new tram line and a new exhibition building. Big plans that have not all proved profitable or have never been completed. Liège is more likely to benefit from smaller interventions that restore quality of life on a human scale. A plan that is flexible and open to change over time will prove to be long-lasting.

Droixhe, a site considered a wasteland for centuries, was used as a manoeuvring field since 1858. In 1930, the site hosted L'Exposition Internationale de Liège. Meanwhile, in contrast to the international exhibition, an ordinary working-class housing district for miners gradually emerged. Today, these blocks are erratically shaped by demolition or extension of houses and workplaces. Around 1958, a modernist plan (image 2) was executed on Droixhe on the remnants of the world exhibition. The new modern towers with social housing were popular for a while, but as poverty increased, Bressoux's towers became available only to the poorest of the poor. Together with the influx of guest workers in the 1970s, people in the neighbourhood became isolated from each other.

This resulted in the decline of Bressoux. The city of Liège recognised the dichotomy between the 20-storey towers and the two-storey workers' housing (image 3). In an attempt to change the neighbourhood's image and reduce poverty, half of the towers were demolished in 2009, leaving a large scar in the urban fabric. The neighbourhood's residents took over this abandoned land by taking shortcuts to what appears to be the heart of the neighbourhood: the small businesses, daycare and schools. Is the plot, now left with elephant paths, still part of the broken up Droixhe, or should it belong as part of the working-class district?

The project site is located in the modernist park, next to a car-dominant street with small businesses and adjacent to a public school. These various challenges require a highly contextual design approach. Can the dissimilar urban typologies of modernism and industrialisation be brought together? The characteristics of each typological urban fabric must be defined, followed by finding a way to deal with these historical features. And finally mending Bressoux, the creation of a framework in which a functioning order can flourish.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can the scarred urban tissue and contrasting urban typologies of Bressoux be mended?

- How is the urban tissue of Bressoux scarred?
- What are the district's contrasting urban typologies?
- How can new buildings be long-lasting and durable?

DESIGN BRIEF

The aim on a large urban scale is to interconnect the modernist planning area with the informal working-class housing district of Bressoux. Modernist planners wanted to connect people with nature, but the large-scale buildings next to wide public spaces combined with vast car parks never really gave the right human scale to the public space. Learning from history, the idea of volumes in a park is translated into a smaller scale that matches the grain of 19th-century working-class houses.

Zooming in on the site, the project area lies in the modernist park and next to a car-dominated street. By creating a sequence of public spaces and making the park denser at the edges, the development of the site will merge the different typologies found in the neighbourhood. Different volumes will be designed and enclose the site, creating a 'park villa' typology. An example for this idea is the "Mehr als Wohnen" project, also located in a former industrial city in 'Hunziker Areal' in Zurich. The shape of new volumes should follow the historical lines of the modernist Droixhe planning area, and should be irregularly shaped like the unplanned 19th-century blocks. In addition, the relationship with the public outdoor space determines the architectural form for the site. Issues of public and private, and diverse functions within the building block will be clearly defined to ensure that local people will actively use the spaces throughout the day.

Thus, the function of the buildings will be a combination of working and living, with workspaces for the working class and housing for ordinary people who have always lived in the area. The project will consist of cooperative housing and social housing combined with work spaces. The opening of small businesses will be encouraged by offering residents childcare close to home (Holliss, 2017). Home workers will be invited into this complex; professions such as baker, builder, mechanic, consultant, craftsman, driving instructor, designer, hairdresser, handyman, social worker, shopkeeper and more. These workspaces will be in close connection with the private living spaces for easy acces, such as the plinth to encourage the use of public space by visitors and the workers themselves.

The project will be future-proofed by creating an open floor plan that can adapt over time. The workshops will be able to adapt to the needs of people in the neighbourhood. The plan also allows the flats to interchange space with each other. The floor plans should encourage neighbours to interact with each other, for instance by using traffic spaces for leisure purposes. The cooperative apartments will also share facilities, such as a workplace for bicycle repairs, a large laundry room, a guest house and more shared functions to meet the needs of users.

METHODS

This research is an in-depth study of Bressoux's urban fabric. The research consists of both collective and personal research. The collective research of the first semester includes archival research on maps and data, interviews with residents of the neighbourhood, and many observations of site visits in Liège. The theme of the first quarter was 'Shifting Landscapes', focusing on the change of the city over time, themed by industry, cultivation and urbanisation. All this contributes to a large collection of data on Bressoux's history and urban development. These results are combined in a thick map that show several historic time layers, making the current scars in the urban fabric of Bressoux clear.

The personal research consists of mappings and sketches of observations of the urban fabric. It studies the informal and ordinary architecture of the working-class neighbourhood and the planned modernist district of Droixhe. Through mixed media; mapping with images, drawings, thoughts and sketches, making connections or finding links between observations, a better understanding of architecture and urban structures is obtained.

After the P2 presentation, further analytical drawings of the urban fabric and housing typologies are made. The research aims to understand the positive and negative effects of architecture and urban structures. Ultimately, these findings will be used to design an urban block connecting the historic working-class neighbourhood with the modernist planning area of Droixhe.

Image 2, map of Droixhe, 1958

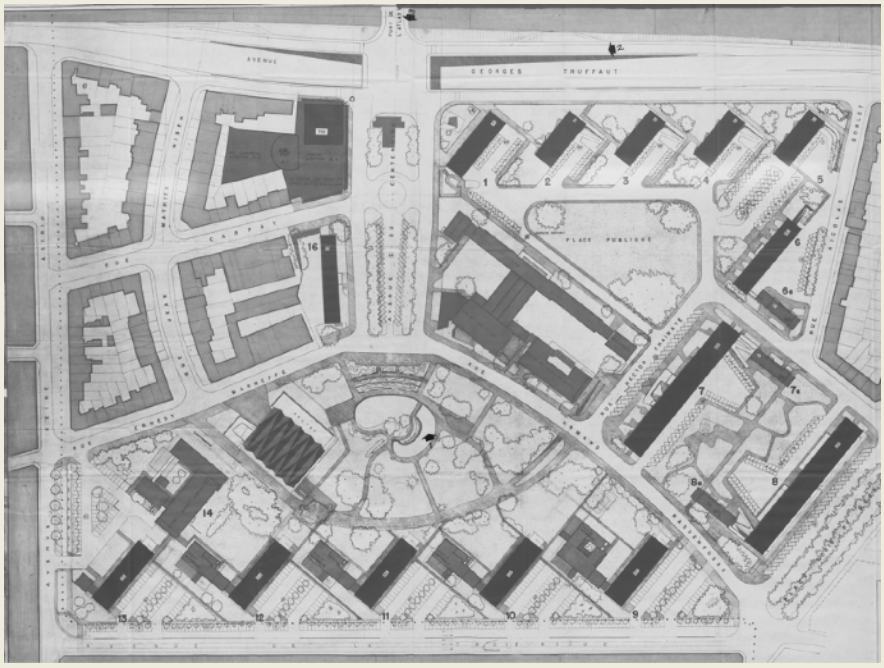


Image 3, ordinary houses in Droixhe





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IMAGES

Frontpage image, image by author

Image 1, image by author

Image 2, image by Archives de la Ville de Liège

Image 3, image by author