Appendix 4: Reflection

Final reflection graduation process

According to Graduation Manual
May 2018 (before P4 moment)

Research & design

My approach, which is not specifically related to any studio methodology, consisted of researching three aspects: (1) the context: Istanbul, (2) the user: a migrant, and (3) the building: a khan. By overlaying and relating findings on each of them I came to the concept of for a design. Additionally, I looked at these aspects both historically and in the present. This gave me a huge toolbox of input for my design. On the one hand that is valuable, it gave me the freedom to relate the design choices as I wanted. On the other hand this approach perhaps gave me too many conditions, too many things to refer or to grasp onto. The scope was too wide and therefore not as concrete as I wanted it to be. It has resulted in the projects main idea being too complex to explain it briefly.

'Overlaying' these aspects, as I called it, was not really how you go from research to design. It is more like taking separate parts of information and relate them to other kinds of information, when these come together logically, I could use it in my design. That meant also that the aspects would clash, for example when my aim is to embed the dwellers (the migrants) in the context (Kucukpazar in Istanbul), but the fortress-like structure of the khan does not really allow that. In that case I had to judge and choose or make a compromise to reconcile the different aspects in a design. That is the challenge, and once I let go of the rigidness of the khan, the stubborn Istanbul practice and the unspecified migrant, it was easier to do so.

During the design process I kept going back to the research (mostly into the khans, because that input was largely architecturally). This was a good method to make and verify design choices, even if they could be made in many ways (as described in the first paragraph here).

Finetuning the design was more difficult (going into the details, connections and grounding), and needed a lot more attention than I had accounted for. In that sense my planning was always behind: I should have gotten to design earlier.

Relation to studio and course

The Design as Politics studio takes on a societal issue, and combats or answers to this with a design. This years theme was migration, a very hot topic anywhere in the world. However, we tend to forget that is issue is not something new, and we can actually learn a lot from history to deal with it. What should we do different? What did past policies result in? Why not even attempt to project successful historical schemes to the present? Using the past as a referential framework as I did, is not a typological approach for the often activist/controversial character of the studio. But I did not want to make something revolutionary, I wanted to create something that is relatable. Both architecturally as socio-culturally, heritage can set some sort of base to relate to for the projects identity and feasibility. Whether the project would be successful in reality, remains an unanswered question, in that sense the project is still rather idealistic. But I also don't think it is wrong to be an idealist when taking on a social issue.

As mentioned, migration is an issue almost anywhere in the world. The fact that I choose Istanbul as the location not only for practical reasons (I know the city quite well) and/or passion (I find it very fascinating). Istanbul as a hinge city between east and west has proven in the history to be resilient and to adjust itself to change. It is not only built up by migrants, it still thrives on them. Istanbul is the example of a city which gained strength from contri-

butions of migrants allows it as a case study for migration as something permanent and enhancing rather than temporary and threatening. And because this is not always acknowledged, I really wanted my project to focus on that enriching element of migration. That meant most importantly seeing the migrant as a skilled professional with knowledge than by where they come from and why (refugee/in seek of work/cosmopolitism/etc.).

The project belongs in a rather specific corner of the master course. This is probably because initially nothing was given (except for the very broad interpretable migration topic), and my project became very specifically in a certain direction (almost as in explore lab), chosen by myself. I have definitely missed some of the structure (as in more deliverables and deadlines) that other studios provide, but I did enjoy the complete freedom to do as I went (methodologically and time-planning wise). I realize a structured studio would have guided my progress better (I would have come further, and it would have been easier perhaps), but I feel I might learn more from it on the long run now that I have been kind of lost.

What I really appreciate during the graduation trajectory is that for once during the education there is more time (never enough, though) and the fact that I only have to focus on one project for a whole year. Even while I am not studying, I have the project in the back of my mind, getting inspired all the time. It gave me some sort of unlimited passion for the project, allowing me to taking distance but still develop my ideas further.

Research method

Throughout the research phase I spend much time finding the direction I wanted to go towards. Once I did, I should have reduced the historical research to a limited scope. Instead, I kept those undefined and super broad topics: Istanbul in present and past, the migrant in present and past and the Khan in present and past. I obviously took bits and pieces specif-

ically from each, but I never clarified where the boundaries were, even though I obviously did not research all of those in full depth. This resulted in my thinking that the research should still be 'completed', as if the research should be a complete history thesis(as done in the 1st year of the master). It frustrated me that I could not complete as much of the research as I wanted, but when I look back now, I realize that the aim of the research is not to have a complete written dissertation, but to have a base, or backbone to build upon when designing a project. While I still feel like the written research part is unfinished, I do think in hindsight that my gained knowledge itself, of which most is not written down or documented at all, gave me a good set of tools for the design. What I mean with this undocumented research is all the information I took from what I knew about Istanbul, Turkish culture and the present situation already, what I learned from buildings I visited there and elsewhere, and things I had noticed during my stay in Istanbul. It is a pity that I haven't been able to document that all, as well as not clearly documenting facts which I argue with. I should have had more structure in documenting sources, surveys, conversations etc. That would also have given the theoretical part more scientific relevance.

My longer visit to Istanbul (in February) was in the sense of experience and gaining knowledge very fruitful, but I regret not making the step towards a design while I was there. It didn't seem logical, because I felt I was there to gather more information to eventually start the design with this gained expertise. But not starting with the design there meant that I still had a research mindset, instead of the point of view of a designer. Of course they should be the same, but I had some difficulties connecting both until I actually 'dared' to design. That was when I forced myself to produce something for the P3, even if it was not a design but more a scheme. When I finally did, I was actually quite relieved and satisfied, I became aware that my ideas were there but I just had to put them in an actual drawing. I think this moment was a important moment for my project, and from then I could really use the research work as a reference in stead of trying to 'complete' that.

Elaboration & discussion

Taking on a societal issue from the perspective of the architect (to be), but as a conceptual project, so not definitely tied by reality, can be interesting for the wide social and professional framework. I have received a few questions about who would pay for the building, what organization would run it, and would Turkey allow it? To be honest, I still do not have a convincing answer, but luckily this is not necessarily the question for the architect. This means that the imagined function of the building might have become be a bit utopian, but perhaps it is not meant to be a realistic function, more like: 'What if a function like this would exist, how should it look?'. However, it can still serve as an example and can spring up discussion. I think especially by looking at the migrant as a potential in stead of a threat or burden (or even something that should be protected or catered to), changes the complete way to deal with migrants. An important question to ask is, what does the migrant need in order to reach full potential (which will benefit the host city/country, both socially and economically)? While the project is in the end an architectural project, the idea behind it, another way for naturalization (or 'inburgeren', embedding in the new culture) gives room for thought in other fields (such as politics) as well.

One of the ethical dilemmas I dealt with was exactly this as well. By seeing the migrant as a potential, more or less ignoring their roots and motives, sounds not beneficial for the migrant himself at all. It might even reminds the way foreign workers were invited (and exploited..) as 'gastarbeiter' in the Netherlands in the past century. They were put all together in neighborhoods, and given just the basic needs to survive. As we know now, after most of these former labor migrants (from Turkey, Morocco for example) stayed, the clustering did not do much good for the acclimatization in the Netherlands. The question is, once again in reference to the past, what should be done differently? The difference I hope to have achieved is two folded: (1) by variety, by taking a more diverse group of migrants, not allowing a homogeneous group (in sense of origin) to

be clustered , and (2) embedding in the existing structures of the professional fields in neighborhoods and thus grounding between.

Conclusion

All in all I think my graduation trajectory did not go very smooth. I have set my own ambitions and goals too high and too broad. When I look back at earlier notes on what all I planned to do, I realize it was way to much. But mostly because I have not been precise and concise enough. I guess that is part of the search, but so many effort (especially during the first semester) feel like a complete waste of time. I did not see my tutors much during that period, which led to me taking so many random paths but not moving any further. The feedback I got during the research sometimes made distractions rather than focus on a smaller part. During the design phase, I felt like the feedback was better to employ and translate it to design decisions. It was good to see my design tutors more frequently and speak about more concrete things that the ongoing research.

The fact that the research still feels lacking (not feeling completed) makes me dislike the research part now (which makes is also harder to conclude it). However, I do have to realize that it is a master of architecture, and not a PhD. Therefore, the design project is the final work, not the research. I do think the final architectural project has the potential to be adequate and of high quality, and I did enjoy the actual designing a lot. As mentioned earlier, I think I should have started to design earlier, while I was in Turkey. Then I could also work it out more detailed in this final phase.

Me on the rooftop of the Büyük Valide Han, back in 2014 during my study semester in Istanbul (own material, February 2014)