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Reflection Paper.

The Market of Resilience and Memory

From rubble to recovery. Designing for memory and belonging in Antakya

From the beginning of my graduation studio, I knew I wanted to focus on Antakya, Hatay, and the disaster that struck the region in February 2023. Prior to the earthquake, my interest was in designing a structure that would be affordable, reliable, and, most importantly, safe to withstand the expected earthquake. However, after the earthquake occurred, I had to reevaluate my research topic. Although the site remained the same, the context changed dramatically.

My research tutor asked me to write a page about the subject I wanted to explore, and this is what I wrote in April 2024:

“I keep wondering why people would return to an area known for its 'curse' of destruction. It could be because of its fertile soil, river landscape, geographical location, history, economy, culture, religion, collective memory, materiality, architecture, smell, taste, and people. There are so many reasons. I want to investigate why people would come back or not. How does civilization start again? After the latest destruction, I am curious about how such a ruined city will rise again. It will. But how? And how could this be influenced? Does it even have to be influenced? I want to explore this continuity within its layers.”

I also wrote: “Talking with family and friends from the region, I hope there is this sense of ownership, this sense of responsibility for reappropriating its land again. I’m curious whether this appropriation can be found in the city's materiality. At the same time, I want to be mindful of my position as a researcher and a Dutch citizen with roots in Antakya. From a young age, I’ve been fascinated by the geological formations in Antakya. Later, I learned about its destructive power, which, paradoxically, is also the reason for its beauty—something that can be seen as subjective. Within my academic career, I have seen Antakya as both a research subject and my hometown. I’m curious to investigate the area while being aware that it’s not passive. Although the city may now seem deserted, it still has a beating heart. I want to find the reason for its heartbeat.”

Afterward, I dove into literature on destruction, resilience, and recovery. The first research question I explored was focused on understanding the dynamics of post-disaster recovery, particularly why people would return to a place devastated by tragedy. Following that, I went on a field trip, which helped me better understand the significance of the closed market in Antakya and its symbolic role in the community’s resilience.

The field trip gave my research a clearer direction. I shifted my approach from purely technical solutions to one that also considered the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of rebuilding. My methodology became more nuanced, incorporating the importance of memory and identity in the recovery process.

Reflecting on my approach, I recognize that my personal involvement and deep knowledge of the situation sometimes led me to make decisions too quickly without fully analyzing or explaining the reasoning behind them. As a co-founder of a foundation working to help the people of Antakya by building homes for them, my emotional connection to the disaster was profound. However, feedback from my mentors encouraged me to slow down and take a more philosophical and reflective approach. This feedback helped me understand the importance

of visualizing and communicating my design ideas more clearly, ensuring that they were both academically rigorous and sensitive to the emotional needs of the community.

What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

As an Explore Lab student and a future MSc AUBS graduate, I believe my graduation topic aligns with the nature of the master Architecture track and will also contribute to my future work practices. This research started with extensive background knowledge of the site and the topic: My BSc Earth Science thesis at the University of Amsterdam was about the expected earthquake in Istanbul and comparing the old and new building design codes. During my Earth Science bachelor, I wrote several papers about the expected earthquake that would hit Antakya and during my master Architecture at the TUDelft I wrote my history thesis about the tourism architecture in Antakya. In addition, within my master's program, I followed the MSc1 studio Extreme, which focused on investigating and designing for building on and during extreme conditions. The extreme conditions and site for this studio were also Antakya. Initially, I had difficulties finding the right direction for my graduation project, as there were so many after the earthquake. However, during the graduation period, the research and designing process helped me fully understand the complexity of the topic. With the help of my tutors, the borders of my graduation project formed, and I worked towards positioning myself within this topic. I believe that the design and research I've been working towards, with its philosophical, form and material aspects, try to eliminate the social, technical and functional doubts. The Explore Lab Studio gave me the opportunity and freedom to work on the project independently while knowing that the outcomes and experiece would be taken further in my career.

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

At the start of my project, my focus was primarily on technical solutions—designing safe, earthquake-resilient structures. However, after the 2023 earthquake, my perspective shifted. My research became more human-centered, integrating architecture with social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of resilience and recovery.

Initially drawn to the role of the Uzun Çarşı as a space of continuity, I explored how materiality, memory, and community shape resilience. My methodology evolved through fieldwork, ethnographic observations, and unstructured interviews, allowing me to capture lived experiences and the dynamic adaptation of space. This approach—where architecture is understood not as a fixed solution but as an adaptive process—became central to my research.

Navigating my double role as both a researcher and someone personally connected to Antakya was a key challenge. While my deep connection to Antakya provided unique insights, I had to remain critically aware of my position to ensure an ethical and objective research framework. This reflective process helped refine my methodology, reinforcing the idea that resilience is not just about rebuilding structures, but about sustaining identity, memory, and community agency.

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

The academic value of my project lies in its interdisciplinary approach, merging architecture with history, sociology, geography, and cultural studies. It goes beyond the technicalities of disaster recovery to explore how architecture can support the social, emotional, and cultural recovery of a community. By integrating these diverse fields, my project provides a holistic understanding of how cities like Antakya can rebuild after devastation. In contrast to traditional

approaches in post-disaster architecture, which often prioritize physical reconstruction, my work highlights the importance of preserving and rebuilding the emotional and cultural aspects of the city.

From a societal perspective, the value of my work is profound. Antakya's recovery is not just about rebuilding physical structures but also about restoring a sense of community, identity, and belonging. My research emphasizes the role of community participation in the process of rebuilding after a disaster, underlining how important it is for the people of Antakya to have agency in the decisions that shape their city's future. By focusing on the role of memory, identity, and resilience, I highlight how architecture can create spaces that foster social cohesion and a sense of collective responsibility. This is essential in ensuring that the rebuilding process is not just about erecting new buildings, but about reinforcing the emotional and cultural bonds that bind the community together.

Ethically, my project prompted deep reflection on my role as both a researcher and a member of the Antakya community. Being personally affected by the earthquake, and as a co-founder of a foundation focused on helping the city's recovery, I had to remain acutely aware of my position within the community. My work had to prioritize the agency of the people of Antakya, ensuring that their voices shaped the vision for rebuilding. My research also dealt with the ethical responsibility of architects and researchers to consider not only the physical but also the social and emotional dimensions of post-disaster recovery. The question of how to ethically engage with a community affected by such tragedy was central to my project, ensuring that my work was both respectful and inclusive of the local population's needs and desires.

The societal implications of my project extend beyond Antakya. It addresses broader issues of resilience, community participation, and the role of architecture in fostering a sense of belonging in the aftermath of a disaster. The insights gained from my work could be applicable to other communities facing similar challenges of post-disaster recovery. Additionally, it underscores the importance of creating spaces that serve not only as physical shelters but also as symbols of hope, identity, and continuity.

In conclusion, the value of my project lies in its ability to bridge academic rigor with community sensitivity, providing a nuanced perspective on the intersection of architecture, memory, and resilience. It highlights that the process of rebuilding a city after destruction is not only about physical reconstruction but also about nurturing the continuity of life, identity, and culture. The project ultimately demonstrates the power of architecture to foster social cohesion, a sense of responsibility, and community ownership—essential elements for any post-disaster recovery.

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

The principles and insights gained from my research on Antakya's recovery extend beyond its specific context. The framework I developed—focusing on resilience, community participation, and cultural continuity—can be applied to other disaster-affected areas, such as Syria and Gaza, where communities face similar challenges in rebuilding after destruction.

A key takeaway from my work is the necessity of community-driven and participatory approaches in post-disaster reconstruction. As I argued in my MSc thesis, rebuilding should not be dictated by top-down interventions alone; rather, it must involve those directly affected. Spaces of collective memory and local engagement—like the Uzun Çarşı in Antakya—play a crucial role in social and emotional recovery. This principle is universal and should be embedded in all rebuilding efforts.

Architecture is not just about constructing physical spaces—it is about restoring identity, dignity, and belonging. Any post-disaster recovery that ignores these dimensions risks

creating places that may be structurally sound but emotionally and socially disconnected. This is why community-led processes must be the foundation of resilience.

My research underscores a fundamental truth: rebuilding a city is not just about replacing what was lost, but about reinforcing the spirit of those who choose to stay and rebuild. This lesson is critical for Antakya, but also for any community striving to rise from devastation. Wherever destruction occurs, people must have the right to reclaim and shape their own future.