

Final reflection

Mauricio Polo
4501918

Public building graduation studio, Luxembourg city.

The relationship between research and design

The Public Building studio 'Ground, things, and representation in Luxembourg' deals with the city as an intersection of geology, bureaucracy and civic sphere. The territory of the city is considered as a field of contradictory desires. The aim of the studio is the specificity of a particular urban-territorial condition informing design. That specificity is to be revealed by analysis of tendency, precedent, and the ground and systems underlying the territory.

Parallel to the abovementioned research, an individual and deeper theoretical analysis was held, in order to produce concepts to employ in the architectural design.

The research phase in Luxembourg city led us to face a geological condition existing in the city that is understood as a dichotomy between the valley and the plateau, which is a quality that has a deep influence in many of the aspects of the city and its inhabitants.

The further theoretical analysis part came as a catalyst for the project since I started to address the dichotomy within the limits of a contemporary city as Luxembourg and its continuous change. In this phase, I went through the analysis of a text by Rem Koolhaas entitled 'the generic city', and essay part of his book S, M, L, XL. In this text he addresses the contemporary city of the 90's as a metropolis that has a difficulty in fulfilling the purpose of reacting fast enough to the cultural changes, the contemporary city tends to produce instead a superposition of the historic city, its memory and symbolic force with a blankness where this generalization is possible. This new urban territory has been named by Rem Koolhaas as the generic city¹.

Koolhaas makes a parallel between the idea of a contemporary airport and the contemporary city, as 'all the same'. According to him, this imposition suggests the removal of an identity which at some point will be too narrow for the human exponential growth. 'Identity centralizes; it insists on an essence, a point. Its tragedy is given in simple geometric terms. As the sphere of influence expands, the area characterized by the center becomes larger and larger hopelessly diluting both strength and the authority of the core; inevitably the distance between center and circumference increases to the breaking point'²

¹ The generic city is a response to the exponential growth of humans, which implies that the past will at some point become too 'small' to be inhabited and shared by those alive (Koolhaas & Mau, S, M, L XL, 1995).

² (Koolhaas & Mau, 1995)

Koolhaas concludes his essay by mentioning that 'The writing of the city may be indecipherable, flawed, but that does not mean that there is no writing; it may simply be that we developed a new illiteracy a new blindness. Patient detection reveals the themes, particles, strands [...]'³

The imposition of this blankness in the case of Luxembourg results into a difficulty, to read specificities in the city as the aforementioned dichotomy of the valley and the plateau, this 'patient detection' mentioned by Koolhaas embodies sets a general objective for the project: to reinforce the awareness of a specificity in Luxembourg city by an architectural object that suggests a patient detection.

The idea of patient detection encouraged me to research about architecture as a medium to create experiences and a further analysis of the sensation and perception. I decided to research more about perception (an appraisal of the symbolic reality of the object) since it's less subjective than sensation (without the detour to the brain) and this led me to investigate about the symbols or signs that empower the meaning of perceptions.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach and the chosen method.

The groundwork of the studio was based on a research that involves the analysis of the territory by three phases: Survey, systems, and things. The first one as a medium to produce knowledge across the territory, drawing it not just for representation purposes but to rediscover its reality. The second is the analysis of the urban relationships within the territory in as an abstract diagram to reveal the hidden management of the city, and lastly, the 'things' analyze the artifacts and their debt in a reciprocal way to the territory that accommodates them.

My contribution to the group research started by analyzing the infrastructure artifacts, and how they fit in the systems that operate in the city. I related this investigation to the dichotomy of the valley and the plateau as elements that effectively reinforce the awareness of this reality between the valley the plateau and the buffer in between. This includes simple artifacts as urban elevators, funiculars, etc

This methodology influenced my personal research on this objects since I decided to analyze different architectural references in which the objects had to react to similar geological and social conditions. The result was a matrix in which I was able to classify the artifacts by relation with the terrain (Above ground, on-ground and underground) and also by their typological condition. single element, group, integrated element) (Fig. 1) This led me to define two important aspects of the project.

³ (Koolhaas & Mau, 1995)

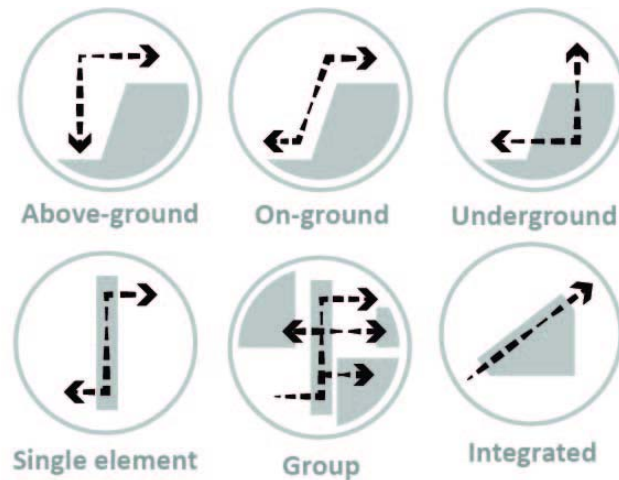


Figure 1. Classification of references by relation with the terrain and by typology.

First, the site location. The analysis of the references made me conclude the best approach to highlight the dichotomy had to be underground because it was the only way I was not intervening the buffer in between, this reduced the location of the site to a few areas where could be applied.

Second, the selection of a program, and a building typology

The aforementioned research related to the perception supported the idea of fulfilling the same objective by different meanings. The result of the references analysis also showed that all the artifacts located in those borders between a change of strata had three experiential stages a that I called the access, the interstice, and the opening. This triad suggests a linear process that later on was translated into a programmatic catalyst. A food production chain, but also a three phase based promenade empowered with signs to fulfill the general objective.

As a conclusion, I can say the result of this project to be presented on the P4, has been an amalgam of the results obtained in the two phases of research, (on group and individually focused) and the methodology, empowered satisfactory findings that provide a conceptual ground to the final proposal.