



REFLECTION

ON THE GRADUATION PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

As part of a hybrid discipline both rooted in human and “formal” sciences, landscape architecture not only provides a frame and a process for an intercalary design but it also has a duty of knowledge, to produce and develop a unique understanding: What can we know? And How? But beyond the philosophy of science, a landscape architect is often confronted to extreme humanitarian situations, and is frequently asked to create structures of prevention or relief, and therefore the ethical question is central: What should we do? Can we go beyond the discomfort of our comfort zones, the flooding zones, the endangered habitats, the green patches, the bituminous cities, the sleepy neighbourhoods, the entertaining parks and the relaxing spots?

A duty of change often comes with a will of acting, what can we hope for?

THE REFUGEE CAMP, A TERRITORY TO CONQUER

Both architects and urbanists had worked closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to design and develop the refugee camp for its unity, the tent to its grid. But little has been done to upgrade these rigid structures from their state of emergency to a state of impermanent permanence (refugees spend between 7 and 17 years in camps). Creating resilient structures that are both adaptable in time and in space is a common task for the landscape architect. And therefore, the role of this discipline has to be more prevalent in the multidisciplinary work around the refugee issue.

THROWBACK: RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The purpose of the project is to apply a landscape approach to complement the efforts of NGOs, governments and related-design disciplines to solve the refugee camps issues.

The main intention is to use this landscape based approach to transform the refugee camp from a singularity to a continuity, and by doing so insure a regeneration of the urban and peri urban tissue along the Austrian Hungarian border.

On a broader scale, we aim to strengthen the role of the landscape architect in filling the gaps of incomplete political, social and sometimes spatial reforms of the refugee issue.

REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The research objective aimed first to place the landscape architect as a main actor in the refugee camp design issues, and landscape architecture as a valuable approach to reconcile spatial needs and social pressure. The theoretical framework of the asset approach gave a new direction on how to deal with the vulnerable, but it didn't provide a spatial framework in the earlier stages. It is the analysis of the camp and its stages of evolution through history that were the most valuable to reduce the camp to its essence and therefore give room for reinventing it.

REFLECTING ON THE PROCESS

By analysing the region and dissecting its structures and processes, we gained insight on both the camp components and the region potential.

This interrelated understanding is made even stronger through the design process. The earlier division of the processes of the region versus the design of the camp proved to be obsolete in the light of design. Processes should be integrated from the beginning, benefits may come in different times for the region and the camp, but any implemented process, infrastructure or component is from the beginning integrative.

The design process shifted the focus: it came from a different understanding of the region and its carrying structures, and these structures are now used to generate the "neo" or "hybrid" components.

The camp takes from the landscape its ability to generate energy, fences, water supply, to generate habitat, construction materials and connection

And the region takes from the camp its ability to bring attention, funds, new flows of people, new solutions, its ability to question the old patterns, its new production methods, its self-sufficiency, its autonomy, and its bubble inside a bubble.

And therefore, the hand in hand approach that was strangling the process is becoming more flexible, less strict, unexpected interactions can happen from what first might seem like a unilateral process.

Conclusions can be made about the importance of design to unblock the planetary strategy into planning and it comes from overcoming the heavy theoretical expectations, and question their most solid arguments.

Further insights can be gained by working in time and through scales simultaneously and see how local interventions impact the regional scales, and how matured camps transform the region and the border. The border is subjected to metamorphosis through the camp and the changes in the region.

REFLECTING ON THE BORDER

The Austro-Hungarian border is not only a spatial framework in this project, it is a central pivot and a determining line, by its historical luggage, its fake invisibility and its intangible repercussions (difference in policies, politics towards refugees, etc.). The border is a constant in refugee camp, it is never too far, reminding the refugee and the camp of the precariousness of their state. The border is both a shield and a firing line. In our case, the duality of a European border that is both open and close, the language and politics barrier and the economic disparities on both sides of the line, give a different significance to the border, more secure but still perilous.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

A missing step can be further developed: the toolbox, the edited guidebook of the UNHCR, and this step is crucial to fulfil the research objective and to prove that a landscape approach can be upgraded from a contextual planning to a set of general principles. These principles can be developed from the specificities of the landscape approach. By asking a simple yet determining question: how can the landscape shape the camp? The highlights of the answer are both a guiding thread to the design and the needed edition to the UNHCR guidebook, and therefore this answer is the basis for the general principles that can upgrade the landscape approach from its contextuality to replicability.



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