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Someone//Somewhere

the European Union, a Home for so many Differences

In the summer of 2018 the plan arose to start a project with the three of us. The structure of the project took many turns and eventually resulted in the outcome that lies before you. A route through the European Union became our area of research and design, in which we investigated and translated the feeling of being at home somewhere. To grasp and understand our research/design domain we went on an extensive field research along the rivers Rhine, Main and Danube. Before and during this trip to the Black Sea we collected substantial information which helped us answering our research question:

How can we generate a place, which is related to different scales (local / European Union) and related to multiple actors and their stories, in which one can feel at home?

Based on the gathered and analysed data from the field research we designed a framework to assess sense of place. It is based on analysing four distinct groups of stimuli through which connections are constructed to a place: *aesthetics, people, activity* and *connectivity*. Ideally these stimuli are high, resulting in a place where people can resonate harmoniously with their surroundings. The importance of creating a positive sense of place, where the stimuli are high is strongly linked to feeling at home. Analysing the four stimuli per visited town/city showed the gaps of potential and thereby offered an entry for us architects to intercede.

After concluding on our research the question remained how to translate the research in an architectural design proposal. In short, we envision *eighteen moorings (anchor points)* – 18 architectural designs - along *one route* – envisioned as a chain of events hosted by a ship – that follows the three rivers Rhine, Main, Danube. Instead of aiming to design for practical uses, we focused on the atmosphere and 4 stimuli of the places. To guide ourselves through the design process we constructed two methods. First of all, we expressed our experiences of the towns/cities in manner of *colours, light, activities, shapes* and *door handles*. These we call our *Lines*. Secondly, we indicated three important *Angles* to incorporate while designing. However, the correct formulation of these methods took us quite some experimenting - it was difficult to switch from research to design. As many roads lead to Rome, we would argue that you have to take them all to get there. The first step we undertook towards designing was that all three of us sketched a small building in three different cities. It quickly became clear that this was not the way to go. Although we were directed (both by our tutors and ourselves) to pick only three cities and design something specific for our findings locally, it felt wrong as it was not presenting the bigger underlying message we wanted to address in our design. We noticed that the stories and drawings of our first ideas (including many) evoked responses that were in stark contrast to what we were actually aiming for. Another example echoing this is the idea of 'the Tableau' which we presented at the P2. Eventually we concluded that this idea staged more or less the dystopian story from the Russian novelist

Yevgeny Zamyatin who describes a society ruled by 'The Table'. The 'Tableau' we envisioned was not visible but still dictated a checklist to each building we planned on designing. The checklist (and thus the Tableau) had to guarantee the cohesion and order between the designs. Although we wanted to create cohesion without a big visible institution, our initial idea we presented at the P2 was clearly not correlating with our aims. Sessions with our tutor showed us our naivety to again make something singular and overarching (e.g. the buildings in Brussels). Eventually, in order to guide ourselves in the right direction we started to distil the *Lines*. It was an essential step between research and design in which (our) feelings were expressed and the hard data was transformed into usable input for our design.

Insofar, we have thought a lot about the role of our designs in the towns/cities and their interplay on the larger scales, across borders. Eventually, the designs on the local scales came forth of the Lines and our personal stance what architecture should be: anchored, consisting of multiple sequences or rhythms and the ability to generate stillness (our three angles). Through the same approach the different designs correlate with each other and show an important interplay between differences and sameness's. The first six buildings that we propose are designed functionless. They are anchored in the towns/cities next to the water and positioned on strategic axes. By listening to the local building material and building techniques we were not only able to react to the local urban setting, but also to the social-material context in which we situated the designs. Concerning the way of constructing the architectural designs we did not seek to invent the wheel. We definitely believe in innovation and it is fascinating to see how much newness can be found in contemporary building methods. However, if we wanted to make a signpost for example sustainability we would have made everything out of wood or if we wanted to construct a signpost for the European Union we would have made our facades blue with golden stars. Our main goal has been to embed the designs in the context of the cities and towns, places that are full of meaning. In our opinion this supposes the use of a standard building language.

As indicated above it has been a long road to establish a bridge between research and design. Not discussed yet is that at the same time it needed to suit the three of us as well. We noticed that especially in a group of three the discussion moments can take twice as long. All options are always discussed and, even when decided, critically examined. The designs themselves are constantly adjusted to all three our opinions and consequently the responsibilities are shared. Nevertheless, after final decisions the work is done fast-paced (when we had one week, we actually had three). Such a moment is taking place now as we are preparing ourselves for the P4. We are recapturing all the small bits and pieces, making again lists of things we should not forget to incorporate and pass on jobs from one person to the next. We are still together every moment of the day in times when Covid-19 establishes a big gap between people. We are not allowed to enter the faculty nor speak to our colleagues and tutors in person.

The lack of tutoring in person makes it sometimes difficult for both sides to express ourselves or to have a deep discussion on why we positioned for instance doors in this manner or why we picked a certain material. These topics did not necessarily make the designs nor the architectural detailing a matter of difficulty, rather the expression of our vision of the whole project appeared most challenging. To illustrate, it is interesting to see that at times we discussed incomplete drawings, our tutors saw the same potential in the design as we did. Nevertheless, these potentials were not communicated via the drawings but merely via speech. The drawings missed the atmospheric elements such as colour, shadows and people. Communicating these potentials of a place/design seems difficult to us and is something we are still working on and (of course) discussing about. We see it as our last final goal to learn to communicate our overarching visions in drawings/sounds/film.

The constraining situation due to Covid-19, besides the social distances, made us reflect on the message we wanted to deliver through our architectural design. Although many borders are currently closed and the cooperation between the countries of the European Union seems to be shaken harder than after Brexit, our interdependency becomes even more apparent. So, we continue working on an articulation of a project that crosses borders. We tend to express our fascination to surmount the constraints of rising nationalism and shattering states, with a much more delegate message. Rather than fighting fire with fire, we want to facilitate a transcending message through architecture that emphasize cooperation and a sense of shared belonging to ultimately feel at home at the local and European Union scale.