

**Reflection paper**

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**EXPO MONDO:**

An interdisciplinary design-based research to an inclusive exposition of the world

*This thesis integrates the graduation of two masters, Architecture & Science Communication.*

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## **Topic**

The beginning of this project was marked by a visit to World Expo in Milan in 2015. While being there I was confronted with an ambiguous feeling on this spectacular event. On the one hand it has the ambition to represent the world in all its diversity. But on the other hand, the way in which the world is represented reveals Western imposition. This means that the West takes a dominant position in the way World Expo represents the world. This can't be seen separately from World Expo's colonial past. For the sake of inclusion, there arises an opportunity to develop an alternative Exposition of the World, based on what everyone on earth has in common: EXPO MONDO.

The transformation towards an inclusive society is a focal point on the agenda of the United Nations and the European Union. This project positions itself at heart of the practice to developing alternatives that break with the reality shaped by the dominant culture, and which asserts our understanding of that reality, of our own experience. This practice is known as *decolonization*.

## **Methodology**

The Expo model was confronted by its own limitations through inverting it, in this way it could leave the conventional format and an alternative assignment was formulated: an exposition of the world, in cities all over the world, where visitors could retreat from their everyday life, to reflect on their own reality.

A theoretical inquiry was needed to get a deeper understanding of what spatial configuration and implantation would be appropriate for EXPO MONDO. Therefore the notion of inclusion was investigated from a Science Communication perspective, and from an architectural perspective. This resulted in a deeper understanding of what is elemental in architecture. And a deeper understanding of what makes an exposition communicate in an inclusive way, on the level of the visitor, and the community.

Guided by theoretical insights of Godfried Semper, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Alison Smithson, Joseph Rykwert, Robert Venturi and Richard Padovan I was able to define starting points for EXPO MONDO.

There are the elemental components of architecture: roof, base, column and wall. The fundamental act that belongs to architecture: the continuous alternation of retreat and coming into public. And the elemental forms that all have structural, functional and ornamental qualities. Their forms are not bound to a particular component or material – nor do they have a structural or ornamental quality, they have both. Two basic construction methods of architecture: stereotomy and tectonics.

The theory gave insight in the opposing forces that are fundamental to life on earth. Day/night, Light/Dark, Open/closed etc, are familiar to everyone on the planet. An inclusive way to deal with these opposite forces is to acknowledging their mutual dependence. Deliberate ambiguity is an approach articulated by Robert Venturi to design with opposing elements architecture. Mies van der Rohe also explored the mutual dependence of opposing forces in the design of two pavilions for the Barcelona 1929 World Exposition.

## **Process**

Starting points for the design were developed on an abstract level and I experienced difficulties translating this into an assignment and design. The gap between theory and practice was wide. I managed to translate these thoughts into architecture after doing a thorough analysis of the two pavilions of Mies van der Rohe mentioned above. These two pavilions, as architectural embodiments of the abstract thought, guided me in articulating the architectural design of Expo Mondo, as I used some of the opposing spatial elements of these two buildings (symmetry – asymmetry, classical- anticlassical form), and translated this into one building.

The graduation project offered me the opportunity to design an architectural project with freedom in terms of climate and function. This allowed me to develop my knowledge and design skills on brick bonding and the beauty of proportions in the design.

I have been given the opportunity to investigate brick as a material, and I worked a day on a building site to do masonry work. This was a new experience for me, and has given me insight on the building practice and craftsman side of the field.

## **Feedback**

The tutors gave me feedback on using more visuals and sketches instead of solely words. I discovered that putting effort in translating words into drawings has had a beneficial impact on both my own understanding, and the communication with tutors. The combination of two masters that require different skills (writing and designing), having 5 tutors, and time restraint, made that I have felt blocked in the creative process for several times. This was solved by taking distance from the project in summer, and by managing the work in a well-structured post-it planning. This gave me a feeling of control, and thus reduced stress. It worked best for me to spend a whole day working with one part of the brain, so on writing or designing.

## **Design**

In the design the idea of the plinth performs as an intermediary between the patio-pavilion and the location where it is implanted. The grid is used as an organization method. The brick module is the grid. The golden ratio is used to relate in proportion the different spaces of the pavilion and to create a harmonious route of transition. The design is inclusive to multiple visitors as it allows for different interpretations of the exposition, for one person it can just be a beautiful place, another will be triggered to contemplate the building, or nature, or will look for more information on the internet.

I believe Expo Mondo is a real explore-lab project, as it offered me the possibility to explore my personal fascination within the field as well as my position and responsibility in society at large. I enjoyed the freedom that this exploration gave.