

**Public Building Graduation Studio
Strasbourg 2017/2018**

Reflections

Research

After my visit to Strasbourg I was struck by how rapidly the urban density and character was changing when moving from the city center towards the southern neighborhoods. There was a clear difference in mood, scale, appearance. This initial observation drew my interest to the morphological aspects of the city's tissue. I examined them in detail relying on old maps dating back to the 1st century BC. By juxtaposing historical maps of Strasbourg I realized the morphological anomaly I noticed is a direct result of the fortifications systems that were implemented, reshaped and mostly demolished between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. As a border city between France and Germany, city was always under the threat of a sudden attack. Those defense structures were essential in protecting the town and in a long run, shaping its urban character. By tracing all the former fortifications' shapes and areas used for military purposes, I determined a Zone that became the initial outline of my site of interest.

Zone can be understood as a strip of land with a specific set of characteristics as well as a space of particular restrictions that remain in opposition to the outer world. Shaped by past events it can remain forgotten until you find your way inside. In the case of the Zone in Strasbourg it is important to emphasize that most of it went through a big urban redevelopment. It is a heterogeneous body, an archipelago of different "pieces" that are very often self-contained spaces of infrastructural character.

While investigating the morphological character of the zone I realized a lot of those "pieces" were either filled with big infrastructural elements such as the central railway station or a highway in the western part or have already been urbanized after the demolition of the fortifications in the XIX century. The latter applies to the representative Neustadt district in the northern part of the zone, designed and developed by Germans during the Reichsland period. The southern strip has been redeveloped in the last fifteen years as a part of the urban rehabilitation project for the Port du Rhin. Part of it has been recently redesigned to become Park Heyritz. Yet there were still big green areas left in the changing neighborhood. Even though it is close to the city center, there is no direct, linear connection leading to it. It influenced the decision that became the backbone of my architectural intervention. It was the recognition of the potential rather than ambition that I decided to create an axis that will provide the connection between the two neighborhoods- "developed north" and "green south".

At the theoretical level I was influenced by the paper by Richard Sennett "Boundaries and borders", in which he mentions that the contemporary districts and cities as a whole fail in providing spaces such as public squares, plazas where people unlike you can co-habit or how those spaces are being designed out of the cities. His concept of the Open City offers "emancipated existence" and strictly relates it to the urban program. Ambiguous edges, when boundaries become borders with inter-active fringe is one of the ways to guarantee a well functioning city. Changing a boundary into a border to connect the urban setting with the green space is one of the principles of my architectural intervention.

At the same time, while working on my theory paper, I was imagining what the Zone could mean for the development of the architectural proposal and what qualities could determine its character. I came up with morphological aspects of the Zone that could be translated into the design proposal. The three main elements I determined were: grid, threshold and puzzles of the zone. Grid as the most stable and basic urban form stimulates the creation of variety of systems within the city and would work as a structural base for the design. Threshold divides what is external and what belongs inside as well as is a place where two worlds overlap. It can be understood as an element that allows creating sequences within one architectural intervention. Puzzles of the zone will rely mostly on the natural context such as greenery which creates an indefinite number of sequences of experience while passing through the space.

Proposal

My architectural proposal transforms part of Strasbourg by offering porosity in the city's tissue between historical neighborhood La Petit France and the green belt in Heyritz's neighborhood.

My intervention tries to change **a boundary into a border** to offer the possibility for the events to happen on the edges of it. Inactivity and a clean cut between different spaces is an accurate description of my site. It is located south of the city center, standing on the shore of the canal in front of the Civil Hospital and cut by the 4 lane car road, canal and a bike lane. The proposal is a bridging structure that allows free passage over the canal and a car road to the botanical garden as well as to the open garden. Understood as a border it offers more open condition for events to happen on its edges. It becomes an interactive zone.

The main axis is cut perpendicularly with secondary axes that follow the logic of the redevelopment happening in the area. Combined they allow creating a series of "threshold moments" while passing over canal and road. It can be the entrance from the bridge to the building, from the building underground, from the bridge to the garden and so on. It is meant to strengthen the notion of changing surroundings, which would reinforce the feeling of rediscovering some exceptional, forgotten quality of the city.

While reaching the southern side of the plot the bridge merges with the building that sits at the edge of the canal. It hosts the botanical garden. The building creates an envelope around the passage and becomes a gate to the open garden behind it. The whole structure is holding onto the ground next to the garden. It is meant to create the effect of the land reaching over to the old, urbanized city center.

The proposal becomes a new physical connection between the old town and the green belt, which will allow people to rediscover the rich greenery that gates the city from the south. The proposal fits well with the Grandeur Nature Plan. It is a planning strategy which goal is to strengthen the role of nature in the city of Strasbourg and the region. Strasbourg was a capital of biodiversity in 2014 and is determined to continue and strengthen its commitment to nature and biodiversity, to prepare for the stakes linked to the changes. The botanical garden will strengthen the plan and offer an escape from the hectic city life.

Understanding on the "how and why"

My studio focuses on Strasbourg and its contradicting ambitions. My design proposal was meant to represent some specificity that was discovered during the research phase. Strasbourg is a city that was always on the edge between France and Germany and this changing ownership determined over time quite big changes in the urban tissue. It was the particular urban landscape that is a direct result of the former defensive character of the city that became my design's starting point.

Choosing Public Building as my graduation studio was dictated by my belief that there is not enough focus on the public realm in the contemporary cities' development. I wanted to create an architectural intervention that would offer a gateway for the citizens and would provide them with edifice of leisure and educational character. My bridge structure literally stitches together public space of the city that was cut by the infrastructural elements offering a public passage.

Reflection and Translation of Mentor's feedback into my work

During my design process it was stressed that my design goal is not clear enough. My tutors advised me to go back to the research phase to understand what my true intention was. This helped me clarify what were the main ambitions of my architectural intervention. First was to connect the city center with the undiscovered green belt that lies in its close proximity but is hard to reach by pedestrians walking from the center. This approach reintroduces a valuable green public realm in the city center. Second was to stress the importance of preserving the flora and fauna present in the region. Creating a botanical garden and a communal garden I offer a space which strengthens consciousness regarding nature preservation. Botanical garden can become a space of leisure for the citizens as well as a space which allow investigation of the rich flora present in the region and the ways to preserve it in the highly urbanized context. Building can also become a meeting point to learn about the current challenges the greenery around Strasbourg faces and maybe even a hub of new ideas how to preserve or care for green areas in and around the city.

Learning from my own work

As my goal was to preserve the green enclave that sits within the zone I was wondering while developing my proposal whether the big structure will not be more harmful than beneficial to the surrounding. My proposal transformed into an overhang bridge structure that sits on one edge of the canal. It is fenced by the fifty meter long communal garden which rises up to 5 meters. The top floor of the bridge as well as the central volume of the whole proposal is filled with different plants. I believe those solutions will guarantee that the proposal becomes a center where nature is celebrated and protected. Besides, the intervention will also connect two neighborhoods different in a character and offer a getaway from the highly urbanized environment into a green strip.

Time planning towards P5

For the final part of my graduation period I will reflect on the feedback received from my tutors during P4 presentation. Moreover, I plan to prepare 1:200 physical model of my architectural proposal and its surrounding. This physical representation will present material qualities of the proposal. It will allow understanding its urban qualities.