



A fruitful border | Reflection P4

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1) The relationship between research and design

The first semester of the graduation year, starting September 2016 focused on research. This phase also consisted of writing a problem statement which should form the literature basis for the following personal research and design. My problem statement was mainly focussing on the text; *The open city* by Richard Sennet¹. In his research he pleads for cities to have an sociology for open cities. Which means a city has to be open for human exchange socially and economically by creating open borders. The focus on the research of Sennet was triggered by the importance of social and economic exchanges he describes. Other research, like that of Doug Saunders², also points out that besides the need for social exchange, the economic exchange is crucial in a affordable housing plan. For my project this lead to the choice of the site and also the starting points for the design, namely the way how the economic live can be integrated into the dwelling block. Studying the context of an affordable housing project on the location I started with, the Dejach Wube sefer. We noticed the rapid changes of the whole city in this one neighbourhood. Especially the differences between the road on the right side and the one on the left, see illustration 1. The one on the right is highly developed compared to the one on the left were a lot of the informal housing on the other side of the sefer is and will be demolished. This means the articulation of the street will change drastically, therefore the border of the sefer was chosen as the site for my project. The challenge was to design different faces within the project which accommodate the stimulation of social and economic exchange and give an answer on these changing atmospheres outside and within the sefer.

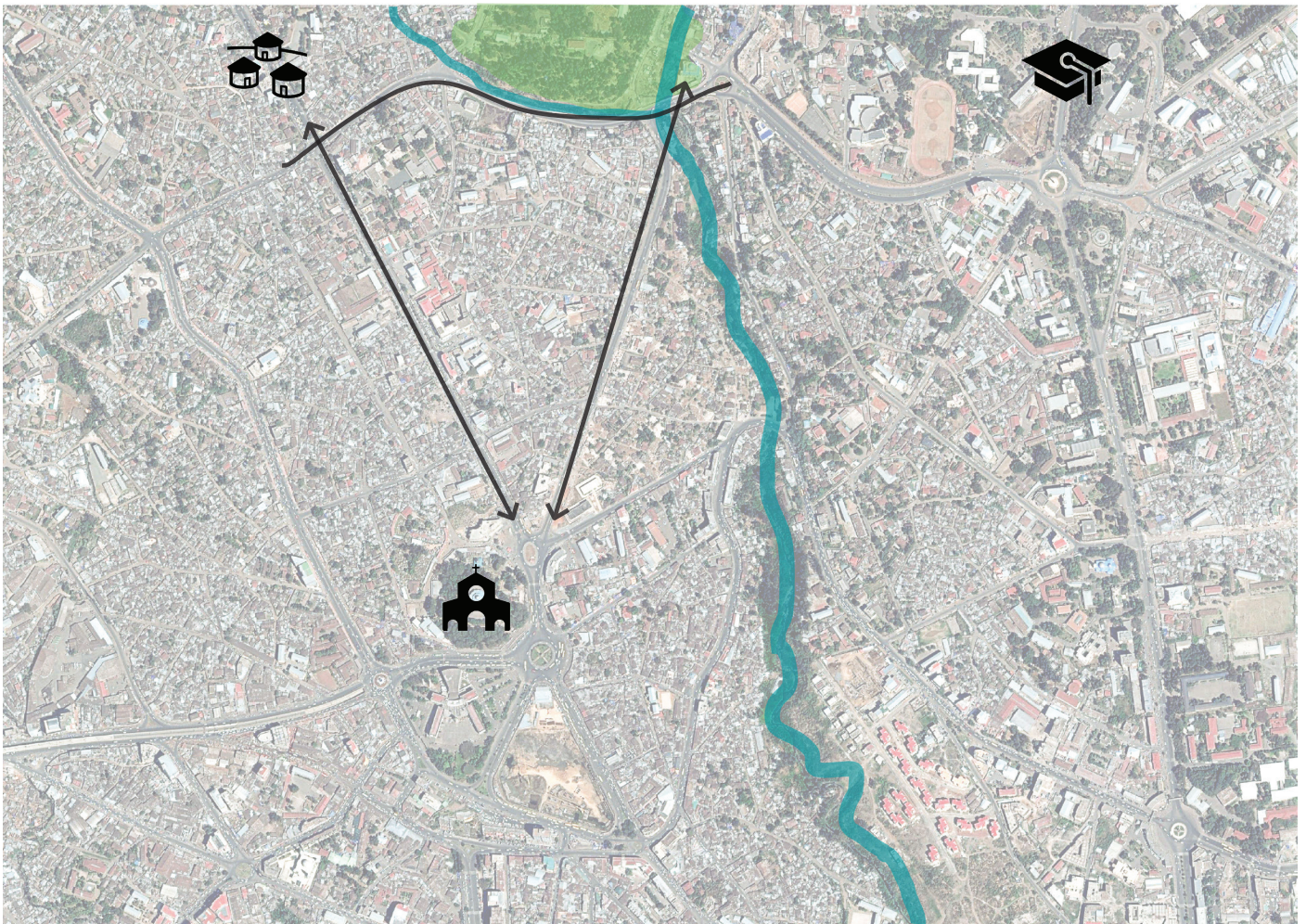


Illustration 1 Dejach Wube sefer, enclosed by three roads

¹ Sennet, R. (2013). *The open city* (pdf). Retrieved from <https://www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/UploadedResources/The%20Open%20City.pdf>

² Saunders, D. (2011). *Outside in: the lives of the new city*. In *Arrival city* (pp. 37-75). Great Britain, London: Windmill Books.

Because of the focus on designing the border a great deal of the search within the design was done on the connections to the different streets. The borders were defining the block itself. During the process of designing the block, the typical condominium blocks were a comparable factor. These condominiums are affordable housing projects in Addis Ababa which are successful in many ways but do lack some important qualities. The most important missing quality for me was the fact that the public space feels like it has been designed after deciding where the blocks are placed. So what I tried was first thinking about what was important for the border spaces, so the faces towards the streets and its urban design. This means that the size of the block was mostly decided from parameters obtained by the definition of the streets, rather than researching the block size. At this point I am wondering if my block size would have been different when going more in depth on this research. I did compare the size of the courtyard to the average size of a condominium block courtyard, in which the one in my project is more intimate in size. Also the way my block is more closed off and has a wider gallery on two sides contributes to a more intimate atmosphere within the block. I realise now that the comparisons with the condominium blocks were done during the process, but not documented. Maybe this subject would have been something when having more time I would do more research on this.

2) The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

The theme of the graduation studio: Affordable Housing for Sustainable Development in the Global Urban South, Addis Ababa. By choosing the border of the sefer, there is a great influence of the different streets the site is situated between. Especially the way the project has to deal with a big retaining wall and the language of a bigger scale street. I assume this street will become more commercial in the (near) future and thereby sets some clear articulations for the project. This created a big focus on how to deal with economic life and its social ways of living. The topography together with the focus on the income generation lead to implementing the element of the stairs. The stairs created a way to bring all the important factors together. It opens up the boundary between the in- and outside of the sefer creates a border which is open for social and economic exchange.

In a way I think there were two ingredients which helped me to create this open border, the different street characters and the height differences in the site. Because of the topography I was able to introduce the stairs, when this project was based in the Netherlands this wouldn't have been possible. Does this mean the project is a site specific solution? Yes and no. Recognising the different street characters and its social and economic qualities and then translating these differences into a design, is a design approach which can be used anywhere in the world. The actual design ingredients as the stairs and the building techniques and how the social way of living make it site specific for Addis Ababa and this location with the height differences.

3) The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The course guide of the graduation studio points out that the students need to: 'Find a balance between local cultures and techniques on the one hand, and global developments on the other, becomes an important challenge.' With this sentence my process during the project can be explained. During the process it was a great challenge for me to find a balance between implementing the informal way of living but at the same time finding an answer on how to deal with this changing scales of the streets. For example the design of the facade was quite a struggle in the period after the P2. This doesn't necessarily mean the facade itself was the problem, but my personal competencies to be self critical and being able to research a subject and revise this within my own design. Dealing with this issue was the toughest and most valuable moment of my graduation so far. I learned a lot by studying social housing projects with a critical eye and using the obtained information as a tool to design the facades of my projects. See the next page for the projects that have been studied and the following page for the design of the facade based on what the research thought me. I do realize that

this learning project is an ongoing process, on which I think I made a great step forward during this graduation project. I also believe this will definitely help me on a professional level. It is not just the skill to reflect and being critical but also realising when something in the design process get stuck, noticing this and search for a way to deal with it.



1) Oiseau des îles social housing - nantes - antonini darmont - 2014 - photo alexandre wasilewski



2) 58 Social Housing in Antibes / Atelier PIROLLET architectes



3) Block A Noordstrook, Dick van Gameren architecten



4) Morangis Retirement Home / VOUS ETES ICI Architectes



5) Social Housing in Elmas / 2+1 officina architettura



6) Primary School in Gando / Kéré Architecture

1) <http://www.archdaily.com/769058/azure-announces-az-award-winners/5589ab37e58ece06b7000004-azure-announces-az-award-winners-image>

2) <http://www.archdaily.com/779843/58-social-housing-in-antibes-atelier-pirollet-architectes>

3) <http://www.archdaily.com/167540/block-a-noordstrook-dick-van-gameren-architecten>

4) <http://www.archdaily.com/365331/morangis-retirement-home-vous-etes-ici-architectes>

5) <http://www.archdaily.com/144902/social-housing-in-elmas-21-officina-architettura>

6) <http://www.archdaily.com/785955/primary-school-in-gando-kere-architecture>



Illustration 3 Design of the facade based on the facade research

4) The relationship between the project and the wider social context

The relation of my project to a wider social context is also within the different faces of the block. I think my project can be seen as a search on how to relate to different atmospheres from the urban to the dwelling unit scale. On the urban scale everything seen in Addis Ababa had an influence on how I designed the relation to the main street. One example of a reference is shown in illustration 4, the National Theatre at the Gambia street. The arcade of my project towards the main street contributes to this image of the city. It's a function for the whole city and gives an answer on how to deal with the changing scale of a street within the centre of the city.

At this time of preparing the P4 presentation it is important to show the research on the urban patterns. At the same time it gives me the possibility to take a step back and remind myself of the influences that triggered my design approach. By which I mean to identify all the important patterns in Addis Ababa and the sefer itself. It is important to explain how my relatively modern block relates to the more modern way of live we see in Addis Ababa. But that it can, to a certain extent, also accommodate the more traditional way of living.



Illustration 4 National theatre Addis Ababa, https://c1.staticflickr.com/4/3754/11785495716_933c75b5b6_b.jpg