

During my excursion to Tallinn in the beginning of the studio, I was fascinated by the Patarei building and its surrounding area. The former military area included the Sea-plane hangar, now turned museum, the Patarei building, fortress turned prison, and a vast sloping public space that lead to the sea. I saw a lot of potential and got quickly involved in the current debate of how to reuse the Patarei building. What intrigued me was its dark history contrasting the beauty and strategic location of the place. I started researching how to deal with dark heritage buildings, as well as criticizing the current plans of redeveloping Patarei as a mixed-use complex. I soon got invested in the symbolism, and what it would mean for a building with a complicated past to be reused for the future. This lead to my first proposal of designing a music school, memorial and museum in the complex. However these proposals were on subjective grounds. They were an interpretation of how I felt about the building and what I thought would bring beauty to this emotionally charged building. While there is value in emotional interpretation, it is not convincing without a connection to concrete aspects of the building. I was not looking at the real building and its physical attributes (its special form and geometry, vaulted construction, massive masonry walls). I was responding too much to the abstracted Patarei and what it symbolized, instead of the physical building and its architectural qualities.

The turning point in the design process was exactly when I started to do the opposite. When I let go of the symbolism, and even the function of my architecture, and instead responded to the form, technique and materialisation, and the topography of the site.

“Completing” the geometry of the building by repeating a fragment of it through a series

of rotations, mirroring, and flipping allowed the creation of public spaces of different characters. Responding to the stereotomy of Patarei by continuing the stereotomy in the paving of the public space and the ground floor and adding contrast with the light tectonic upper floors. Digging on the naturally descending terrain to match the height differences from one edge of the building to the other. All these design decisions are responding to the site in form, configuration, and technical motivation. These decisions, alongside my goal to revitalise the area, within the context of Estonian culture, naturally led to the functions of dwellings, a sauna, cafes and restaurants.

This year has been transformative in the way that I view architecture and my design process. In the past, I had become so involved in symbolism, narrative, and user experience of architecture, that I had gradually stopped looking at buildings for simply what they are. This year I started to notice more, and to let go of the need to use architecture to solve bigger problems than itself. I’m starting to see the value in doing architecture for the sake of architecture. I am slowly developing the skill of judging architecture independently from its meaning, and instead on its composition, configuration, readability, usability, beauty, smart solutions, and its response to the context. I am letting go of the limiting beliefs that I so often placed on myself early in my design process. Limiting beliefs that came from my morals, values, upbringing, opinions. I’m starting to recognize them from what they actually are, instead of an objective truth that design choices should obey to. I am letting go of these things, not because they are unimportant, but because they became paralyzing, or, made me miss out on good architecture.